

This issue of the Dispatch considers the important issue of mentoring--that process of continuing one's education in a different way than formal education. We hope you enjoy Davon and Alleah's practical tips and Bill's unique definition of mentoring. Hit reply to let us know your thoughts.

## Mentorship for All Seasons

By [Davon Cook](#)

This fall my oldest child goes off to college—far away. As my panicked list of “things we ran out of time--or ability--to teach him” expands, I find myself praying that the right next person(s) will appear to provide guidance, challenge and support for him. My advice to him when seeking a mentor, formal or informal, is derived from lessons I've learned from wonderful mentors along my journey.

- 1. Ask questions.** Seek insight from those around you. In general, we humans love being asked our opinions or asked to tell stories about our experience. It's flattering...makes us feel needed and knowledgeable! Whether it's a designated mentor or simply an experienced person with whom you're interacting, seek the wisdom of their experience.
- 2. And in reverse, listen to and reflect on the questions that mentors ask you.** Theodore Kinni's [book review](#) of [Managers As Mentors: Building Partnerships for Learning](#) summarizes, “Great mentors foster discovery, they don't instruct; thought-provoking questions are much more powerful than smart answers.” I call these Powerful Questions, and sometimes they take a long time, soul-searching reflection, or much hard work to answer. Yet the power of the question is in our willingness to engage with it.
- 3. Ask for help when you need it—and ask specifically.** Most of humanity is willing to help when asked, but people cannot read your mind. If you need advice on a specific topic, ask “Can I take you to lunch? I'd like to pick your brain on crop insurance and would value your advice.” (Or in his case, show up at his professor's office hours!) If you'd like to experience a specific event, ask “Could I accompany you to that meeting with the bank? I'd like to learn how you negotiate financing.” Or, if you're looking for an ongoing relationship, “I am hoping to develop a couple of key mentors to help guide my career. I would value your input. Could we visit about your willingness and what it would entail?”

Whether you are off to college or a seasoned professional, take these reminders to heart as you seek to benefit from the wisdom around us.

## A Testament to the Value of Mentorship

By [Alleah Heise](#)

Over the years I have had the good fortune of spending many hours in vehicles, often with other family business consultants. What seemed at first to be mere conversations has turned out, on further reflection, to be much more. That time spent in the car created a mentorship relationship with one consultant, a relationship that ultimately shaped my career and my life.

I have never been one to be told how to do something. My dad always teased me about going through life with a hammer in one hand and a chainsaw in the other. To think that someone was going to *assert*



their *mentorship* over me? Ha! It took me some time, and a lot of patience from my mentor, to truly understand the value of this type of relationship.

The word mentor comes from Homer's *Odyssey*. Over time, it's [meaning](#) evolved to mean "trusted advisor, friend, teacher and wise person." When I think about my mentor, all of these are true. Three important life lessons I learned from him were:

- **Be patient.** It may take some time to understand the inner spirit of a person, and when you see that, hang with them – chainsaw and all.
- **Ask questions.** Many of the conversations with my mentor that brought value started with questions, sometimes provocative, that got my wheels turning or that safely challenged my perspective.
- **Manage expectations.** If my mentor told me his goal was to be in a mentorship relationship with me, I would probably have resisted. But his steady approach, positive feedback, guidance, and open availability to share and think together went so much further.

Most important, my mentor also left me with a profound respect for differences. While we came from somewhat different backgrounds and experiences, our ability to name those experiences, compare notes, and learn something from one another helped me build a foundation that I will always appreciate and hold dear.

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## Mentoring and Discipleship, Mark 3:14-15

By [Bill Long](#)

We tend to look at mentoring or mentorship as an intentional process. Last week, for example, a retired friend of mine told me he had a "mentorship" meeting that afternoon. What he meant was that he was helping a younger man understand some basic lessons of managing a business. He "mentored" the younger man one hour per week.

Yet when we look at the New Testament, and especially Jesus' call to his disciples, a slightly different picture of mentoring (or, in Biblical language, "discipleship") emerges. Listen to the words of Mark's Gospel: "He (Jesus) appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons." We always knew that the intentional activities of preaching and casting out demons were both essential parts of Jesus' ministry but we really didn't expect the first thing that is mentioned: "to be with him." The point of Mark's words, picked up in none of the other Gospels, is that a central feature of mentoring was simply to "be with him."

### Mentoring by Example

When the disciples were with Jesus, they learned much more than techniques of preaching or casting out demons. They saw his approach to life, or how he dealt with crowds, the religious authorities, the disciples themselves. They picked up on his sense of purpose and timing and, as Easter week approached, perhaps even his fears or uncertainties about the future. In each case, however, these valuable lessons came because the disciples were "with him."

### Mentoring Today

If we see mentorship in our day not simply as learning or imparting techniques but as catching the spirit or example of someone, we can relax a bit and realize that opportunities for mentoring are all around us. Who, do you think, might be watching *you* and *your example*? Whose spirit or approach to life and work has been formative for you? With this broader understanding of mentoring, we see ourselves as vital links in receiving and giving important knowledge and life lessons.

