

THE GIFT OF MENTORS

By: Walter C. Wright, Jr.

IN THE COMPLEX CAULDRON OF LEADERSHIP AN OLD IDEA IS BUBBLING to the surface again. A word heard increasingly in corporate board rooms, executive offices and management retreats invites leaders into a new kind of relationship — a life shaping relationship. The word? Mentor. This word and what it has come to indicate has a long and rich history. In the Odyssey, Homer tells the story of Ulysses leaving home to fight in the Trojan War. Before leaving he entrusted his son Telemachus to the care of a tutor whose name was Mentor. Mentor had the responsibility of nurturing this young man into mature adulthood. Mentor was a gift to Ulysses' son — a temporary surrogate for a distant parent. And Mentor brought a gift to Telemachus — wisdom and learning. Mentor was the key player in the dance of a learning-teaching relationship — a relationship we can learn from today. You can be on either side of this relationship — mentors like Mentor or a mentoree like Telemachus. I would like to tell you about my experiences of seeking and being sought by mentors and what I have learned about the gift of mentors.

Donald Bubna A tall, skinny, shy 14 year old sat across the table from the young minister. The place: Winchell's Donut Shop in Pacific Beach, California. The event: a gift of grace — the first in a long series of such gifts I would receive. The pastor was Donald Bubna, a young clergyman leading his first congregation. I did not know it then, but now, 44 years later, I recognize what was happening. I was being mentored. And for the past 44 years, mentors have played important roles in my life and taught me how to give this gift to others.

For some reason, Donald Bubna took an interest in me. Every Wednesday he met me at the donut shop after school. He listened to me. He encouraged me. He believed in me. I don't know if he taught me anything specific or was directive in his mentoring. I only know that he believed in me at a time when my confidence was low. Under his mentoring, I moved into leadership roles in the church youth program.

THIS RELATIONSHIP CONTINUED IN SOME FORM THROUGH MY FIRST year of college, during which time he helped me think through my life purposes and calling and encouraged my transfer to a small private college in San Francisco. The move to San Francisco was the end of our regular mentoring sessions but not the end of the relationship. Donald Bubna kept track of my wanderings through graduate study in Scotland and California, and through various management responsibilities over the years. He saw potential and invested himself in me. I saw someone who believed in me, affirmed me and encouraged me. And I found the confidence to live up to his confidence. That may be the heart of the mentoring relationship.

For me, as I look back over the gift of mentors, the mentoring relationship is an intentional, exclusive, intensive, voluntary relationship between two persons. It is a relationship – a teaching/learning connection between two persons – in which both persons work to nurture the relationship – to contribute to the connection.

Others define mentoring more broadly. Some approach the topic the gift of mentors with a focus on mentors as persons of influence in the lives of others. With this broader definition mentoring would occur with or without an intentional relationship. Anyone whose words or actions shape the way we think and live would be a mentor. Thus mentors could be close or distant, alive or dead. We all continue to learn from the words and reported actions of people we have never met yet who continue to teach and shape our lives. And, of course, this perspective reminds us that even without our knowledge people may be looking to us as mentors and learning something about living from our lives. Everyone teaches what is important by the way they live their lives.

For this conversation however, I will use the term mentor as an intentional, exclusive, intensive voluntary relationship between two persons, usually with the intent to grow and develop one of the persons toward an agreed upon goal or objective. And like all relationships, even though the purpose will be to grow one person, the process of relationship allows both persons to give and to receive, to teach and to learn. Mentoring is a dance of teaching and learning together.

Roland Given

When I began my college studies in San Francisco, I was assigned an academic advisor. I still did not understand the role of mentors — but Roland Given became one. He met with each of his advisees, listened to us, believed in us, encouraged us and helped us think through decisions during a formative time in our lives. Under Roland Given's watchful encouragement, I engaged in campus politics and a quiet student began to learn about leadership. He guided our academic program and nudged me along the path to graduate school. He also brought us into his life and family. I remember eating at the Given home and babysitting for their three small sons. I do not remember much of the content of our relationship, but I remember the affirmation and the encouragement to pursue graduate study. Again my life was shaped.

