

## What's in it for the mentor?

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**A**s Georgiann McKenna notes in her research:  
*For some, mentoring is an add-on job. The role in some programs is not always clear. If then, for instance, the mentor is given no money, little release time, and must assume new responsibilities for the effective induction of a new member into the profession, why would an already overburdened experienced professional say "yes" to such an additional role? The following research was designed to probe that question.*

There's a great deal of worthless literature to be found on the subject of mentoring. This study however is notable as an example of good quality because it is clear and meaningful. Who wouldn't want to know what she discovered? Further, others have replicated her results since then – even if they didn't know it (because they didn't bother to do a literature search before they began!)

Her study collected qualitative and quantitative data from 37 mentors from a USA-based program that assisted and supported for a new hire throughout an initial year. In this instance, experienced staff members served as mentors. Monthly seminars intended to meet the needs of participants are also scheduled. Mentors did not play evaluative roles. The sample can be described as

- ❖ primarily female (75.7%), with almost 60% holding a Bachelor's degree
- ❖ the mean age was 37
- ❖ most (62.2%) did not receive release time
- ❖ over half (56.7%) attended five or six of the monthly seminars.

The research asked:

- ❖ What are the benefits that accrue to a mentor in a formal induction program?
- ❖ How are mentoring roles played out?
- ❖ Which mentor roles take place?
- ❖ Is there increased effectiveness in the workplace of the mentor due to mentoring?

After an extensive review of the literature concerning the mentor benefits cited in other studies, those benefits were categorized into four Dimensions:

- ❖ Relationship
- ❖ Professional
- ❖ Skill
- ❖ Personal Esteem

McKenna had these content-validated by several experts and followed the same procedure for role-functions that mentors have been known to fill for new hires.

## **T** he study:

The increased effectiveness of the mentor in his/her own workplace was measured in terms of mentor workplace outcomes. These mentor outcomes were reported in open-ended questions asking for specific examples of outcomes on three content areas mentors most extensively worked on with their proteges. Mentor outcomes were also studied from the perspective of the four Dimensions in the in-depth interview portion of the study. Respondents used a Likert-type rating scale indicating how much they felt there were tangible workplace benefits as they worked on six content areas with their proteges. Later, these data were studied from the perspective of age, gender, education, satisfaction level, and release time. Triangulation (360 degree feedback) was achieved through the use of several data sources. The interviews took place at twenty-three locations, took nearly two months to complete, and were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim.

## **W** hat were the benefits?

The benefits on the Relationship Dimension were highest, followed respectively by the Professional, Skill, and Personal Self-Esteem Dimensions.

**1** Relationship Dimension (highest benefits), mentors benefited by seeing proteges get started and grow in the profession, become more independent, and avail themselves of new opportunities. Overall, the mentors felt a sense of pride in passing the skills of the profession on to the next generation. This research verifies what has been said: "*Mentorship is one way in which older workers may realize the significance of their lives and professional contribution.*" As the mentor takes responsibility for another by fostering growth, s/he does indeed grow and develop further in the profession.

**2.** Professional Dimension (second highest benefits), mentors felt they were helping the organization. They reported being challenged, rejuvenated and reinforced in their own professional identity. Mentoring gave them an opportunity to show their own talents while becoming more aware of the importance of communicating in a professional manner. In this way becoming a mentor benefits not only the mentor and protégé, but serves the profession as well.

**3** Skill Dimension (third highest benefits), mentors reported they analyzed their own skills more, received stimulating ideas for use in the workplace and acquired a sharpened ability to effectively help another.

**4** Personal Esteem Dimension, mentors were reaffirmed that they could work with other people, were honored to be selected and felt important when asked by their protege for advice.

## **Substantial benefits cited by mentors**

Twenty benefits received a rating above 3.5 out of a possible five – quite an impressive number. We also have to keep in mind that they were in four different dimensions. Thus we can see the multi-faceted value of mentoring. Here are the top ten:

<b><u>Benefit</u></b>	<b><u>Rating out of 5</u></b>
•Happy to see my protege become more independent	4.219
•Established a trusted friendship	4.135
•Felt good to see my protege avail him/herself of new opportunities in the workplace	4.086
•Fostered a sense of pride in helping another get started in the profession	4.081
•Provided a sense of accomplishment in seeing professional growth in the protege	3.944
•Felt it could help my organization in the long term	3.917
•Pleased me to know that my protege found my past experiences useful	3.892
•Received affirmation and support from my protege	3.865
•Helped reinforce my own professional identity	3.865
•Gave me a sense of pride in passing skills of the profession to the next generation	3.861

Of the next ten benefits, a number focused on the mentor's own career, help-giving capabilities and analysis of skill development. For example, benefit number 11, "Challenged me professionally" rated a 3.838 out of five.

