The Army Officer's Guide to Mentoring

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For my mentors, who saw what I could be;
And my protégés, who see who I am.

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Introduction

Mentoring has been part of the profession of arms for a good chunk of recorded history. The term *mentor* comes from Greek mythology, where Mentor was the tutor of Odysseus' son, Telemachus. When Odysseus went off to fight the Trojan War, he assigned Mentor to teach his son everything he needed to know to become a man. According to legend, the goddess Athena joined in as well, occasionally taking Mentor's form to teach Telemachus about what we would now consider strategy and operational art.

A little closer to our own time, we find the story of Fox Conner, the most important person in 20th century American military history you've never heard of. While he was a master of American military art, his fame comes not from his own actions but from the officers he coached and mentored. Conner saw potential in Lieutenant Colonel George Marshall and he arranged for the posting in World War I that began Marshall's march to fame. Conner helped steer a young Lieutenant George Patton towards the nascent Armor branch while helping Patton craft the warrior persona that would make him an icon. Perhaps most importantly, Conner took a young Major who believed his career was over and lit a flame within him for professional

growth. Major Dwight Eisenhower would go on to lead the Great Crusade in Europe and become President of the United States.[i]

Because the word *mentoring* gets used in many different ways, let's define our terms up front. This book will use the current (as of this writing) Army definition of mentoring: "the voluntary developmental relationship that exists between a person of greater experience and a person of lesser experience that is characterized by mutual trust and respect."[ii] The *mentor* is the person in that relationship with greater experience, while the *protégé* is the person with less experience.

Mentoring matters! It matters because it shapes both the present and future of our Army. It matters because at our core, we are social beings who need the company of one another to blossom. It matters because, as steel sharpens steel, so professionals become more lethal and capable when they can feed off one another. I'm passionate about mentoring because it's played an important part in my own career and development. Here are two of my own personal stories, showing both sides of the relationship. While anecdotal, they still provide a sense of mentoring dynamics and the difference they've made in my life.

Introduction

My Stories

As a young Army aviation officer, I thought the world revolved around the flight company. Anything that was worth doing was centered on maneuvering scout aircraft downrange to find and destroy the enemy. All of that *other stuff* (maintenance, logistics, and the like) was done by *other people* to let the true warriors strap into their noble steeds and ride forth. So after a year of platoon leader time, when I became the battalion S4, I thought my life and career were over. I sulked my way up to my new office, figuring out how many months I would have to spend in the position before I could break free to the Captain's Career Course and get around to a command of my own. It was as the S4 that I met Major Joe Blackburn, who thoroughly changed my perspective.

Major Blackburn was the battalion executive officer and took his developmental responsibilities for the staff very seriously. Within a month, he had shown me just how crucial logistics was to the success of the battalion and how I couldn't afford to bring any less than my "A game" to the fight. Perhaps more importantly, he helped me make a personal connection to my work and understand that many of my strengths actually lay in this field. Joe Blackburn was only my XO for four months, but his mentoring changed

the course of my career and I stayed in touch with him for years after that, seeking counsel and sharing my experiences with him.

Fast forward almost a decade, and I was a Major myself, teaching history on the West Point Faculty. I was always on the lookout for cadets who might be good history majors. I reached out to Cadet Mandi Rowell (now Rollinson), who had done particularly well in my course, and asked her if she had considered majoring in history. To my surprise, she wrote back and said that she wasn't particularly interested, but would I mind if she came by the office to talk about some matters of professional interest? Most plebes go out of their way to avoid any additional contact with instructors. I was intrigued and told her to come by. Our conversations that day launched an ongoing professional relationship that has lasted almost a decade and shows no signs of abating.

Although I was her mentor, I was learning just as much from the relationship as she was. When she sought my counsel about remaining as a cadet after her initial two years, I found myself reflecting on similar stay or go decisions in my own career. When we discussed the ups and downs of a dual military marriage and how to make it work, I had to think about what aspects of my own

marriage were deliberate and which were simply fortunate happenstance. When Mandi shared fears of being pigeon-holed in a specific position, I drew on what Joe Blackburn had done for me those many years ago to help her see the contribution she was making. Truth be told, our relationship has been as much about my growth as hers.

Why a Book on Mentoring?

Those experiences and others like them sparked my interest about mentoring in the Army officer corps. My work in the Army's CompanyCommand (CC) and PlatoonLeader (PL) forums further stoked my interest in how peers and seniors/subordinates alike feed one another's need for growth and development.[iii] When I had the chance to return to West Point to lead the small team that stewards those forums, I wanted to take advantage of that opportunity to get a better understanding of Army officer mentoring and the role it plays in developing the leaders of today and tomorrow. Part of my new role was earning a doctoral dissertation in learning technologies to understand the theoretical underpinnings of my daily work. In doing the preliminary studies for my dissertation, I was shocked to find that the research on Army officer mentoring was very high-altitude, focusing on broad

percentages and vague perceptions. No one had done any work on what mentoring looked like from the individual officers' perspective, from the ground up.

I set about to change that. For my doctoral research, I reached out to members of the CC and PL forums to find people respected by other forum members as having great mentoring experiences to share. I found ten who were willing to spend hours telling me about their time as mentors and protégés and how it had shaped both their careers and their lives. From those ten, I was able to write a dissertation that shared their knowledge and showed how it fit into both the scholarly constructs of mentoring and the Army's own mentoring doctrine.[iv] I was happy with what I had created, but I wanted to share it with a broader audience of Army officers. A doctoral dissertation, with its careful scaffolding of academic terminology and its rigid structure, simply isn't the best way to reach busy Army leaders who are accustomed to something different.

The book that you're holding in your hand is my attempt to take my research and make it accessible to the population that I care deeply about: the Army Officer Corps. It's my hope that this book will help Army officers see mentoring as something that everyone in the profession can do, albeit on a deeply personalized and individualized

level. Nothing in this book should be taken as a call to arms for an Army-wide mentoring program or a declaration that if you're not mentoring, you're wrong. Instead, I hope that the examples and techniques discussed in this book help Army officers to see the possibilities in their own mentoring practice if they're willing to put themselves out there.

The Limitations of this Book

There's always a catch, right? In this case, given the bold objectives I laid out above, I think it's important to state up front what this book is not:

- *Representative*. Nothing in the experiences I discuss is meant to be taken as proof of broad trends in the officer corps. The Army is a complex and diverse place, with mentoring experiences as broad and varied as the officer corps itself. The participants in my study came from multiple branches and multiple posts, Active, Reserve, and National Guard; but capturing every career field was simply not possible. There were also some shortfalls in minority representation in the study that I discuss in Chapter 9. This book should be thought of as a snapshot in time and an attempt to capture some

best practices rather than as a portrait of enduring trends.

- *Doctrine*. Army doctrine has the unenviable task of being applicable in multiple domains of action. None of the mentoring practices or experiences in this book should be taken as "the right way" or "the Army way." Instead, readers should look at the encounters in this book with a careful eye to context and think about how similar practices might manifest in their own lives and careers. Army officers who want to get a better sense of the doctrinal underpinnings of Army mentoring should take a look at ADRP 6-22, *Army Leadership*, and the mentoring resources published by the Center for Army Leadership.
- *Not for everyone*. There's no doubt in my mind that mentoring happens in the Army NCO corps and throughout the ranks of the other Armed Services. However, the original study that underpins the ideas of this book solely focused on Army officers. The old saying "write what you know" applies here; as an outsider, I don't consider myself capable of fully understanding the nuances of NCO leadership or the varying cultures of the other services. A deeper understanding of mentoring in those contexts is still

needed and nothing would make me happier than to have someone take this book as a challenge to do just that. We'll revisit this limitation in the Conclusion.

Organization of the Book

This book is divided in three parts. The first section, which contains this introduction, is an **overview of mentoring theory and definitions**. This section will be most useful to anyone unfamiliar with mentoring terms and references or someone seeking to better understand a broader context of mentoring theory. The section also discusses the differences between coaching and mentoring and how our misuse of those terms often leads to unnecessary confusion about what our roles are as leaders. If you're anxious to get into the hands-on aspects of mentoring, feel free to skip ahead; you can always come back to look at definitions of specific terms.

The second section is all about **mentoring outcomes**. After all, we engage in mentoring because we want to change something about ourselves or help someone else change something about themselves. It's only right, then, to look at what mentoring can accomplish for the individual. These outcomes include, for example, new career paths, emotional and spiritual development, and the establishment

of role models for further development. The outcomes section will also discuss some current shortfalls of mentoring outcomes, such as the neglect of lower-performing officers and the challenge of negative examples.

The third and final section discusses mentoring **practices and contexts.** Many of us have a fairly narrow conception of mentoring: an older and younger officer sitting down together to discuss Life, The Universe, and Everything.[v] While that construct is completely valid, mentoring practice also takes place in many other settings and with many other pairings. The final section will tackle peer mentoring, e-mentoring, mentoring within the chain of command, and cross-gender mentoring. Each chapter will discuss the strengths and limitations of its respective practice.

If you get nothing else out of this book, I hope you'll understand this: **you can make a difference in mentoring.** Let's get started!

Introduction

A quick style note: Throughout this text, names spelled in conventional type are real names, used to denote historical figures or with the consent of the named individual. Names in all capital letters are pseudonyms, used in accordance with my original study parameters that require me to protect the identities of my participants. Single capital letters indicate an individual not participating in the study whose name is withheld for privacy. Third person pronouns not in quotes refer to individuals of either gender unless specifically noted otherwise.

Chapter 1: Mentoring 101[vi]

You can learn my way of doing things, but if you have issues or problems and what I'm doing isn't making sense or helping, please go find someone that makes sense to you. Go find other perspectives, because I have a very distinct perspective on a lot of things. I may not be the best person, my methods may not work for you. - JEAN

If we're going to talk about mentoring, we need to have an understanding of studies in the field that have established a baseline of common knowledge and terms. The Army has its own specific nuances of culture that alter our mentoring practice and we'll discuss those. But understanding the common elements of workplace mentoring[vii] that cross the boundaries of professions helps us to narrow our focus to those things that are truly unique to our service. This chapter will lay out a current understanding of how and why mentoring relationships form and develop, who does mentoring and why, and look at some emerging forms of mentoring that may change our thinking.