As I look back over my experience with Roland Given, it is clear to me that mentors may give advice when asked, but much more importantly they give blessing and encouragement to risk learning and growth. By listening, giving honest feedback in safe trusted conversation, the mentor both affirms the perspective of the mentoree and broadens it gently. Through this affirmation and encouragement, mentors like Roland Given encourage self-reliance and confidence. By creating a safe environment for the relationship, the mentor enables the mentoree to step out of the comfort zone and risk something new or untried. No one likes to

fail, but it is a gift to be in a relationship that encourages risk and promises to be there to bring learning out of failure. Mentors provide a safe place to regain perspective and energy.

George Ladd

I ENTERED GRADUATE SCHOOL THINKING I WAS CALLED TO BE A PASTOR — like Donald Bubna. And then I met George Ladd, the crusty old professor of New Testament Theology. Dr. Ladd became my first formal mentor in the academic sense of that term. In his classes I caught a passion for life, community, relationships, eternal values and a vision for lifelong learning. I became a student of biblical theology and George Ladd became my doctoral mentor. He intimidated me and pushed me. He argued with my ideas and let me know how little I knew, but he also showed me the beauty of truth and fed my appetite for study. My calling in life began to shift toward the academy. I wanted to learn and teach.

But Dr. Ladd also taught me about humanness, vulnerability and the pain of life. We played handball each week and talked. I got to know a brilliant man struggling with life — a man lonely and uncertain about his legacy — a man who taught about community but found relationships difficult to sustain. He shaped forever my vision of life as community, relationships and character, but he was not a happy man himself. I began to realize that mentors do not have it all together. They also are in the process of learning and growing. But they can still believe in you and share something of themselves with you.

This was an important lesson for me. Mentors are people too. We may choose them because of their perceived maturity, wisdom and experience. However, mentors, like all other human beings, bring their complete selves to the relationship — their strengths and their weaknesses. To the extent that mentors understand their weaknesses, it can be a touch point for learning and an arena of growth for both persons. To the extent that mentors do not recognize their weakness, it has

The potential for damage. When mentors put their insecurities, weaknesses and fears on the table for discussion, the modeled vulnerability opens doors for learning and growth in two ways. First, the mentoree has opportunity to learn about vulnerability, honesty and truth. But second, the mentoree needs to cultivate the independent objectivity to choose different paths from the mentor. In every mentoring relationship, while there is always the overwhelming respect that makes the mentor attractive, there will normally be decisions, behaviors and beliefs of the mentor that the one being mentored will choose not to adopt. Mentoring is not a cloning process. It is intended to develop the unique person of the mentoree and that requires a differentiation from the mentor.

Calvin Schoonhoven

DURING MY DOCTORAL STUDIES OUR SECOND SON WAS BORN AND I needed to work. Cal Schoonhoven took a chance on me and defined my life direction. Dr. Schoonhoven had just been appointed special Assistant to the President for Academic Affairs and he needed an administrative assistant; he chose me.

Technically, Cal Schoonhoven was an employer — a supervisor— but he also filled the role of mentor. He had administrative responsibilities and he delegated major assignments to me — assignments that I had no idea how to do. Yet he believed in me, encouraged me and trusted me to figure out what I needed to know. And he affirmed my efforts. From this relationship I learned the value of affirmation. I received so much affirmation from Cal Schoonhoven that I was eager to learn what I needed to take on the next responsibility. It was easy to risk venturing into new arenas with such an affirming coach at my side. It was under his encouraging guidance that I realized I actually enjoyed the administrative side of education — something most academics prefer to avoid — and a new tangent was taken in the trajectory of my development.

There was a selfless side to Cal Schoonhoven's mentoring role. When the arena of academic administration expanded, Dr. Schoonhoven put me forward for increased responsibilities, preferring to maintain his own faculty leadership in the library. It was not long before I found myself serving on the president's staff in academic research and planning. Again, someone had believed in me, identified abilities that had not yet been developed, provided opportunity for growth, encouraged my efforts and lavishly affirmed my progress. I still trace the beginning of my journey in organizational leadership to the time I spent with Calvin Schoonhoven.