# Mentoring roles

What did McKenna's research discover about roles in a mentoring program?

In this particular program, the roles played would not match what would be needed for other conditions.

Frequency	Role	Comment
most frequent	advisor supporter	Examples: giving specific recommendations to the protege, providing support for successes as well as failures and offering options from which the inductee could choose a course of action.
moderate	teacher / coach developer of talents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The role of teacher was used only under three conditions: the protege was weak and needed excessive direction; the protege was in an area of high technology involving many procedural complexities; or the mentor personality was the "take charge" type.</li> <li>• The role of developer of talents became associated only with proteges categorized as "strong."</li> </ul>
Slight/ seldom	protector role model sponsor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The protector role was used only when the mentor felt the protege was not being treated fairly or was excessively criticized by other staff.</li> <li>• Most mentors felt there was not sufficient time to role model through observation.</li> <li>• Very few mentors chose the sponsor role probably because new hires generally are not in a position to be reaching out beyond the workplace to search for more career development opportunities.</li> </ul>

Mentors did not prefer the evaluator role in a new hires program of this type. Many who chose to talk about it said it caused them serious conflict when they had to assume that role at great length. Further, the role that caused the most role conflict for mentors was that of evaluator. Mentors relied heavily on advising, and supporting. This research also sheds light on why mentors answer as they do when asked to identify their own former mentors. None chose their bosses (who must evaluate).

## Age:

Being older was positively correlated with four mentor benefits:

- ❖ rejuvenated me professionally
- ❖ became more aware of the importance of communicating in a professional manner
- ❖ kept me on the cutting edge in my own field and
- ❖ prompted me to experiment with new ideas/techniques in my workplace.

These findings also confirm findings from business that a sponsor is a well established person who is in a position to use his/her influence for the benefit of the protégé. A sponsor is one who encourages the protege to be on committees to give him/her needed exposure to progress in the field. It is not surprising that this role correlated with age.

**Job satisfaction due to mentoring.**

When job satisfaction due to the mentoring relationship was correlated with mentor benefits, ten such benefits were found to be positive and significant. At the top of the list was that mentors felt rejuvenated. Close behind was: Mentors felt mentoring sharpened their ability to work effectively with others, improved their own skills in the workplace, stimulated ideas for use in the workplace, and kept them on the cutting edge in their own fields. McKenna concludes: *“it is clear that the mentoring relationship satisfied certain ego needs which may have, in turn, helped to make the mentoring relationship more satisfying.”* As a bottom line factor, what organization wouldn't want staff skills to improve?

## **Does mentoring increase workplace effectiveness?**

Quantitatively, mentors report improving slightly in the areas of planning, instructional organization, presenting subject matter, communication and testing. This “slight” effect may reflect the fact that mentors were the best staff and were carefully selected for their expertise. One would not expect more than “slight” improvement when the quantitative perspective is used. However, in the open-ended questions, when mentors were asked to pick three content areas they worked on most with their proteges and relate if any of those translated into improvement, most mentors gave positive responses citing at least two or three such examples.

**Mentor Mirroring Model**

In trying to explain the patterns of interaction, the researcher settled on Charles Cooley's (1922) “Looking Glass Self” to help create her “Mentor Mirroring Model.” The concept is that a person takes a view of him or herself by observing the way others respond -- the “mirror” by which the individual sees her/himself. There are five categories of the model:

<b>Category</b>	<b>Explanation</b>	<b>Sample comments</b>
<b>1.</b> Mirror positive self-image	The protege is the mirror through which the mentor gains new perspectives on his/her own self-worth and abilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ she [protege] is very complimentary to me....</li> <li>❖ when someone gives you a compliment like that you think, oh, I can do that even better.</li> </ul>
<b>2.</b> Open to re-evaluation	The protege's youth, enthusiasm and new energy fostered a freedom for mentors to re-evaluate old patterns of working within a safe environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ the fact that she's excited, raring to go...how can that not rub off on a someone that [sic] has been in the field for a while...it gets you out of your mold...</li> <li>❖ Do I do this...I know I should, but do I? ...and I've gone back and done things differently. Just thinking about how to encourage someone else opened my eyes to what I was doing and ways I was acting...</li> <li>❖ It forces me to look at what I do...e.g. when my protege asked me, “How do you deal with ---?”</li> </ul>