The Mentoring Phases

Dr. Kathy Kram is credited with the foundational work that has shaped mentoring studies for the last 30 years. In her 1985 study *Mentoring at Work: Developmental*

Relationships in Organizational Life, Kram laid out a four phase model of mentoring that stressed the central role of non-linear personal development over time.[viii] Her first phase, *initiation*, lasts for the first year of the relationship and usually involves positive thoughts and high expectations for the relationship. In the initiation phase, the mentor and protégé get a sense of each other's strengths and limitations. They may have known each other prior to the start of the relationship, but the close contact helps them begin to understand each other.

That understanding leads to Kram's second phase of a mentoring relationship, *cultivation*. The cultivation phase is the most robust, lasting for two to five years. In this phase, the expectations of the relationship are tested against realities of interpersonal conduct. For instance, mentors may discover that, in answering a protégé's questions, they don't know as much about a subject as they once thought. In the same vein, protégés may find themselves confronting questions in their mentor's worldview that they hadn't anticipated. Cultivation is not a negative experience; but to truly drive personal growth for both partners, it should involve some discomfort.

The growth and discovery inherent in cultivation often identifies shortfalls in the relationship. This leads to

Kram's third stage, *separation*, in which the protégé redefines their needs and transitions away from the mentor. I can't stress enough that very few mentoring relationships are permanent: human beings grow and adapt, and mentoring relationships should grow and adapt with them. In the separation phase, protégés may begin to drift away from their mentor, spending less and less time engaging with them. Conversely, mentors may feel that they have less to give to the protégé and point them in other directions for continued growth. Either way, a relationship that was tightly knit at the start of the separation phase is arms-length or greater by the end of it.

Kram's fourth stage, *redefinition*, sees the former protégé either continue the old relationship with new boundaries or seek out mentoring relationships of his/her own. Just because a mentoring relationship has ended doesn't mean that the dyad ceases contact completely. Former mentors and protégés may stay in contact with one another for years or even decades.

So how long should a mentoring relationship last? The time figures given for the first two phases are approximate at best; no one has successfully found time limits for the latter two. Kram emphasized that the timing of these phases varies for each mentoring pair, driven by developmental

tasks, professional concerns, and changes in the organizational context. Mentoring relationships last until they are no longer of developmental value to one or both members of the pair.

The Mentoring Functions

Having defined how mentoring dyads function, Kram described how they enhance participants' growth and development. [ix] She grouped these aspects into two sets of functions: *career* and *psychosocial*. Kram emphasized that not every workplace mentoring relationship covers all functions: the chosen functions are driven primarily by the needs of the mentoring pair, the mentor's and protégé's interpersonal skills, and the organizational context of the relationship.

Career functions are those specifically aimed at teaching the protégé the duties and culture of the organization. These functions included sponsorship, exposure-and-visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging assignments. They span a range of active engagement by the mentor in the protégé's career. The popular perception of workplace mentoring centers heavily on the protection and challenging assignment functions, where the mentor actively intervenes to get the protégé

coveted positions. Kram's survey of actual workplace relationships found just as many that never involved any kind of direct career intervention on behalf of the protégé.

Psychosocial functions are the parts of the relationship designed to enhance the protégé's personal sense of competency and identity. At the time, Kram defined the psychosocial functions as role modeling, acceptance-and-confirmation, counseling, and friendship. If career functions are all about making someone a better employee, psychosocial functions are all about making someone a better person. Psychosocial functions help develop interpersonal skills and behavioral abilities that exist independent from the career context.

In later research, Kram and a co-author, Dr. Belle Ragins, suggested that *role modeling* should be considered as a mentoring function set, co-equal to career and psychosocial, due to its centrality in the relationship.[x] This redefinition of the functions places an emphasis on the role of observation in human learning. Protégés may learn points of emphasis and tips from their mentors, but they are more likely to internalize those that they see lived in their mentor's own practice. Role-modeling is also fundamentally different in that it is the only function that is substantially less likely to flow in either direction, from

protégé to mentor or from mentor to protégé. In subsequent chapters, we'll see how examples of how each of these functions can be lived in the life of Army officers.

Who Does Mentoring in the Workplace and Why?

Subsequent research has supported Kram's initial findings and suggested new opportunities to deepen and broaden our understanding of mentoring dynamics. One group of researchers looked at what made mentors decide to assume the responsibility, what kinds of organizational factors either enhanced or inhibited workplace mentoring, and what benefits mentors derived from the relationship.[xi] The researchers found that the mentors' own experiences as protégés was the most important factor in deciding to be a mentor. Other key reasons for mentoring include a desire to pass on information, build a competent workforce, help others, and derive a gratification from seeing others succeed. There is no clear consensus on the organizational factors that facilitate workplace mentoring, but time constraints and workplace demands both emerged as clear inhibitors.

Additional research confirmed that workers with experience as a protégé were more likely to be mentors, but those whose experience was associated with significant

time costs were less likely to be mentors than those with no protégé experience at all.[xii] In other words, if your time as a protégé was long and drawn out, you were less likely to be willing to invest that time as a mentor. The authors found that the characteristics most likely to be predictive of relationship formation included mentors with higher self-enhancement motives, greater desire to benefit others, and those who had experienced mentoring with more intrinsic rewards.

On the other side of the coin, multiple studies examined why some protégés were selected for mentoring relationships while others were not. Allen, Poteet, and Burroughs, the same group that looked at mentor characteristics, studied what protégé characteristics made them most likely to be selected.[xiii] The leading protégé characteristic that drew mentors to them was openness to new ideas. A close second to that openness was a perceived similarity, where the mentor saw characteristics of the protégé that evoked memories of the mentor's early career. Equally important to both of those characteristics was the protégé's perceived ability and capacity for success, with mentors stating that they sought someone with intelligence and potential. The researchers' conclusions on relationship initiation were mixed, with wide variations on how the

relationship began. One striking finding was that 35% of female mentors said they always approached potential protégés first; no male mentors made a similar claim.

Ragins and Kram later confirmed the Allen team's findings. They specifically noted that the *rising star effect*, the tendency of high performers to attract mentoring at a greater rate, required further study on the reasons for its existence and its impact on members of the mentoring relationship. Another research team examined mentoring relationships as social exchanges where the perceived benefits outweighed potential costs.[xiv] Through this lens, they found that protégés were more likely to perceive benefits when the protégés themselves possessed high emotional stability, high self-monitoring, and a perceived internal control of the situation. Mentors, for their part, perceived greater benefits in protégés who were people-oriented, honest, confident, and dependable. Organizational conditions that encouraged the initiation of mentoring included access to the organization's leader hierarchy, an intrinsic reward system for mentoring, and norms that supported mentoring.

Mentoring Norms and Benefits

The organizational norms and processes that support mentoring are complex and vary widely by profession, but we can find some common ground. A 1994 study found that organizations who viewed mentoring as a socialization process were more likely to accept mentoring actions in the workplace.[xv] In this view, socialization is a mechanism to help individuals adjust to an organization's performance standards, people, politics, language, history, goals, and values. Another team further broadened this idea of organizational socialization to encompass the concept of career cycles, where mentoring needs were triggered by changes in organization structure or the protégé's work role.[xvi] These researchers noted that denser and more like-minded work networks were actually hindrances to these career cycles, since they undercut the perception of a need for change.

Mentoring research points to a wide variety of individual and organizational benefits from mentoring practice. In addition to the previously discussed mentoring functions, other researchers found that mentoring developed greater levels of organizational commitment.[xvii] This commitment manifested itself both in identification with the ideals of an organization and retention in that organization. Yet another study suggests that mentoring can

help employees (mentors and protégés alike) avoid the feeling that they have plateaued in their professional lives.[xviii]

I can't stress strongly enough that mentoring is not a panacea or silver bullet for everything that ails an organization. A careful comparison and synthesis of multiple mentoring studies suggested some practical limits to these benefits.[xix] Among other findings, this meta-analysis found that the actual presence of a mentor may be more important to objective career success than the degree or frequency of mentoring itself. Another researcher speculated early on that that mentoring outcomes could vary widely depending on the majority-minority balance in the dyad.[xx] She stressed the importance of understanding how power relationships may vary in mentor-protégé pairs, due to internal perceptions and external realities.

Isn't This Just Good Leadership?

Inevitably, someone parsing the above will throw up their hands and exclaim, "This is just good leadership! What's so special about all of this, that it requires a special field of study?" Recently, two researchers in leader development and mentoring sought to answer this very question.[xxi] The researchers noted first that the concepts of

transformational leadership and leader-member exchange were closest in current leader theory to the developmental emphasis of mentoring research.

Godshalk and Sosik then went on to clarify significant differences in emphasis and outcome between these leader theories and mentoring practice. For instance, leadership only encompasses two of the three mentoring functions: career development and role modeling. Leader-led relationships, such as those within a military chain of command, are by definition formal, while mentoring covers both formal and informal relationships. Mentoring frequently transcends organizational boundaries while leadership rapidly loses effectiveness when asked to cross those same boundaries. Finally, leadership practice emphasizes organizational goals, outcomes, and benefits, while mentoring tends to stress more individually-focused results for both mentor and protégé.

Formal versus Informal Mentoring

When talking about how mentoring is actually done, it's important to differentiate between formal and informal mentoring pairings. Formal mentoring is defined as those relationships generated by a party outside the dyad, while informal mentoring covers those mentoring relationships

that develop naturally or spontaneously between the pair.[xxii] An organization that runs a formal mentoring program may use a wide range of relationship initiation mechanisms, running the gamut from picking mentoring pairs to sponsoring a mentoring space. While diverse mentoring practices may appear in both informal and formal matches, the top-down emphasis of the latter may constrain some pairings. For instance, if an organization formally matches a mentor and protégé, either party may feel reluctant to break off a non-productive relationship.

Likewise, it's difficult to say which is "better," formal or informal mentoring. One of the previously cited studies on organizational commitment found that informal pairs significantly outperformed formal ones and cautioned against mandatory mentor assignments.[xxiii] Another study argued for a greater use of formal mentoring to combat the rising star effect and avoid duplication of effort.[xxiv] He emphasized that the formal approach should be only as directive as necessary, using the analogy of an air traffic controller who deconflicts planes for safety but otherwise lets pilots fly their aircraft. A useful perspective comes from a 2002 study, where the authors opined that formal mentoring carries both great promise and significant potential for dysfunction.[xxv] They called for formal

mentoring to mimic the most successful aspects of informal mentoring practice, including emphasis on network formation and peer engagement.