A friend of mine, Jean Lipman-Blumen calls this vicarious leadership. It is the ability of mentors to find pleasure and satisfaction in the accomplishments of others almost as though it were their own accomplishment. Mentors offer encouragement and praise but at a distance. They do not participate directly in the activities of the mentoree. They affirm goals endorse strategies and reflect on outcomes, but they leave the decisions to the mentoree. What a gift! Mentors give of themselves to energize the person they mentor and in this way contribute to the mentoree's growth and leadership development.

Glenn Barker

But if Cal Schoonhoven launched my journey of leadership, Glenn Barker shaped it. For 12 years I had the gift of Glenn Barker teaching me what servant leadership was all about. When he was appointed Dean and then Provost, he took me on as mentoree, protégé, or as he liked to say, "Alter ego". Again, he was my organizational supervisor — the corporate Vice President for the institution. But he was much more than that. From the day of our first meeting, Glenn Barker established the parameters of our relationship. He was a verbal person — a college debater — and he needed to think out loud, to talk his ideas through. He wanted a safe relationship in which to think and he took me into his head and his heart. We talked about everything — his vision and passion for the institution, his hopes, dreams, plans and

frustrations, theology, family, life and relationships. For 12 years I was privileged to walk in the shoes of a gifted successful relational leader. Everything he did, every decision he made, everything he believed and valued was on the agenda for discussion — the ups and downs, the successes and failures — what an opportunity for learning.

Some people call this coaching — this way of walking alongside someone, caring about them, getting them involved and engaging them fully in the task at hand — this sharing of yourself, your experience and your wisdom. I believe there is a definite connection between mentoring and the executive coaching that has become popular in leadership circles. In many ways executive coaching is a professional form of mentoring — an intentional, exclusive, intensive, voluntary and contractually defined relationship.

As Glenn Barker taught me, mentoring is a personal relationship that shapes the values of the mentoree by direct teaching and by indirect modeling. Over the years I have come to believe quite strongly that such a relationship can exist simultaneously with an organizationally defined relationship. Yet mentoring that occurs within an organizational context brings particular strengths and concerns

To the relationship. A mentor within the organization can help the mentoree fit and belong in the organization and develop ownership for the mission and outcomes. There is a danger however that the relationship can become too attached. The mentor cannot always expect the mentoree to rally to his or her organizational agenda. Just as in personal life and values, the mentoree needs to be able to differentiate from the agenda of the mentor. On the other hand, if the mentor is seen as the protective champion of the mentoree, there is the risk that once the mentor is gone; the mentoree will need to leave as well.

With those caveats, however, I do believe it is possible for organizational leaders to serve as mentors for persons for whose success they are responsible. The proximity, the knowledge of the shared mission, the accumulated wisdom of the organization has much to offer the mentoring relationship. But the question always arises: how safe is this relationship? It is one thing to sustain a mentoring relationship when the organization is thriving. It becomes much more complicated when times are tough and positions are being eliminated.

While this must be faced honestly, I do not believe that tough times need to bring the end of the mentoring relationship. Pain, hurt and disagreement run in the bloodstream of any relationship. The critical elements necessary to sustain the relationship are honesty, objectivity and trust. Even a painful time of reorganization can be an important time for learning and growth when trust is the dominant force experienced. Both parties in the mentoring relationship need to recognize and acknowledge the various forces working on each of them and the relationship. The mentoring relationship cannot confer special organizational favor on the one being mentored, but it also should not be detrimental to the organizational success of the person. If the organizational pressures become too personal or painful, it may be necessary to suspend the mentoring relationship until the organizational dynamics are resolved. It would be

ideal if the relationship could ride through the storm and serve as a learning center for both persons. Only truth, honesty and trust allow hope for this ideal.

NOT EVERY MANAGER CAN BE A MENTOR TO THE PERSONS FOR WHOSE success he or she is responsible. Not every employee wants to be mentored. The manager-employee relationship is its own particular leadership relationship with certain contractual expectations. Within or alongside this relationship however, when the fit is right and both parties are willing, I believe it is possible to build a deeply meaningful covenantal mentoring relationship. A good mentoring relationship will always seek to be open and honest enough to acknowledge the terms of the organizational relationship.