## What's in it for the mentor? A research study

Category	Explanation	Sample comments
3. Experiment with new ideas	Mentors received ideas from proteges. This, along with the open atmosphere, allowed mentors to feel relaxed about trying such ideas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ I [mentor] used many of her [protege] ideas that she shared with me...</li> <li>❖ We've gone through radical change. My protege was very well versed in technical things...</li> <li>❖ I've learned a lot of good points in marketing strategies...</li> <li>❖ I wanted to try out more ideas...</li> </ul>
4. Mutual feedback	Giving mutual reinforcement through feedback became an apparent characteristic of the relationship.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Sometimes we'd share a new idea and then get back together and say, "Hey, did it work for you?"</li> <li>❖ (see comment below)</li> </ul>
5. Reinforce positive self image	Due to the level and amount of discussion between mentors and proteges, the mentor's positive self-image was reinforced.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ I [mentor] think I've gained as much as she has – maybe more...</li> <li>❖ It felt good to help a new hire avoid some of the mistakes I made.</li> <li>❖ affirmation that I'm a good employee and do have something to share with someone else...</li> </ul>

The complexities of mutual feedback are fascinating. One mentor related that, at the beginning of the year, her protege's expectations were too high and this resulted in extreme frustration. The mentor noted: *"After discussion...we realized we had to back off and look at what was more realistic...However, mid-year we realized the expectations had to be bumped-up for her ...we weren't asking enough.* [Then the mentor reported going into her own workplace reflecting] *Perhaps I should be expecting more too? Then I'd bump up my expectations to see what could happen."*

### Summary

The mentor, often taken for granted by peers, was now in a position of being an advisor, counselor, and supporter. The roles that mentors played became the means whereby the mentor was affirmed. In turn, this often led to re-evaluation, and re-analysis of mentor habits. As many reported, after many years there is a tendency to do things by rote. Mentoring removed many veterans from that mold. And because the atmosphere was one of freedom to experiment, mentors felt free not only to share ideas, but also to be the recipient of new ideas with the challenge of trying them out. When the mentor and protege were involved in mutual feedback, both seemed at ease to comment on the success or failure of the particular idea or technique. Having such a dynamic in place, it is no surprise that the mentor would be reinforced in the original positive image that the inductee mirrored.

## **Some considerations**

McKenna offers a number, three of which are highlighted here:

### **1. Bridging gaps:**

Organizational leaders interested in bridging the gap that exists between organizational and individual needs might consider the benefits that mentor programs play in potentially satisfying the respective needs at both levels.

### **2. Financial:**

Those concerned with the financial aspects need to be cognizant of the significant differences reported for those with release time. The financial investment of several hundred dollars per protegee seems minimal in exchange for such significant benefits.

### **3. Networking:**

For staff who refer to isolation and loneliness so characteristic of a given profession or position, mentoring fosters reflective thinking for those at the same time it creates an atmosphere of less isolation and loneliness. Adults grow by sharing experience and reflecting it. This research suggests mentors do both very effectively.

Her up-close look at mentor benefits, roles and outcomes, demonstrates “*that the effects of these programs can go far beyond the scope of its original designers ... the intended purpose of support and assistance to the new hire is as valuable an outcome as its unintended purpose of rejuvenating veterans personally and professionally.*” While her study focuses on newer hires, in the intervening years, other researchers have confirmed her findings for other types of programs. As she concludes:

Perhaps Sophocles was quite correct, “I benefit myself in aiding him.” With the specific benefits now defined, perhaps anyone selected to be a mentor will know first hand “What’s in it for me?” ##

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### **About the editor:**

From 1987-1992, Marilynne Miles Gray was Editor of *Mentoring International Journal* in which this research first appeared. During that time, she oversaw production of 18 issues containing 124 articles, two annotated bibliographies of 165 and 541 citations respectively, plus shorter articles and *MentorInk Newsletter* that is still being issued on a regular basis.