The traditional conception of mentoring has a fairly clear picture: a senior and a junior, sitting at a table, the junior raptly paying attention as the senior holds forth on his view of the universe. Hopefully, the previous sections have helped you broaden that perspective somewhat. The following sections discuss other frontiers of mentoring that are further redefining what mentoring means.

Peer Mentoring

Peer engagement is a promising subset of mentoring research that poses a broad range of challenging questions. Far from being a new idea, peer mentoring has been part of the workplace mentoring construct from the beginning, when Kram and a co-author, Lynn Isabella, posited that peer relationships would vary widely in their provision of the mentoring functions.[xxvi] For them, the defining characteristic of peer mentoring is *mutuality*, where both members of the relationship assume the roles of protégé and mentor, often simultaneously. Mutuality conceives of a more flexible form of mentoring where a mentoring pair is

constantly discovering areas of expertise held by one and desired by the other.

Kram and Isabella identified three different types of peers, differentiated by their level of trust: *information peers*, who share information about work and the organization; *collegial peers*, who are more intimate and share ideas about long-term goals; and *special peers*, who use a close relationship to provide emotional support and friendship. The research also found that peer mentoring was most prevalent during participants' twenties and thirties. Another early author asserted that alternative forms of mentoring emphasizing lateral relationships instead of hierarchical ones would become more prevalent.[xxvii] This author perceived that the flattening of organizations in vogue at the time would necessitate a new emphasis on peer-to-peer learning.

More recent research on peer mentoring has focused on its origins, conduct, and place in mentoring theoretical constructs. One recent study tested the idea that a growing range of options for professional development would lead to a greater emphasis on peer mentoring.[xxviii] They found the four most common routes for peer relationship initiation to be co-workers, education connections, professional associations, and family. Each route's support mechanisms

differed: coworkers focused on organizational support and coaching; education connections and professional associations emphasized skill development; and, family members gave emotional support, feedback, new perspectives, and affirmation of effort. No significant differences in mentoring practice by gender or age were found.

E-mentoring

Concurrent with peer mentoring, e-mentoring[xxix] has emerged as a viable field of study as digital connections become omnipresent in everyday life. The best working definition of e-mentoring conceives of it as a mutually beneficial relationship between mentor and protégé conducted through computer-mediated communications (CMC).[xxx] This definition allows for e-mentoring as CMC-only, CMC-primary (where the digital exchanges are supplemented by face to face contact), or CMC-supplemental (where digital exchanges are used to extend the reach of initial face to face engagement). Individuals pursue e-mentoring for a wide range of reasons: greater perceived access to mentors; past experience with mentoring; comfort with CMC; a supportive organizational culture; and, a desire to expand a developmental network.

Like other forms of mentoring, e-mentoring is not without its drawbacks. One roadmap for e-mentoring research noted that its challenges include ease of miscommunication, delays in developing relationships, requirement for increased writing instead of oral communications, and challenges to privacy.[xxxi] In spite of those challenges, e-mentoring is perceived as a promising new frontier for mentoring practice. One group of researchers asserted that e-mentoring can potentially help decrease the social bias in mentoring by making mentors more broadly available.[xxxii] The same pair stressed that e-mentoring makes a networked approach to mentoring possible, where a protégé can potentially bring multiple mentors to bear simultaneously on a problem.

Cross-Gender Mentoring

Scholarly studies of cross-gender mentoring suggest that it has different compositions, practices, and outcomes than same-gender mentoring. A 2004 survey outlined significant variations between men and women in how they perceived mentoring.[xxxiii] Fewer men (17%) than women (23%) reported being satisfied with the availability of mentoring in their workplace, while women were more likely than men (40% versus 28%) to have a mentor. A

larger number of women (25%) than men (16%) perceived challenges to workplace advancement from a lack of mentoring. In comparing the characteristics of male-female and female-female mentoring pairs, one study claimed that cross-gender pairs lasted three times as long as single-gender pairs.[xxxiv] Another study found that attempts to ignore gender in mentoring relationships often led to the affirmation of stereotypical gender roles, allowed suppressed tensions to undermine mentoring relationships, and devalued informal engagements outside of the workplace.[xxxv]

The current literature on barriers to the formation and sustainment of cross-gender mentoring relationships suggests that they are real and significant. Both female protégés and male mentors expressed fears of the mentoring relationship crossing the line into sexual harassment or being perceived as a sexual advance.[xxxvi] Outside perceptions were also seen as a significant factor impeding the formation of female-male relationships, with jealous spouses (22%), office gossip (16.7%), and family resentment (16.7%) all identified as factors unique to those relationships.[xxxvii] However, the resentment of co-workers over perceived preferential treatment as part of the relationship outweighed all of the above factors (33%) for

both male-female and female-female pairings. Clawson and Kram attributed the fears of sexual intimacy in cross-gender mentoring relationships to the fact that many characteristics of developmental relationships exist equally in romantic relationships.[xxxviii] They described these characteristics as *levels of intimacy* and mapped out how excessive intimacy and distance can be equally destructive in developmental relationships.

Some proposed solutions are instructive for what they suggest about viable cross-gender mentoring practices. One researcher suggested that referring to *cross-gender mentoring* instead of *women's mentoring* could improve acceptance of those programs as being non-exclusionary.[xxxix] Workplaces were also encouraged to promote the relevance of mentoring for all genders.[xl] At the individual level, suggestions for mediating unhelpful perceptions of cross-gender mentoring varied from leaving an office door open during interactions to avoiding pet names for one another.[xli] Many researchers stressed the importance of both parties continually examining their assumptions, attitudes, and behavior for potential barriers to successful relationships.

The Current State of Army Officer Mentoring

All of the above sections involve research drawn from multiple domains of work and organizational contexts. Since this book is primarily concerned with Army mentoring, it's worth ending this chapter with the most current examination of Army officer mentoring perceptions and practices. In 2013, the Center for Army Leadership (CAL) included several multiple-choice and open-ended questions in their 2013 CAL Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL).[xlii] This was the first time questions on mentoring were put to a broad Army audience since the 2004 Army Training and Leader Development Panel studies. The CASAL surveyed almost 22,000 soldiers in the ranks of Sergeant through Colonel and analyzed the data by grouping it into junior and senior NCOs, as well as company-grade (CG) and field-grade (FG) officers.

On the question of receiving mentoring, the CASAL found that a majority of officers currently considered themselves protégés, but with widely varying practices. 59% of CG and 55% of FG officers reported that they were currently receiving mentoring, below the overall survey average of 62%. The frequency of mentoring underscored a stark difference between the two populations: more than half of CG officers stated they interacted with their mentor weekly or more often, while 70% of FG officers indicated

that their frequency of mentoring was monthly or less frequent. When asked to explain in open-ended responses what they saw as the primary benefits of their mentoring, the protégés overwhelmingly indicated that they derived professional development, personal growth, and personal encouragement from those interactions. For those officers not receiving mentoring, over half identified difficulty of finding a suitable mentor as a key reason, while 36% stated that lack of time led to their lack of mentoring.

The practice of serving as mentors also underscored a significant divide within the CG and FG officer ranks. The percentage of FG officers serving as mentors (70%) was well above the Army-wide average of 65%, while the percentage of CG officers serving as mentors dropped precipitously by rank. 50% of Captains reported serving as mentors, while only 39% of First Lieutenants and 28% of Second Lieutenants reported the same. This makes sense, given that CG officers are likely to be less experienced and therefore less capable of being mentors. In addition to a divide by rank, a much higher percentage of officers who held supervisory positions identified themselves as mentors than those who did not hold such positions (72% versus 48%). The reasons given for not mentoring almost exactly mirrored the reasons for not receiving it: 50% of

participants stated they had not found a suitable protégé, while 34% indicated a lack of time to do so.

Now that we've gleaned some of the best info from the scholarly study of mentoring, it's time to make the leap from theory to practice. As we do that, we'll address in the next chapter a key distinction: between *mentoring* and *coaching*.

Chapter 2: Coaching vs. Mentoring

Mentoring is about the relationship. Coaching is about things. - ARLO

Words mean things. The terms we choose shape our worldview, define our frames of reference, and limit our solutions to identified problems. They trigger responses in us that we may not even consciously recognize. All too often, we mix up the terms *coaching* and *mentoring*, usually to our detriment. This chapter is all about the difference between the two and why you should care.

What's the Difference?

In the Introduction, I briefly discussed the Army's definition of mentoring. By contrast, the Army doesn't have a formal definition of coaching. Instead, the Army differentiates coaching (and counseling, its more formal counterpart) through a series of comparisons.[xliii] I'll list some of the more important ones below:

- Coaching guides an individual's learning or improves their skills; mentoring guides their personal or professional growth.
- Coaching happens during performance of a specific skill or task; mentoring happens in conversation.

- Coaching can be either mandated by an outside agency or requested by the individual; mentoring must be a voluntary, mutual commitment.

Seems clear-cut, right? And yet, if you take a hard look, you'll find uses of "mentoring" to describe something that's really coaching, counseling, or the simple exercise of leadership. A few examples that I found recently when I looked into the matter are:[xliv]

- A reserve component program seeks nominations for a Mentoring for Success Course for non-commissioned officers. The program mandates that only E7s or above are eligible for participation as mentors.
- A TRADOC schoolhouse asserts that mentoring is an administrative requirement for all senior instructors and directs that all schoolhouse personnel receive mentoring from their direct supervisors. The schoolhouse also sets an expectation that instructors will mentor their students.
- A post-deployment AAR contains several references to "mentoring Afghan partners" as a vital component of the brigade's mission. These

references occur in multiple topics ranging from staff engagement to Security Force Assistance.

- A commissioning source runs the Respect Mentor Program, an effort to pair cadets who have fallen short of standards with an assigned officer or NCO. The cadet's participation in the program is his/her only option if they wish to avoid separation.