Glenn Barker had a passion for relational leadership and organizational community. Years later I remember telling someone whom I was mentoring that I was not sure if Glenn Barker had changed the institution as much as he would have liked, but he changed me forever. I cannot think about servant leadership, relational leadership and organizational community without thinking about the model of Glenn Barker. And, as my wife Beverly and anyone who has worked with I can attest, I learned well the need to think out loud about everything. Glenn Barker died of a heart attack while he was my mentor, but his legacy lives on in every leadership responsibility I accept. Like the others, he believed in me, encouraged me and affirmed me. But more than anyone else, he trusted me with his hopes and dreams and visions. He set out intentionally to replicate a little Glenn Barker in me. I hope he succeeded.

Mentors and Relationships

BY NOW I WAS STARTING TO UNDERSTAND THE INCREDIBLE GIFT OF mentors. I knew that I needed them and I was beginning to suspect that I might be able to pass this gift on to others.

It was at this point that I became intentional in seeking out mentoring relationships — looking for mentors to whom I could attach myself and opening myself as friend and mentor to some who sought me out as a mentor. Not all of these relationships worked. Some did. Some did not. Sometimes geography and logistics created a barrier larger than the perceived value to one or both persons. Sometimes a conflict in core values questioned the benefit of the investment. Sometimes schedules and time constraints made ongoing relationships unrealistic. Sometimes hidden agendas and misdirected purposes made a mentoring relationship unwise. Not everyone who offers to be a mentor brings pure motives. And a good mentor will be honest about motivation. Like every relationship, a mentoring relationship will last only as long as both parties find it fulfilling.

It is this mutual fulfillment and interdependency that defines mentoring more than any particular model. I have participated in mentoring relationships that are like teacher-student relationships, some “teacher” defined and some initiated and shaped by the “student.” I have participated in mentoring relationships that operate the gift of mentors like consultants or

sounding boards, or accountability agents, or peer relationships of friendship. Some are short term, under one year, some have continued for 20 years. Some are intensive, meeting weekly. Most are periodic — three to four times per year. In several cases, active intensive mentoring relationships evolve to quarterly, semi-annually or even annually as people move around and grow in responsibility.

For me, the model that fits best is a relationship managed by the one being mentored. The relationship involves meeting three to four times a year as needed by mentoree. The mentoree requests a meeting to talk about and around an agenda shaped first by the mentoree. The expectations and terms of the relationship are clarified and agreed upon at the first meeting and the initiative for continuing the relationship lies primarily with the one being mentored. The key components probably include a sharing of wisdom and experience, personal accountability, a safe place to talk, a place to laugh (often at yourself), a place to weep, learning, challenge, encouragement and affirmation.

I also like to include a meal to underscore the social informality of the relationship. And, of course, the very existence of a mentoring relationship should say "I believe in you; you belong." It is a gift to be given and a gift to receive.

What do mentors look for in a person in whom they will invest themselves? Seven characteristics suggest themselves to me:

- Unrealized potential, undeveloped possibilities;
- Curiosity and a hunger to learn;
- Strength of character;
- Shared values in life;
- Reflective thinking and self-assessment;
- Willingness to accept responsibility for one's own growth;
- Energy, purpose and hope.

Max De Pree

ONCE I REALIZED HOW IMPORTANT MENTORS WERE, I BEGAN TO LOOK for them. If Glenn Barker defined servant leadership for me, Max De Pree refined my vision of the leader's legacy. I had heard Max De Pree speak and I read his book. He was the chairman of the board at the institution where I worked. He deeply impressed me with the visible integrity of his life and

leadership. Max De Pree was someone I wanted to be near and learn from. To the extent that I understood them, the values and commitments of Max De Pree were the values and beliefs I brought to leadership. I knew I could learn from him.

