

PEER MENTORING

Mentoring relationships take many different forms. Perhaps the one familiar to most people is when an older person (the mentor) guides, tutors, coaches, or otherwise influences a younger person (the protégé) in a profound, lasting way. This is the sort of relationship that Mentor had with Telemachus and that Paul had with Timothy. In this book, when we talk about “mentoring,” we generally are referring to this sort of mentor/protégé relationship.

However, the more one investigates the practice of mentoring in our society, the more one finds an interesting phenomenon: many of the characteristics that define mentor/protégé relationships are also taking place among people who are basically the same age – within five or six years of each other. At first one is tempted to describe these simply as friendships, but they are actually peers mentoring each other. Peer mentoring has enormous benefits, and I strongly encourage you to pursue these kinds of relationships.

Illustrations of Peer Mentoring

Two examples from Scripture of peer mentoring are Jonathan and David, and Barnabas and Paul. An outstanding contemporary example is the long-term relationship that has existed between Jerry White, president of The Navigators, and Fred Hignell III, president of a real estate development and management company. Here’s how Jerry describes their relationship: “Fred and I met more than ten years ago through a mutual friend . . .

“We had several common traits: an engineering background, a strong choleric personality, a commitment to reach our friends for Christ, and a deep desire to be godly men, husbands, and fathers.

“Early on in our friendship we began by discussing our goals for our family, personal lives, and jobs. We traded specific prayer requests. We had no verbal commitment of our accountability. Yet accountability was implicit. And as we became more frank with each other, we developed a trust that fostered additional openness. Accountability was the result, not the initial intent.”

Encourage, Balance, and Motivate

Now compare Fred’s journey up the other side of the mountain: “As I began to grow in my spiritual walk, and as God brought men with spiritual depth into my life, being a ‘lone ranger’ became less attractive.

“I began to realize that to remain teachable as I got older, and to end well in my Christian walk, I needed to develop one or more relationships that would require me to be open and vulnerable.

“When my friendship with Jerry began, I was not looking for an accountability relationship. But as we spent time together, I saw he was a man with whom I could be transparent, who would keep a confidence, with whom I could share my ‘paddle.’

“Jerry and I are goal-oriented, so our accountability began with discussing our annual goals and then following up to track our progress. After we attended a conference where the speaker advocated developing significant accountability relationships, we defined a clear purpose for our relationship: ‘to encourage, enhance, and motivate each other to love Jesus with all our heart, soul, and mind, and to finish life without dishonoring God’s name.’”

Indispensable Help in Deep Waters

Jerry and Fred can tell you about numerous times when their lives have definitely been “sharpened” against each other’s wisdom. They have seen each other through career changes, major life decisions, and family troubles. One of the most gripping moments in their friendship, and one that reveals the incredible worth and power of peer mentoring, was the tragic murder of Jerry’s thirty-year-old son Steve, who was shot to death while driving a cab in Colorado Springs.

“[My wife Mary and I] sped home in shock to find Fred already there to help,” Jerry recalls, “sharing our desperation and grief . . . We lived numbly through the days of memorial services, overwhelmed by the complications of this terrible event.

“Fred, his wife, Kaylinn, and [two other couples] literally guided our lives during those days. But I especially needed someone to look to and pray with. Fred was there; he helped me think things through and even suggested decisions.

“Most of my life I had been the strong one, self-sufficient, helping others through hard times. Now I really needed others. I was weak and unsure where my emotions would be from day to day – guilt, sorrow, fear, or just weariness. Fred sensed my mood and shared Scripture or just prayed.

“Even after Fred returned to Chico, he called almost daily to check on me. He kept me accountable on cutting back my travel schedule. He warned me that I could not carry on with ‘business as usual.’ . . . He kept me accountable on several aspects of my recovery from grief. He would ask how much sleep I was getting and if I was beginning to exercise again.

“Fred did a lot of listening, and at times, he gave strong counsel. His help was indispensable.”

Can you feel the depth of that relationship? That’s what can happen when men of similar ages pursue vital relationships with one another.