None of the above examples are meant to belittle or denigrate the referenced programs. All of them are well-intentioned efforts that seek to fill important developmental needs within their organizations. But all of them violate the primary component of mentoring: that it is a **voluntary** and **mutual** relationship. If both parties in a relationship don't have control of its initiation and conduct, they aren't mentoring. JEAN summed this up quite well: "That's the definition of a mentor, that it's a sought out relationship. The people I send emails to, looking for guidance; the people that email me; the peers I still go to. You can have a very fluid dynamic there."

In talking about his work in the CompanyCommand forum, ARLO differentiated the two like this:

> In the forums, I do see, I always have seen, some mentoring, but I see tons and tons and tons of coaching that happens. Things like: "I was in this situation, we had a MASCAL, we had to notify six families

> simultaneously. I did it this way. Here's how I did it." Two months later, somebody's in a similar situation, comes back, and says, "I need to modify it, because of this. I need your advice on this." That usually is a coaching situation. That is not, "I wanna grow up and be like you. I'm trying to go this way in my life. Can you help me get where I'm going? I want to transfer branches, can you help me figure out a way to grow and become this type of brigade commander?" That's mentoring.

JEAN agrees:

> Coaching is a lot more task focused, where I'm trying to teach you how to call the sergeant major, hand receipts, counseling. To me, coaching is very object-oriented, with a task, conditions, and standards, although I guess those terms are now outdated. There are things present in coaching that are not necessarily present for mentoring. Mentoring becomes more organic, free-flowing; it tends to revolve more around individualized issues and problems.

Although it's important to understand the difference between coaching and mentoring, it's not always possible to cleanly separate the two. Because professional growth involves mastery of discrete tasks, coaching sometimes becomes a component of mentoring. JOSH and I had a conversation that helped draw this distinction out:

> Me: Could you describe what you mean by coaching?
> JOSH: I think we both agree on the definition of mentorship, that it's a deeper relationship between an older member of the profession and a younger member. I see coaching as a step down from that. A

> leader, somebody who is more senior to me, giving me some sort of advice, whether it be on a project, career, or whatever, but not really a deeper, ongoing relationship.
>
> Me: So coaching is more transient, much shorter in duration, while mentorship is a longer term relationship?
>
> JOSH: Yes. I see mentorship as a noun, coaching as a verb. Within a mentorship relationship there is coaching, but just because there's coaching, doesn't mean there's a mentor-protégé relationship.

Other participants emphasized the long-term nature of a mentoring relationship, as opposed to short-duration coaching. TRAVIS emphasized in our discussions that his key criteria for mentoring is the existence of a sustained relationship. WILL agreed, stating:

> I've had some time to reflect over the past 24 hours, I do really see a differentiation between teaching, coaching, and mentoring, now that I think about it. Mentoring is really long-term relationship building, where coaching is a specific type of mentoring.

Looking at all of the above assertions, we see an extra difference between coaching and mentoring emerge. Coaching is done for discrete, short-term tasks; mentoring implies a commitment to a longer, deeper relationship. While this seems self-evident when you read the descriptions of each term, it has a very real impact on people's understanding of the kind of commitment they're

taking on. One individual may not be willing to take on a lengthy or deep commitment in their life, but would be able to assist another officer for a short period on a singular task. By contrast, another individual may wish to eschew short-term engagements in favor of a lengthier reflective practice that lets them grapple with complex issues. Carefully differentiating between coaching and mentoring helps us find the right tool for the developmental task.

When to Coach, When to Mentor

Most units are supportive of opportunities to build in deliberate leader development practices, even if they aren't diligent about creating them. If you tell your leadership, "I'm going to be away from the office to talk to my mentor" or "I'm headed to the motor pool to coach 2LT X on inventory procedures," you'll find them generally accepting of that. So the first answer to the question, "Should I coach or should I mentor?" is *Yes. Do both.*

At a higher level, our culture as an Army is generally supportive of both practices. As JEAN put it:

> I've always felt that one of my personal strengths, but also one of organizational strengths of the Army in general is its approach towards teaching, coaching, mentoring, and learning; as my dad puts it, "The transfer of knowledge from one generation to the next." I've always looked for ways, consciously or

> unconsciously, to build that into my normal battle rhythm.

Both coaching and mentoring require that you have some knowledge about the other person. If you're the coach, you need to understand the way your partner learns and how he views the world. If you're the recipient, you should have a sense of what you want to get out of the coaching and whether the coach is able to provide it.

Coaching is a better solution when someone is looking for detailed assistance with a problem or task that is bounded in nature. The coach/recipient relationship allows for the creation of trust that enhances a learning environment beyond direct instruction. Paradoxically, this means that the more successful a coach is, the less likely a sustained relationship between coach and recipient is.

TRAVIS commented:

> The coaching aspect depends on the person: some will be more inclined to come back to you having confided in you once, or if it's towards the forum, that it gave enough details to cross the line into sharing. A lot of people with coaching, once the problem is solved, it's out of sight, out of mind.

ARLO agreed:

> Coaching is about things. Coaching, as I've observed it, tends to be far more focused on options picked up and dropped. "I've got this problem. I'm looking for an answer to this. I have my answer. Thank you." With

> coaching, I'm trying to get better at this task. That's nice: here's an idea, if it works for you, great. If it doesn't, I don't know what to tell you.

Mentoring, on the other hand, is far more involved and complex in terms of interpersonal relationships. For one thing, mentoring may involve a more unconscious entry into the pairing. As ARLO put it:

> You choose your mentor, because that's how mentors work, you choose yours. Your mentor usually doesn't get a vote in it. You find out you're a mentor, and you go: *Son of a bitch, I'm a mentor, how did that happen? Why am I still hearing from this person? Why am I still calling them, they haven't worked for me in ten years?* You choose your mentor because they have sound advice; they have experiences that you don't have but you think you need to leverage; they have done things that you think you need to be able to resource; they know people you somehow think are going to be beneficial to your thought process and the decisions you're going to need to make.

ARLO was being somewhat facetious in the quote above; it is hard to imagine a pair moving into the intimacy of a mentoring relationship without some sense of obligation for the welfare of the other. But it is fair to say that coaching may evolve into mentoring. Conversely, mentoring relationships may hit a metaphorical wall that causes them to take a coaching approach instead, as TRAVIS experienced:

> It's impossible to tell beforehand, with any given question, where it goes from there. I just do my best to try to help them out. Then the mentoring part is ongoing; that onus has to be on the protégé to just offer something when it's virtual. You can't pull teeth on people. They just want to say, everything is great, I'm amazing. They do have to do a 360-degree evaluation, so they should do something in there; but if they choose to ignore that or they think it's not important, there's not as much to talk about.

Mentoring is better suited than coaching for ill-defined problems that may have multiple viable solutions. The solution itself may not be readily apparent to the mentor, who then has to take some time to reflect on their own or work with the protégé over time to develop an answer. Mentoring relationships almost certainly require a longer investment of time in the long run and both members of a mentoring relationship should be honest with each other about that. ARLO summed it up well:

> Decision making is a big part of it. Their wisdom, their position in their careers advanced of your own seems to be a big part of it. They are down the road ahead of you, they play a role in being scouts for you in where you're going. The relationship part of it also includes things like the protégé saying, "I've got this situation, I'm facing a dilemma, a decision, I'm not sure of my COAs, I'm struggling with this. I need to think about it, I need to talk about it, I'm trying to wrestle with this." The mentor often will say, "Huh. That's interesting. I don't know." The mentor usually does something like flips over a napkin and starts to doodle COAs on it, or

> doodle out something related to it. The mentor either helps come up with something or says "I'll get back to you." Good ones very often move it onto their own plate of things to do. They are personally invested in their protégés.

Here's a small experiment: taking what you know from this chapter about coaching and mentoring, build two columns on a piece of paper or your spreadsheet software of choice. In one column, list people that you consider coaches; it may be helpful to list the things they coached you on or helped you with. In the other, list people that you consider to be mentors. Odds are, you'll have more trouble defining exactly what those mentors did for you. You may be able to recall some memorable conversations or events, but you'll probably struggle to say that your mentor helped you learn *this* particular task or *that* particular skill.

That kind of amorphous outcome is part of what makes coaching often more attractive than mentoring. It's much easier to take a coaching relationship and say, "I got X, Y, and Z" out of it. The changes and outcomes from a mentoring relationship tend to be more subtle and drawn out. Frequently, both protégés and mentors alike won't recognize some of those outcomes until much further down the road. In the next section of this book, we'll talk about outcomes from mentoring relationships. As we do, be ready

to reflect on your own mentoring experiences to see what matches. If you haven't had any mentoring experiences yet, then look at the outcomes to see which would be good fits in your own life.

Section II: Mentoring Outcomes

Chapter 3: Career Functions: *What* Do You Want to Be?

I saw [mentoring], to use an analogy, as walking into the woods. It's dark. It's an unknown area, it's kind of scary. If you have someone to do it with you, to guide you along, it makes the experience much easier. - JOSH

In Chapter 1, we looked at Kram's mentoring functions (career, psychosocial, and role-modeling) as indicative of the kinds of outcomes we would expect from mentoring relationships. Not every mentoring relationship is going to have all of those outcomes and a mentoring relationship is no less legitimate if it only focuses on a subset of those functions. In this section, we're going to examine those outcomes and what they might look like in the context of a mentoring relationship between Army officers. We'll start in this chapter with a look at career functions, broadly defined as efforts that help individuals better understand the profession and their place in it.

Finding your Path: Through the Protégé's Eyes

All of the officers who participated in my study experienced career development through their protégé experiences. As noted earlier, career development in a mentoring context goes beyond the simple counseling and

coaching that we expect as part of a senior-subordinate relationship. It also pushes into more personal territory, where the intent is to develop individuals through their manner of performance into better, more capable officers. Career mentoring isn't simply about filling a slot: it's about creating a more competent professional who can be beyond performing assigned tasks. Let's look at some cases of junior officers who found themselves in positions beyond the norm and how mentoring helped them cope.