Is that enough to make a good mentor? What makes a good mentor? The elements or ingredients that make a good mentor may differ from person to person and perhaps will even change over the time frame of one's life. As we move through our own life journey we may look for different experiences or perspectives in a mentor. Mentors know when to listen and when to talk. They may bring a network of resources. They may offer particular skill in an area that needs development. They are respected broadly and they encourage those around them. At the core however, I believe there are certain characteristics that I would always seek in a prospective mentor: wisdom, strength of character, shared values, accumulated experience- is, continued learning, reflective articulation on life and accessibility. It is the character of the person that draws us to mentors. Mentors have character — they are characters — they live out the commitments of their character.

A little over 20 years ago, I took the audacious step to write to Max De Pree and request a mentoring relationship for two years as part of an educational leadership grant that I anticipated receiving. To my surprise and pleasure, Max agreed. And then to my surprise and displeasure, I did not get the anticipated grant. I wrote back to the gift of mentors Max De Pree, thanked him and informed him that my program was not approved. But I underestimated the generosity of the man. He responded with encouragement and affirmation and suggested that we start the relationship anyway. That was 20 years ago — another gift. For 20 years Max De Pree has been available to me three to four times a year to think with, talk with, weep with and learn from as I have struggled to understand this journey of leadership. He has believed in me, encouraged me, affirmed me and gently challenged me. During the 12 years I served as President of Regent College, a graduate school affiliated with the University of British Columbia in Canada, Max De Pree was the one with whom I shared my excitement and my frustrations. Seldom did I come away from a meeting with Max that I did not have a broader perspective on the reality in which I lived and a renewed sense of hope as I continued to live out my leadership responsibilities. He has been a tremendously formative force in my leadership development. Whether he likes it or not, I am part of the leadership legacy of Max De Pree. And that is a gift to me.

Mentors are a gift; and they provide the gift of sanctuary — the opportunity to withdraw from the pressure of daily work and life and reflect on what is happening. In this reflective relationship the mentoree slows down, reviews life's journey and nurtures the self-knowledge that is important to growth. Max De Pree has given that to me.

I know that Max De Pree serves as a mentor to several other persons. And I know from these years that Max comes to the role of mentor as one who has experienced and benefited deeply from the gift of mentors. Max says that every leader should have three mentors — because that was his experience. It could be different for others. But, three men shared their lives, vision and wisdom with Max De Pree, shaped his leadership and influenced the legacy that he

passes on to others. Carl Frost, an organizational psychologist who helped Herman Miller implement its employee centered Scanlon Plan, shaped the way Max saw and served the employees of Herman Miller. Peter Drucker, perhaps the pre-eminent management scholar of the last century, guided Max's thinking about organizations and their role in broader society. And David Hubbard, Max's close friend who served for 30 years as the president of Fuller Theological Seminary, strengthened the theological conviction with which Max De Pree lived out his concept of persons, his commitment to diversity and his legacy of service.

Max De Pree understands the gift of mentors and he makes himself available to pass this gift to others. If I am about anything on my journey of leadership, it must include the continuation of the legacy of the leadership of Max De Pree.

Watching the mentors in my life I have learned that mentoring is about mentors sharing themselves with someone to whose growth and success they are committed. It is an investment of the mentor's very self, a sharing of his or her values. It is not a cloning process — not even the cloning of the mentor's values. The focus of mentoring relationships should always be on the one being mentored. The objective of the relationship is the growth and maturity of the mentoree into realization of his or her potential. Mentors create sanctuary and provide feedback, share themselves and offer perspective so that the mentorees can become the persons they choose to be. Mentoring is not about the mentor. It is always about the one being mentored. It is not about replicating the mentor. It is always about encouraging the growth of the one being mentored. That is a gift.

John Bray

MAX DE PREE THOUGHT CONSCIOUSLY ABOUT INCLUDING a THEOLOGIAN among his mentors to help him think about ultimate perspectives. I did not — perhaps because I had so many friends with theological education — but it happened anyway. John Bray was the pastor of the church I attended. Dr. Bray was a brilliant thinker and speaker with a specialization in the field of history. We established a relationship when he moved to town that lasted over eight years. Every Wednesday John Bray and I would meet at Ernie Jr's Taco House for lunch. We did not think we were mentors or mentoring, but we needed a safe place to think and talk and argue about life, relationships, community and leadership — John as pastor/theologian — me as manager/ teacher. We sharpened each other's thinking and enriched each other's spirit. This, I believe, is another piece of mentoring reality — mutual mentoring. Mentoring is a partnership of learning and encouragement in a commitment of trust. Just as it can happen within an organizational relationship, mentoring relationships can thrive among peers.

Peer mentors are those friends who know each other well and like one another anyway! They are persons with high trust relationships that care enough to disagree with one another, to call each other to account when their actions do not match their words, to share what they are learning — good and bad. Peer mentoring, like all other mentoring relationships, requires a good fit, a high level of transparency and trust, and probably an

interest in common that bounds the relationship. But peer mentoring is more than just friendship. It is intentional. It is a deliberate commitment on the part of two friends to hold each other accountable for growth ... in addition to enjoying one another's company.

David Hubbard

I DID SEEK OUT ONE OTHER MENTOR WHO COULD GIVE ME THE BROADER perspective of theology and spirit as it am worked out in leadership: David Hubbard. After he retired from Fuller Seminary, while I was still president of Regent College, I asked for regular times to sit down with him and hear his perspective on leadership — particularly in the academy. I had known David Hubbard for years, worked on his staff, and observed his leadership from a safe distance. While he was president, I found it difficult to get close enough for a mentoring relationship. After his retirement, however, I found a relaxed resource with wisdom abounding, ready to embrace a colleague president with encouragement and thoughtful perspective. In the short time between his retirement and his sudden death, I was privileged to talk with and learn from a wise leader who had successfully lead a premiere faculty of scholars, students and staff for over 30 years. As a leader who thinks theologically about everything he did, David Hubbard set a standard against which leaders would do well to measure themselves. His untimely death placed a marvelous mentor out of reach.

Accountability Groups

THERE IS ANOTHER FORM THAT MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS CAN TAKE. Normally we think, and above I have described, mentoring relationships as exclusive connections between two people. I believe that some of the same benefits — encouragement, affirmation, perspective and challenge — can be found in small groups of persons committed to one another's leadership and growth. Two such groups important in my life emerged during the middle management years of my leadership journey. The first was a group of other middle managers, some within the same organization that I served and some from outside. We met weekly or breakfast with the specific agenda of encouraging one another in our leadership development and holding one another accountable for pursuing our priorities and living our values. That group met for several years until one by one we moved off into new leadership responsibilities. After a gap of over 13 years, however, we had a reunion of that group recently. It was good to remember together the early days of our leadership development and be encouraged by the opportunities and challenges currently facing each of us in our leadership roles. In some ways the group is not as intimate as a one on one mentoring relationship. In other ways it is easier to hold ourselves accountable when we have the multiple commitments of the group. I do believe there is an important role for peer groups of leaders — what I like to call "learning communities" —where leaders belong, where they have something to offer and something to learn, where they feel safe enough to think out loud and where they find encouragement, affirmation and hope.

My second accountability or mentoring group is not directly related to leadership but has taught me much about leadership, relationships, community and life. This is a group of men with whom I climb mountains. Several are in leadership and management roles; several are professional psychologists. We share in common a love of the mountains and we have climbed, hiked and canoed together now for over 25 years. In the 70s we spent one three-day weekend in the California Sierra's every month for six years, missing only five months in those six years. As our responsibilities began to scatter us around North America, we dropped that to three or four trips per year. Now we try to get together at least twice each year and gather as much for the friendship and encouragement in our life responsibilities as we do for our love of the mountains. Twenty-five years of shared life builds very strong bonds and gives intimate insight into each other's lives. It is normal for members of the group to be in conversation by telephone or email, counseling, advising, coaching and mentoring one another

Through our various responsibilities. There is much "mentoring" wisdom in this group and we learn much about life and leadership from each other as well as in the organization and safe execution of a mountain climbing expedition. And, of course, there is very high trust. "What is said on the trail, stays on the trail!" In a way the group itself corporately becomes the mentor to each of its members as well as the context that sustains a network of valuable accountability relationships.