Immediately after BOLC, JOSH was assigned as the executive officer for a One Station Unit Training (OSUT) company. As a brand-new second lieutenant in a job normally given to a seasoned first lieutenant, JOSH felt isolated. Fortunately, both his troop commander and squadron commander saw this and took the time and effort to create additional development opportunities for JOSH outside the norm:

> JOSH: [The troop commander] would send me out to be a platoon leader for a lane for the final exercise for the privates, the STX Lanes. I would be a platoon leader on a HMMWV lane…I did that 3 or 4 times over the course of the year; I would leave my job, what I was doing, to go spend a week in the woods. He would make me work on OPORD writing. He made me go on the spur ride, even though I didn't want spurs from that unit, but it was one of those things: "You need to experience this, you need to go through this." …The squadron commander wanted me to shoot a Table VI

> [gunnery] before I left, a modified one. He basically ordered the 1SG to ensure that the senior drill sergeant, who was a master gunner, took me into the UCOFT and made time in the schedule for me to understand how the process works and to get better at gunnery. Gunnery skills exercises, gunnery skills training: he made me go through that. He made me go through the STX lanes; whenever a brigade OPD popped up, like when we were taking the Strykers out, I was the platoon leader for that. I had to organize squadron sports teams, which is maybe not a big deal, but I was a second lieutenant and had no idea what I was doing.

All of these were above and beyond the duties assigned to JOSH as an XO. Additionally, the troop commander made sure that JOSH had every opportunity to ask questions about duties and responsibilities that weren't part of his daily routine or extra assigned duties:

> JOSH: The relationship, there was a lot of discussion, I was always asking him questions. Because I was removed from Big Army in that assignment, and I honestly had no idea what to expect on the outside, he was my major conduit for that. Telling me what a weekly battle rhythm in a unit looks like, describing to me what the typical relationship between captains and lieutenants are. We talked about what's expected of you as an officer.

JOSH noted that the impact on him was significant:

> JOSH: What I viewed as an assignment that was supposed to be not career enhancing, not broadening, was not going to prepare me to be a second lieutenant out in the force, turned out to be one of my most

> professionally rewarding assignments because of people caring about my development. I really think it set the stage for the rest of my career.

JOAN found herself as commandant of the Commanding General's mess in Korea, which she admitted could seem "fluffy" and "ridiculous." Fortunately, she had a mentor who helped her see the bigger picture:

> JOAN: [My mentor] took it upon himself to ensure that in my new position as the commandant, I understood what my role was, I understood why it was important…Watching the interactions among the staff, among the brigade and battalion commanders, among the membership at the CG's mess…It gave the division staff somewhere to be less formal with each other and to have those interactions in a protected environment that wasn't out in the ville, to come together. That taught me a lot about the importance of creating those relationships with the staff around you.

On his second deployment to Iraq, EARL had to cover what had been three brigades' worth of terrain with just a single brigade's allocation of assets. He despaired how to do this until a mentor helped him see the impact of his work and gave him the encouragement he needed to move forward:

> EARL: He said, "Hey, just in the first week, you've done a great job of streamlining all of this chaos. Nobody here could figure out how to organize it. So far, you've got a good system of controlling the pace, the information, the flow." That was the first time I ever

> interacted with him and he built me up right there. He said, "You're brand new, I got it; you're doing this well, keep it up." We sat down and talked; he counseled me, gave me my left and right limits. He said, "Given the stuff we've got coming up, I'm going to be counting on you to show me what you've got. Whenever you have a problem, come and get me, and we'll work through it."

Even officers serving in more routine assignments, ones with duties and expectations closer to the beaten path, identified times when mentors truly made a difference for them.

As a brand new platoon leader, WILL found himself trying to understand his roles and expectations. His learning curve was deepened by the fact that his first billet had been in a deactivating unit. He hadn't gotten any kind of development out of that position. Fortunately, a pair of battalion commanders gave him the kind of perspective he was craving:

> WILL: One was male, one was female. They were both really approachable; anytime I had a question, I felt like I could go to them respectfully and ask questions. *Will the lack of deployment hurt me in the future? What's Airborne school going to do or not do for me? What do I need to be thinking about as far as my career?* They were really receptive to those kind of questions. They would pull me aside, or I'd ask a question and they'd set up an LPD for the rest of the lieutenants in the battalion. They really helped me create someone I could lean on to get mentorship outside the company level.

COLE was serving as a specialty platoon leader on his first deployment and was one of only a handful of officers from his branch in the unit. COLE's XO took it upon himself to ensure that COLE had a sense of his next steps in his career:

> COLE: Gradually, throughout the deployment, I would spend a lot of time in his office. We would discuss things: my career; schools to attend, making sure I was getting education as soon as I could get it; building my resume; constantly looking for next role. This is what you should be looking for in an OER, this is what your OER should say, this is what you should focus on so you are in the positions you need to be in, doing the key points you need to do as you move through your career. He took an active molding role for me.

Post-deployment, when COLE was offered a position elsewhere in the state and was reluctant to leave the unit, his mentor helped him gain some perspective:

> COLE: He said, "I don't want to lose you. You're a valuable asset, you've done great things with this platoon. But you're in a very competitive branch inside this state. The opportunity to move into a slot for promotion isn't going to come along very often. If you're being offered it now, you should take it, so that you're set and ready for that next rank. Otherwise, you could be sitting here as a first lieutenant for 8 years while you're waiting for some officer somewhere else to get promoted to major. Then you'll be one of 10 people competing for that captain's slot. If you're being offered it now, you need to take it now." That kind of guidance, taking a look at how I should go forward,

> how I should manage and work my career; that's probably the only officer who's really and truly ever done that to that level for me, especially that early in my career.

After completing the Career Course, DARREN served as a platoon trainer for BOLC, educating newly commissioned lieutenants. DARREN's battalion commander saw the potential in him and closely mentored the young captain:

> DARREN: [He] really sat me down, talked me through my career path, talked me through my strengths and weaknesses, and really took the time to counsel me in a way that hadn't happened before that. He gave me ideas, what I should be looking for in my career. He gave me a greater understanding of the Army and my role in it…It was always professional, but definitely someone I felt I could talk to, that I could bring up issues that I was having. If he saw something, he would correct it there, he would talk to me, and let me know where I was and where I stood and give me an honest assessment. That allowed me to really do a better assessment of myself, and I could move forward as a leader. I was ultimately a lot more successful as a commander for having worked for him.

In all of these cases, junior officers found someone inside or outside their chains of command who took an interest in them as a fellow professional. It is certainly true that everything described previously made these junior officers more effective in their jobs, but it's equally true

that many of the mentor actions taken went above and beyond simple task performance. JOSH didn't need to conduct STXs to be an effective OSUT XO, but that experience made him a better platoon leader and commander later. COLE's departure from the unit left a hole that took time to fill, but it also ensured that he would continue to grow and develop within his career field. To get a better sense of why these mentors did what they did, it's instructive to look at career mentoring functions through the perspective of an officer as mentor.

Lighting the Path: Through the Mentor's Eyes

As DARREN continued forward in his career, some junior officers that he made a mentoring connection with continued to reach out to him. One, a combat training center observer, drew on Darren's experience in a variety of positions:

> DARREN: He'd ask me "Sir, I've got a [specialty] platoon coming through. I know you were a [specialty] platoon leader. What are some things I can read up on, what are some things I can look for?" It started off with, "I'm in a training role, you were in an instructor training role, and you've also been a platoon leader in this role. Give me some advice for how to do this job, things to look at." Then he went to the career course, knew he was going into command, so he started coming back to me, asking for advice, lessons learned, what do I wish I had done as a company commander, what are things I

> wish I had known. The things you might ask an outgoing company commander if you were coming into command, but asking it of me, getting some ideas.

TRAVIS found a young lieutenant who was content to languish on a staff while he waited for his turn to move down to the company level. TRAVIS helped him realize that the transition would not be automatic but would require the lieutenant to show his capacity for such a position:

> TRAVIS: I impressed upon him: *Look, we've got an NTC rotation coming up and you need to position yourself to swoop in [on a job.] You're on the bench right now, but you have to think in terms of being the best you can be and hoping that you're contributing; that way, when it's time to switch out lieutenants, you're not still here*...He hadn't thought of it that way; he didn't realize that he needed to execute his responsibilities at that time to the best of his ability. And, while he had all this extra time, be prepping himself for the next step.

ARLO had a prior service junior officer come to work for him on staff. Recognizing what he had to offer, she began to seek additional development from him:

> ARLO: She started coming to me with things that were much more mentoring in nature: talking about places she wanted to go in her career, things she wanted to do. She also was prior service, so she was not exactly a spring chicken; she had lots of maturity, she had a good head on her shoulders. She knew what she was doing,

but she used me for that similar azimuth check type of role.

JOAN's introduction to her first protégé was less positive:

JOAN: He walks into my office absolutely furious and drops an entire trash bag full of stuff on my desk, and says "I can't do anything with this, because there's no paperwork!" I'm slightly taken aback, because this is not the right environment for you to have that attitude, young padawan. Let's try to fix some of this. I said something along the lines of: *Slow your roll. What's wrong?* He went off on a tangent which had nothing to do with me; he hadn't received the appropriate documentation from various individuals. He was frustrated because he didn't have the tools he needed to complete his job. This was a case of, "I want to help you, but I can't, because I don't know how to solve my problem." For lieutenants, that's allowed, and expected in some ways. I jumped on the phone, called the sergeant major of the unit, and explained the issue. He got off the phone to do what sergeant majors do, and sure enough, his soldiers showed up about ten minutes later and did what needed to be done.

JOAN could have left the issue there or reamed out the junior officer for his presumption. Instead, she took advantage of the incident as a learning opportunity:

JOAN: We got to have a moment of development immediately. I turned to him and said: *I realize you're new at this. But what you did was really unprofessional.* He protested that he didn't have what he needed. I said: *I understand that. You also didn't know who to reach out to in terms of the right person to call, how*

> *relationships work, all of that. I've shown you once; next time I suspect you'll be able to do it yourself. Next time, I expect that you'll do it yourself, but I'm certainly here if you have questions or issues as you integrate onto the staff. Do you have any questions for me at this time?* He did not.

Because JOAN took the time to develop the junior officer and to leave the door open for further conversations, he became a valued member of her team and a persistent protégé.

Leaving the Path: Going Outside your Comfort Zone

The officers in my study were particularly complimentary of mentors who could look beyond their own career paths and give individualized advice on a way forward that best suited the individual. EROL moved into a training command from a Special Operations assignment, and by his own admission was less than enthused about it. A mentor helped him see the perspective of what he was doing and how it could actually make him a better officer:

> EROL: I kind of had this shitty air about me that this was somehow beneath me. That it was a grind doing something that was not real world oriented. My boss at the time…when he came in, he said: "I understand. I've been operational all my life. But I was told that I should come out here and take this command as a broadening exercise. If you don't understand the generating force, it's hard to understand the operational force and get a

> big picture of all of it, understand how they all interplay with one another." At the time, he made a lot of sense to me, and he was somebody I looked up to.

DARREN explained how having a mentor who brought a broader perspective to career management helped him to see different possibilities:

> DARREN: When it comes to career advice, the one thing I've found that's different between [him] and the other people I've worked for is that most people I've worked for tell me to do exactly what they've done. They don't mean to do it, but you can tell that what they're really laying out is their career path. Because of his ability to see all of the different people that go to all of the different positions… [my mentor] understands that's not necessarily the case. You don't have to follow that one career path as long as you achieve certain things and do the right things in your job.

TRAVIS had a similar experience in both respects:

> TRAVIS: [My mentor] did some career counseling: "What do you want to accomplish?" He thought I might be better off in a functional area; I was on the fence then and now about that. That was the first senior rater I had where I connected with him… I had other senior rater counselings and other people I talked to who followed the model of, "Here's what [DA PAM] 600-3 says. You need to hold this position for a year or two." But it's something else to say, *How do you navigate the command queue? What do you do to work your best and be impressive and show you know what you're doing? How do you handle issues with progressively more senior NCOs?* I am a "T" at working with sergeants first class, but when I took this job, I had a

> master sergeant who was about to retire. So that was my first time leading a master sergeant. That's all pretty tough and new; you don't get that with, "Here are the gates and the gatekeepers. Get through them. Freestyle it. Come up with something, make it happen."

Several officers noted some of their own challenges in trying to play a similar role for their own protégés:

> DARREN: He also has transitioned to [another branch], so there's not much advice that I can give him. From my perspective, I can tell him some of the things I've seen, but it's harder for me to mentor his career without knowing much about [that branch] beyond the handful of captains that I've worked with.

> ARLO: He was incredibly competent. He had some ideas of where he wanted to go, but he's only had one assignment and the world was huge, there were so many things he didn't know about [the branch]. I was from a whole different part that he had never experienced...I gave him things to read. At the time, it started as more coaching: here are things you're going to need to do to help get you ready for command. Big-brother-ish. And he just kept coming back.
> Next thing, he's asking me to try to improve his relationship with his first sergeant. He had no reason to ask me that, he had lots of people he could have asked that. Then he was asking me for advice about things to do after command. Then he got picked up for the same grad school program that I had gotten picked up for and he was asking for advice and counsel on ways to approach that, because now he wants to go back into the SF world.

> EROL: He and I had a chance to link up this summer: he was out at Fort Knox for a class, so I had him come over for a barbeque in the summer, just to have a chance to catch up. It was one of those things, if I had a chance to help him, I wanted to help him. He was looking for what he wanted to do, he was thinking of going public affairs or functional area, something with the AGR program. He was just trying to see all different sides of it. When I'm in that position, I really refrain from giving advice; I'm just trying to give that perspective and let people come to their own conclusion based on what's best for them and their family.

All of these officers show an incredible self-awareness of their own strengths and limitations in providing career advice to their protégés. Their examples are worth emulating: advice, connection with the right people, and humility about what they don't know. It is worth pointing out that all three examples involved mentors counseling protégés from different branches or career fields. One felt he was less effective because of that, while the others saw themselves as giving useful outside perspectives. Again, the emphasis on mentoring as an individualized developmental relationship is crucial; some dyads may function well outside of a branch context while others do not.

Benefits for All

Chapter 3: Career Functions

One misunderstood aspect of mentoring career functions is that their benefits only accrue to the protégé. In this view, the mentor is wholly focused on the protégé, pouring blood, sweat, and tears into their development. The Army's own CASAL survey (discussed in Chapter 1) didn't even ask about mentoring benefits for mentors! The truth is, mentors do get career benefits from their relationships in different and often subtle ways.

After returning from Iraq, EARL found himself adrift. At the Career Course, he came into a mentor role that, by his own admission, changed his career:

> EARL: I ran into a group of obvious lieutenants: the way they were acting, they all had short haircuts. We just started talking. I found out we were the same branch. I asked one question, out of two questions that changed my life: *What are you guys learning?* They said, "Nothing." And then, this is the question that defined who I am as a leader, since that day: *What do you want to learn?* They were awestruck. That opened Pandora's Box, it was the one question that, honestly, probably changed my life. After contemplating it, I was like, *Wow, this is it, this is where I belong as a professional, as a person*. *I need to be someone who leads people not just formally, but informally, and helps build them, because that's the only way I'm going to be able to share my knowledge with others.* That set the tone for the remainder of my career course. It also moved me into a new way of thinking on about how I interact with my mentors and with the people I need to mentor myself.

Building on his previous discussion of mentoring junior officers within his branch, ARLO explained the benefits he sees from it:

> ARLO: One is, access to experience that I haven't had. The other is checks and balances on the decision-making process. Access to experience is huge. I'm a huge believer in the importance of experiences. I have only done so much; my career is very linear, it's gone exactly where I've gone. But having people who can come and sit and talk; they've walked through the same woods, but hundreds of meters away from me, and seen and heard and smelled other things. That gives me a better understanding of the same woods through which we've been walking, to use a Scouts Out analogy.

JOSH noted that his engagement with his troop commander, who mentored him during JOSH's time as an OSUT XO, didn't end when the assignment ended. In fact, both parties in that relationship continued to derive career benefits from it in the years that followed:

> JOSH: He also, moving forward, provided a lot of feedback for me, allowing me to vent about stuff: *Hey, what would you do in this situation?* There were also some periods in that relationship down the road, where his career didn't go quite where he wanted it to. He was at a crossroads with some bad experiences. I started to provide him with some feedback. At that point, when things were turning south for him, I provided feedback.

WILL summed up the career benefits he saw from mentors and protégés alike:

> WILL: They gave me more of a drive to excel, to succeed in my career. To push me to the next level, in that what I'm doing matters, people do appreciate me; so let me do a better job in my career, my profession, to be able to help others later down the road. That's the driving factor: mentoring others, and being mentored, it pushes you to the next level of *Hey, this does matter, and people do matter*.

Other officers stressed how much personal satisfaction they derived from knowing that their mentoring was benefitting the Army as a whole:

> DARREN: In the Army, you know what you're doing is making the Army better in the long term. As an officer mentoring another officer, you can see that the benefits are going to be high. If you mentor a private first class, for example, it may take a long time for that to come out and benefit the entire Army. When we mentor a lieutenant or a young captain, those are people that will be better because of it and will make their units better because of it. That's assuming that you're giving the right advice and that they're listening to you. You can see a lot of benefit. People who mentor in the Army care a lot about the Army and the organization. Mentorship is a way to ensure the long-term viability of the organization. There's also the intrinsic benefit that you get anytime you do something good or do something that benefits others. People that choose to mentor sometimes see something in that person that reminds them of them, or they see someone with that raw potential. They want to give back because someone has done that to them, so it's their way of paying it forward.

> JOAN: But it's nice to leave your mark on an organization, and one of the best ways to do that is through people. Positions change, missions change; but if you can touch someone's life, make them a better leader or a better person and help them clarify what they want or what their goal is, what they want to be, that's a worthwhile endeavor.

Career Interventions: Not What You Think

The above emphasis on the organizational benefits of mentoring gives us a lens to look at another popular misconception of mentoring career functions. This view holds that mentors have their biggest impact on protégés' careers through direct intervention, either by assigning them coveted positions or convincing others to do the same. In fact, out of all of my study participants, only one of them experienced this kind of intervention at any point. Let's take a closer look at his story to see what's really going on. This is a longer story than most of the narratives in this chapter, but trust me, it's worth it.

ARLO had been serving overseas for several years, well beyond the normal OCONUS tour time frame. He described the start of his PCS process:

> ARLO: When my assignment time came up, I was first offered a slot at Fort Lewis, then it got pulled back. There's nothing like waiting for your RFO only to find out after weeks that it's not happening. Then I was supposed to go to Carson; then after about two and a half weeks, I found out, no, I'm not going to Carson. I

> think it was after Carson, that [my mentor] comes to me and says, "You just need to resign your commission." He stops me in the hallway, real casual, and says that. He had stopped by to ask me what was going on with my assignment. On the one hand, that could be viewed as a very official capacity. He's got someone who's due to leave and he has to make sure that they have a solution. But it wasn't that. He was personally vested in what my answer was, because he was looking long term for the health of the Army and for my personal and professional development.

Needless to say, having a mentor tell you to resign your commission is abnormal and not confidence-inspiring.

What happened next was even more shocking:

> ARLO: I took a step back and said: *Sir, that's a little extreme just because branch can't figure out how to get a good assignment*. He said, "I'm not kidding. How many weeks ago did they start handing out RFOs? Watch, they're only going to give you shittier and shittier options. The good ones are already all gone. They're down to the bottom of the barrel, and branch is only going to continue to serve itself. Now, you need to start thinking about resigning your commission, going forth and doing great things, because I know you will." He wasn't pulling any punches. I went home and told my wife: *You're not going to believe the crazy stuff [my mentor] told me today. He tells me I should resign my commission now, and here's why.* My wife chuckled about it. She knows I'll be able to find work, she wasn't worried about that part.