What Have I Learned From these Experiences?

Mentoring is a gift. Mentors are a gift. It is a gift to give of you to others. It is a gift to receive. The gift of mentors is both who they are and what they provide. Mentoring is a relationship. Normally it develops between two persons, but as noted above, I believe that a group of committed people can mentor one another. It is a relationship that, like all relationships, must be nurtured and invested in. Like all living things, mentoring relationships will deteriorate if not maintained. It is important to understand the relational nature of mentoring. Like marriage, mentoring is a relationship between two people that takes its shape and definition from the two parties in relationship. There is no formula, no ideal model, and no program of steps to success. It is a relationship — and relationships resist definition. It exists whenever two (or more) persons commit themselves to the connection between them and work to nurture it. Mentoring is a relationship connected by a shared interest in learning and growth.

Mentoring takes a variety of forms. I have noted several approaches to mentoring. At its core, mentoring is an intentional learning relationship between two (or more) persons where one or both persons share from their life and experience the wisdom of their heart and mind, and where one or both persons give the other the trust to hold them accountable to their stated vision and values. How often, who initiates, what agenda are all determined uniquely by the parties involved. I do not think there is one best model or one right model. What is

important is trust, honesty and a relationship of belonging, encouragement, affirmation, accountability and hope.

Mentoring is a sharing of one's self. Mentors offer who they are, what they know, what they are learning. They bring their strengths and their weaknesses to the relationship. Mentors are growing and changing like everyone else. The ability to reflect on and share the process of growth and life is a gift for the mentor as well as for those being mentored. While particular experiences and skills can be beneficial to those being mentored, the core exchange of the mentoring process is a sharing of persons — a sharing of one's heart and mind, one's values and commitments. It is the person of the mentor that leaves the lasting legacy, not the positions held or the experiences accumulated.

Mentoring is a relationship between fallible humans and cannot exist without forgiveness. Mentors are human beings with flaws and failings. We like to think of mentors as those who are above us, beyond us, on a pedestal, models of success. And they may well be. But they are always human beings, flawed, wounded, seeking to understand, live and contribute to life. Mentors may let you down. You may let your mentors down. Any strong relationship must carry within it the commitment to forgive and give trust again if the relationship is to survive for the long haul. The same is true for the mentoring relationship. Only forgiveness and commitment can sustain a relationship over time and that is precisely when we learn the most about our leadership and ourselves.

Mentoring of leaders must be managed by the leaders.

During early growing years, it is possible and appropriate for mentors to seek out promising persons to encourage and affirm. When we take up leadership responsibilities of our own, we should seek out one or more mentors, initiate the meetings and take responsibility for the success of the mentoring relationship. Do not wait for someone to decide to be your mentor. Identify the person(s) you believe you can learn from, the person(s) whose values you seek to live, and the person whose wisdom will enrich your spirit and take responsibility for meeting and for starting the agenda for conversation. It takes a degree of courage or audacity to ask a person you respect to be your mentor, but it is a compliment to the person, even if he or she must decline. It never hurts to give such a compliment and even a conversation with a negative response will be a valuable learning and short mentoring experience.

Mentoring is more about following than leading. When we choose a mentor from whom to learn, we choose to follow a person, to allow that person — that mentor — to influence our thinking, our vision, our values, and our behavior. Mentors do exercise leadership — but they do so at the invitation of the follower. Mentoring is more about followership than leadership. This is important, because the persons we choose to follow become the persons who shape who we become — the character that forms our leadership. Leaders begin as followers. This

is true for all of life. We begin life by following —parents, teachers, coaches. Who we follow contributes to who we become. The importance of mentoring for leaders lies in the reality that who we choose to follow shapes our leadership. Leadership emerges out of followership.