The downward spiral continued:

> ARLO: The next thing I know, branch was telling me that they've got the perfect assignment for me…My branch manager is a peer; I say: *Hey, J, why don't you pull up my ORB and my last couple of OERs and show me how there's a connection between anything I've ever done and that job? Why don't you pull up the milestones for career progression and show me where the link between that job and anything that you think I'm going to be doing in my future, to include making lieutenant colonel? And oh by the way, the brigade you've listed, I would get there after they would be in theater, and they will already have someone doing the job that they love. Yeah, no, that's not going to work out.* He says, "No, no, this is great." He's selling it like it's the greatest thing ever, and it wasn't working.
> So I followed [my mentor's] advice. I called J and said: *You know what? That's it. You obviously don't need me, you need a warm body. I'll get you my paperwork, I'll have it on your desk in the morning. Obviously you don't need me. And don't worry, I'll go up to the Beltway and I'll keep doing what I'm doing, because I am a professional and this is my field and there's a war on. So let me go find a better way to do this.* And of course, he totally freaked out. He said, "Whoa! What are you doing? I'm sure we can come up with something." I replied: *Obviously you can't, because this is your bargaining position.*

ARLO then describes a completely unanticipated reaction from his mentor:

> So I'm packing up everything up, walking out at the end of the night, and I see [my mentor], and I say: *Here's where we are. You were absolutely right. Your logic is absolutely sound. I'm so glad you got me ready for this, because you were ready for that point before I was.* He

> says, "Yeah. Let me make a phone call. Stop by my office when you get in tomorrow morning." So I go home, had a long heart-to-heart talk with my wife about this. My wife is good with it, because she knows I can land something.
> I get in the next morning, I go see [my mentor]. He says, "I called T." It took me a minute to figure out that T is the chief of my branch. "I called T and I told him that your branch manager is a complete idiot who is pissing away a great asset, that this idiot was completely screwing up everything. I told him that what he needs to do is get you to [this unit], which is getting ready to go [to Iraq]. I explained all this to him, and he agreed. So go check your AKO email, your RFO should be there." I kind of went, *Uh what? Yes sir.* I scurried off to my desk and opened up my Outlook. All of my email came pouring in and there was an RFO from my branch manager to go to [that unit].

Reflecting on the whole experience, ARLO summed up what he had gained from it:

> ARLO: I cite this example for the duality of it. [My mentor] had the insight to see where things were going. He came to me because he was invested in me and willing to talk to me about problems that I was in even when I wasn't soliciting advice on the problems. He was a battle buddy with me in everything that I was doing. The companion piece of that is, the things on my plate, the windmills that I'm charging at, are quests that he voluntarily elects to take and fight as well. I did not ask him to do a damn thing. He didn't even tell me, nor would he have, that he was going to do something like that. He didn't even ask me my thoughts about going to that unit. We talked about it afterwards. He did it because he knew that I would be a great match. He

> explained why that mission, that next year in Iraq, was a good one for me. He had really thought through, of all the cards and variables in play, why he thought this was a good match for me individually, the unit involved, and the greater Army: short-term, medium-term, and long-term. That's the type of stuff branch is supposed to do, but it's only hard work if branch does it and branch never does it. So in his opinion, he used one of those silver bullets for me, a protégé, to make something right. I had a problem that he had the ability to use resources to resolve, to fix a number of things. And I loved that, it was fantastic. He gets a Christmas card from me every year.

Note that nowhere in this narrative is a reference to the job being particularly career-enhancing or a nice cushy one. In fact, ARLO would go on to deploy twice over the next three years with that unit. But both ARLO and his mentor recognized that his presence in that unit was the right thing to do, and both were willing to take drastic steps to do the right thing.

Instead of direct career intervention, a more common career benefit of mentoring is the invocation of a mentor as a trusted reference:

> EARL: There was one time where I was able to do a name drop and it changed the way someone interacted with me. Sometimes you can drop that name. They're going to call and say, "Hey, he's talking about you." And your mentor will say, "Yeah, he's great people, you should take care of him." And I know that's what happened because the next day they came up to me,

> "Hey, how are you, buddy boy? What are you working on? What can I help you with?" I'd love to have been a fly on the wall for that conversation, because it would have been an ego boost. That's what mentorship is about; as a protégé, sometimes you have to ride on some coattails. That's not your intent, it's more kind of an innocent, *Hey, I worked for so and so*. You can really help yourself just by being a good follower.

Note that the mentor has no direct power over assignments in this example; he simply functions as another source of insight outside of the standard information channels. The effect can even work second-hand, depending on the level of trust:

> DARREN: I met one of the lieutenants; he was getting ready to go to my old battalion that I had just come out of command of. We struck up a relationship. He had been one of [my mentor's] students, and he came highly recommended. I contacted the unit and said, *Hey, this is a quality guy coming, he comes highly recommended*. He ended up going to my old company.

In this case, it was the trust DARREN had in his mentor that helped him relay a recommendation. We have no way of knowing just how influential DARREN's recommendation was in the pinpoint assignment of this lieutenant. The fact that this recommendation still sticks in DARREN's mind speaks to the lasting impression of his mentor on him.

What About Poor Performers?

All of the examples in this chapter, with few exceptions, have been about officers who consistently showed great potential and ability. But DARREN reminded me that there's another side to that:

> DARREN: [My mentor] looked at me and said, "You know, the Army doesn't do mentoring well anymore." He expanded on that, saying "I can walk into any battalion or brigade and say, 'Who's your best lieutenant or company commander?' They'll point to that person, and I'll ask 'Who's his mentor?' They'll jump up and say, 'I'm his mentor' or 'This guy is the mentor.' If you go in and ask who the worst one is, they'll tell you. But when you ask, 'Who's **his** mentor?' everybody will look at their hands and be like 'Well...'" His point was that we do a much better job mentoring people who are already doing well in the Army. We do a terrible job at finding those people that could actually use our help and apply mentorship to them…His point isn't that certain people don't need mentoring; it's that we over-mentor some and under-mentor others. A lot of times, people that perform well seek out people that are like them. They try to find the people that are performing well and get them down the right path. It's convenient or easy to not be associated with someone who isn't doing so well, or just bypass them altogether.

DARREN mused that his mentor's observation forced him to do some self-reflection:

> If I look at myself and ask, *Have I always grabbed the lowest performing officer below me and spent as much time with that person as I would spend with someone who's doing really well?* I haven't. I've been more apt

> to be short with [the person not doing well], being a little more forceful; but the person who is doing well, I will spend more time and [be in] a more advanced stage of mentorship, versus just corrective actions or counseling.

Several study participants shared times when they had taken a mentoring approach to poor performers:

> JOSH: There was one lieutenant, he was the worst lieutenant in the battalion. When I showed up, his commander said, "He's probably not going to last long, he doesn't have what it takes." This was during a deployment. After our first mission, I remember going to the squadron XO and saying: *Hey sir, this guy's not cutting it, he's got to go.* Meanwhile, I was counseling him once a month. I sat down with this guy and told him: *Hey, you're really failing. Your NCOs don't like you because you don't listen to them, you come off as arrogant*, and some other things. What I saw over that time I was waiting for his replacement to come in was that he really did care. He actually took the advice that we were giving him and started improving. So much so that I was glad he didn't go anywhere, I was glad to hold on to him. He became a huge asset throughout the rest of the deployment. There were times where I was getting tired of the strains of the deployment and the constant action that you're going through. The fire that he was bringing to the job and the stuff he was doing sustained me in those moments. Flash forward, on his OER, my suggested senior rater comments was that he was one of top two lieutenants in the squadron.
>
> JOAN: I had a platoon leader who was having weight problems. I walked into his office and asked: *What's your five year plan look like?* [He responded:] "I'm

> going to finish up here; I'm going to go to Fort Leonard Wood to be an XO; I'm going to go to the career course; I'm going to deploy; I'm going to take command; I'm going to apply to instruct at USMA; I'm going to get my Master's in history at Columbia; I'm going to teach at the academy; and I don't know at that point, I think I'd enjoy being an Academy Professor." I didn't sugar coat my words: *I can think of about 40 reasons that's not going to happen.* And I just looked at him.
>
> I knew he'd been counseled about his weight and he was still a platoon leader. That was irritating to me, but we were short on manpower, and the decision was made to have a fat platoon leader instead of no platoon leader. He just looked at me. I said: *You know what I'm talking about?* "[Sheepish] Yes, ma'am." I said: *You've been counseled about this, right? You're officially on the Army Weight Control Program, what are you doing about it? I know you've been to the nutritionist, but what are you eating? What does your PT look like? Because I know you're eating like shit while you're here.* So we had a wide-ranging conversation on nutrition, cooking, the DFAC. I told him: *The things you are doing now are not conducive to you continuing to be a lieutenant. If this was any other organization, you would not be a platoon leader right now. You'd be stuck in the S3 shop until you were fit for duty.*

Some of these mentoring efforts were successful; others were not. But in all of these cases, leaders took the time with less-than-stellar performers to try to mentor them and get them back on the right track. They saw it as a professional responsibility to reach out and assist.

Not every poor performer gets this opportunity. As JOSH put it in one of our exchanges:

> JOSH: I wonder this a lot: if a lieutenant comes in the Army and by the chance of the personnel system is surrounded by mediocre leaders and doesn't have that positive mentorship that I did, and then continues on, does he have that experience to hold all the other experiences up to? And then how does that shape his own command, as well?
> Me: That's a great question. What would be your advice to that lieutenant?
> JOSH: I would go outside of the confines of your rank and your structure. Now, with the internet, it's easier than ever. You have the forums to link into. You've got organizations such as Defense Entrepreneurs Forum, Team Red White, and Blue, all sorts of other things. You can link up with others in an online medium and get what you need. You can start developing relationships with somebody or at least have the opportunity that you couldn't have where you're at right now.

One participant reminded me that just because someone is a poor performer in the Army doesn't mean they have to be written off entirely:

> EARL: Most mentors are careerist; they say "I didn't do that [in my career], and you shouldn't do that either." But a different form of mentorship is: *Let's talk about you and your family, if you don't want to spend years apart. Maybe it is OK to leave the Army, but what's your plan?* You work with them, through their plan.

Chapter 3: Career Functions

All of us want a fulfilling career. We want to do work that is meaningful to us and to our loved ones. A mentoring relationship can be part of that fulfillment if you're willing to open yourself up.

Chapter 4: Psychosocial Functions: *How* Do You Want to Be?

[Mentoring has] helped me understand where people are coming from as far as being a leader…I helped people who had problems that I've successfully navigated and problems that I've never had for one reason or another. There are certain patterns you see and I get better every time I explain it. – TRAVIS

Our profession is not our life − at least, not all of it. Part of being a good Army officer is being a good person and mentoring can help with that. Psychosocial functions, broadly described as those that enhance an individual's sense of competence and identity, are a substantial portion of mentoring outcomes. Career mentoring would be sufficient if we were solely concerned with generating functional competence, but officership also requires the personal touch. In this chapter, we'll continue our exploration of mentoring outcomes through experiences that brought out psychosocial competencies for protégé and mentor alike.