Mentoring is mutually beneficial. Mentors benefit from the mentoring relationship as well as the one seeking a mentor. If the mutual benefit is not there, the relationship will not last. Both parties bring something to contribute. Both parties must believe that they are receiving value from their investment. Mentoring requires an appropriate fit. There must be sufficient common ground upon which to build a mentoring relationship — probably a common pool of shared values is a prerequisite. Shared experience, shared vision, compatible personalities, all will play a role. Not every pairing of persons will produce a lasting mentoring relationship. A comfortable fit — the ability to enjoy and appreciate one another's company — is necessary for any long term relationship.

Mentoring is more listening and asking questions than talking and giving answers. Mentors listen well and carefully. They ask questions. Max De Pree believes that is one of the most important things leaders can learn: to ask good questions. Mentors are not managers. They are not the place to go for answers. Good mentoring listens and questions. Learning is the responsibility of the one being mentored. It is so easy for us to ask a mentor what to do. It is also too easy for many of us to answer and tell someone what to do. But good mentoring resists this. Mentoring is about listening and questioning, not about answering or giving direction.

Mentoring is needed by every leader. Leadership is a precarious responsibility. As Max De Pree says, it is a serious meddling in other people's lives. Leaders need wisdom. They need perspective. They need accountability. This is the role mentors play. Every leader needs one or more mentors to provide the depth of reflection necessary to sustain vision and energy for leadership. I also believe every leader needs to serve as a mentor — because the mentor learns as much from the process as the one being mentored. Teachers have long known that the teacher learns more than the student. This may well be true for mentors also. The gift of mentoring causes intentional reflection and keeps the mentor thinking about life, leadership, vision and values and holds up a mirror to keep us accountable to the priorities to which we are committed. Everyone needs a mentor. And everyone needs to be a mentor.

Concluding Reflection

PERHAPS IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH MENTORING BUT THERE IS A circular nature to relationships and community that continues to intrigue me. Maybe it is unique for my particular journey and stops there. But I cannot ignore the connections. Roland Given's son, for whom I babysat, married David Hubbard's daughter. Glenn Barker's son is now my pastor. And I now have the significant honor and the pleasure of serving as the director of the De Pree Leadership Center, charged by a board to continue the legacy of Max De Pree. But the full circle story that still quiets my spirit is Donald Bubna. When I became the president of Regent

College in Vancouver, Don Bubna was senior pastor of a large church south of the city. We crossed paths several times as colleagues in church and education.

By now I understood mentoring and knew that Donald Bubna had been a key mentor at a critical stage of my life. During this time my younger brother was murdered, and I again stopped to reflect on life and calling. I decided to take Donald Bubna to lunch and ask him why he invested so much in me as a teenager. I did and we had a memorable lunch. He responded to my question first by saying that he "saw potential in me and wanted to encourage it." That simple. He saw potential and I found someone who believed in me.

And then he added words that help define mentoring for me. He said, "But this lunch is not about you. This lunch is for me — a gift from God to me. This morning my board fired me over a leadership conflict. Fifty years of leading churches and serving people were discounted this morning and I have been questioning the value of my life and leadership. Now the president of prestigious Regent College sits across the table and tells me that my time with him as a young pastor shaped his life and direction. This is God talking to me, and I am grateful."

What a beautiful circle of service. What a vivid illustration of mentoring for both of us.

Further Reading

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Walter C. Wright, Jr.

Walter Wright is the executive director of the De Pree Leadership Center. He joined the Center staff in 2000 after twelve years as president of Regent College, a graduate school affiliated with the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. Before moving to Canada, Dr. Wright held a faculty appointment and served in a variety of management positions at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena over two decades. He is the author of Relational Leadership and Crossings and contributes to the journal California CEO.

De Pree Leadership Center

The De Pree Leadership Center was established as a resource for men and women with responsibilities for leadership. The Center seeks to promote relational leadership that nurtures effective organizations into relational communities in order to encourage positive workplace environments where people belong, contribute, and grow.

The Center develops written materials, retreats, workshops, seminars, consultation, and training through relationships with a network of partners. For additional information, contact:

Walter C. Wright, Jr.
Executive Director
De Pree Leadership Center
135 North Los Robles Avenue, Suite 620
Pasadena, CA 91101
626-584-5637