Knowing Someone Cares

At times, the most important function a mentor can serve is to remind the protégé that someone cares and is invested in the protégé's success. Officership can be an

isolating role due to the need to remain aloof from subordinates and the pressure to compete among peers. A mentor can provide the ability to vent safely, hear a differing perspective, or simply acknowledge that someone gives a damn. As several officers pointed out, having a superior who visibly takes an interest is not a constant in an officer's life:

> DARREN: It's nice having those people to reach out to and trust. You change chains of command all the time, but having a consistent person or set of people you can go back to for different things is nice when you move around or when people move around. You may stay in the same spot, but you'll have a new boss. Having that consistency is nice, knowing that those people aren't judging you when you bring up an issue. It makes it a lot easier to operate in a very hierarchical environment.
>
> WILL: Whenever I went back to my school, one or two times down the road, he would pull me aside, ask me how I'm doing. It wasn't just, "Hey, hope things are going well." We would start talking stories, I was able to call him a few times about some of the platoon sergeant issues I was having. He was someone I could reach back to. During the time I was in ROTC, he was just very approachable, he seemed like he wanted me to be there.
>
> JOAN: That was my first taste of being a protégé, as opposed to being lost, flapping in the wind, peer mentorship. D took it upon himself, even though I'm a lieutenant and he's a major who works for the CG and the Chief of Staff, to see that somebody cared about me.

> TRAVIS: It's nice to know someone cares, that somebody will listen to you. Doing it in person is nice. Posting a question and getting an email notification when it's answered three minutes later is gratifying in a sense, but it's nice to have someone look you in the eyes, and say, "I've been through what you're explaining"; "I knew somebody that handled it this way"; "This is how you get through this rough spot."

JOSH pointed out that the steps in an officer's life are often filled with uncertainty and discussed how his mentors have helped lessen that uncertainty:

> JOSH: That's the biggest thing; helping me with my comfort level as I've taken on new aspects of the profession. The other thing that I've gotten out of it is a sense of community. Like I said, it's scary doing a lot of this by yourself. At least it is to me. So, just having someone else I can talk to, who can relate to what I'm going through, and that's also helpful. And just learning something new; I can look at all of these relationships and there's been a huge amount of learning that's taken place. So it's been that personal interaction that has helped me walk through that. With all of them, they've shown me what right looks like, with all of these relationships.

Others talked about how their mentors helped process complex ideas or concepts that didn't necessarily have a right answer:

> ARLO: She has a great way of looking at things. She has a great way of taking complex ideas, breaking them down, and turning them into simple understandable ideas. She's very logical. Her ranges of experiences are

> entirely different than mine. Putting people like that into your kit bag are fantastic. As life progresses, they bring not only their alternate sets of experiences, but their alternate way of looking at things. When you're able to meld those things together, you get sort of a 1-Up, to use a Mario-ism. It's kind of cheating, but it's also really advantageous.
>
> EROL: Sometimes, it takes a cooler head, somebody who's a little more senior, to be able to sit down and help you think about something objectively, help you think about something from someone else's perspective, and help you frame a resolution that works out for you. The things you want to discuss, or conflicts you've had in the workplace, or you're just stuck professionally and you're trying to get to the next level.

In some cases, the fact that the mentor was not directly involved in the officer's unit was seen as an advantage, because the protégé could safely share ideas and concerns without fear of retribution coming back to them.

> ARLO: In making time as a neutral arbiter of situations, he's fantastic because he's not invested in the process. He's keenly invested in the result, because he wants great things for me, but he doesn't give two shits about my unit. He doesn't care about any of the stuff actually happening because he's not in it. He'd always make time to talk about whatever is going on. I could sit, slowly explain things to him, feed him all the variables; he would always ask extra questions to try to tease out all of the variables and help me sift through it all, to make sure that I'm considering things and weighing things. To help me make sure I'm thinking things through.

> DARREN: The things I get out of being a protégé are an exchange of ideas, advice about my career, an outlet to express frustrations, calming me down. I'm not an angry person, but everyone has frustrations in the Army. It's nice having someone that you can express those ideas to and know that it won't reflect negatively on you. Someone to explain to you, "Hey, this has been frustrating guys for 20 years," or "I know the Army is working on this," or "Just wait until you get to the next rank and you'll realize this is not such a big deal."
>
> EROL: We fleshed out a few different options which would be appropriate. Everything came with consequences, from whistleblower actions to other stuff, which I opted not to do. It's hard to remember, it's been a little while now. He gave me some sound advice: it was something where I could bounce it off somebody else, and get impartial feedback that I could take and use. When you're close to folks and they're friends with you, the advice they give you, while well meaning, is sometimes biased due to the relationship you have with them. So they won't tell you some difficult courses of action.

In all of these cases, mentors gave their protégés strength and confidence to do what needed to be done. What needed to be done in some cases was…nothing; no direct action was taken by either the mentor or the protégé. Instead, the protégé simply needed the opportunity to process and understand what they were experiencing with the help of another.

Chapter 4: Psychosocial Functions

The Exterior Façade

A crucial aspect of psychosocial mentoring is the ability to exude the calm confidence that is a vital component of an Army officer's identity. It manifests in many ways: the untroubled poker face; the calm voice on the radio; the steady hand on a shoulder. But all of those actions seek to project order in the face of chaos and all of them are vital to leading soldiers. TRAVIS talks about how one of his mentors exemplified that quality:

> TRAVIS: It's hard to explain the magic; there's something there, but it's hard to express what it was. Part of it was just his demeanor and his poise. He didn't have to shout; he would just stand and look at you, and the room would go quiet. He had that sort of presence, almost like a really good schoolteacher. The ones who have reached the level that the kids are all talking, they walk in, and the kids stop acting up. I never asked him explicitly how he did that, but I always wanted to know. It's still kind of an enigma to me. I wish I had that, but I just don't. When I walk in a room, nobody quiets down for me. It's something that I've always respected a lot and that I'm still trying to crack that code on.

In some cases, the mentor provided a specific element of the exterior presentation that the protégé felt was lacking in their lives:

> EARL: He was very in tune with what happened at the platoon, company, and battalion levels at the time. He wanted to know every detail about what was going to occur at any given time, what I would describe as gnat's

> ass detail…When I moved on to later jobs, my focus was on detail, detail, detail; it helped me. Having to focus on every detail under the pressure of having to notice every detail is not forgiven easily, it's something that induces a lot of anxiety in a leader.

In this particular case, EARL didn't agree with the entirety of his mentor's leadership style, but he found the emphasis on detail helpful and added it to his own demeanor. (We'll revisit the importance of that distinction in a minute.)

One officer found that his mentor helped him find an approach that balanced humanity and mission:

> DARREN: That didn't necessarily mean being someone that was easy and cool, but rather someone that disciplines when they should; works soldiers when they should; trains hard, but gives people time off. I think that might be a subconscious reason that I've gravitated towards those people, is because they mirror my ideal of what I'd like to have out of a leader. I hadn't thought about it until after you mentioned it, but that's probably where that comes from.

In still another case, the protégé drew strength from the mentor's successful weathering of trauma:

> TRAVIS: He was at the Green Ramp incident at Fort Bragg in the early 90s; it was a big airplane crash and a lot of paratroopers were in cargo planes and died. He related his experience from that: he was supposed to jump that day and got pulled off of the flight 10 minutes before it happened. It was something silly, he had to go back and handle staff business. Some guy was on the standby list and hopped in; the guy who took his

> place didn't survive. He talked about survivor guilt and dealing with other emotions: how he got through it, even though he feels really bad about it because he basically saw it happen. He was almost to the headquarters building; he got the word and he ran back. It didn't sound like there was much he could do, as far as first aid or pulling people out; it was such a deadly incident. It was like a train wreck: when it happens, it's over, and there's not much you can do for anybody.

None of the above examples necessarily mean that protégés become mirrors of their mentor's psychosocial approach. Instead, the mentoring relationship gives the protégé a chance to understand the pros and cons of a different approach. Remember EARL's mentor and his emphasis on detail? EARL went on to relate a surprising story of how that particular mentor revisited him at a stressful time:

> EARL: I had been in command for six months and I went to a range brief with one of my platoon leaders, just to sit in on it. It was for a machine gun range: we had never done one since I was in command, it had always been small arms. This was our next step before a gunnery; my boss was curious how we were going to do it and he starts diving into the details. I had the Mission Command philosophy as mine and I trusted that the lieutenant had looked at the TM and was going to have everything in place. My battalion commander also believed in Mission Command and trusting but verifying; he was verifying. I don't know if his trust was misguided, I think we were just very busy and things got overlooked. We thought we were just going to go

> out, shoot some pop-up targets, and go home. My platoon leader − and this was my fault, because I didn't coach him on this − he didn't have the zero phase [of the range] in there. That led to a cascade of "what the f---s"; it turned into a long night. Right after the brief, I told [the platoon leader]: *All right, get into the training room. Let me get the TM, we're going to go through this.*

Many of us can probably identify with this situation: someone we trusted has fallen short on a critical detail and the onus lands on us to fix it. For EARL, who prided himself on attention to detail, it was especially galling:

> EARL: I was hot. I had never lost my composure in front of my subordinates, but I was about to, and I felt it. So I took a moment, I was in my office fuming with the lights out, and I was like: *What the hell? What is going on here, this is absurd! How could they forget the attention to detail?*

It was at that point that the timely intervention of his mentor came into play:

> EARL: The phone rang. I was like: *Who is this? What else could go wrong today?* It's my [mentor], who said, "Hey man!" I was like: *Get the f--- out of here!* I'm about ready to chew some ass, and here he calls. He said, "I'm calling to see how you're doing out there, what's going on?" I was like: *Aw, sir, shit's just bad today.* He was like, "Oh, there's nothing too bad. I promise you that." Making all sorts of jokes, it brought me down a notch, our banter. He said, "What's going on, talk to me?" I explained what happened. He said, "Here's what I think you're going to do: you're going to

> go in there and do what I would have done, chew some ass, put some people in their place. **Don't do it.** Here's what you've got to do. Go in there, explain your expectations, and give them the time to fix what they did wrong." It was like the poles of the whole world just flopped and I was on my ass. It's just a powerful coincidence that he called at just the right time with the right advice and it was from the least expected source. It was shocking.

EARL knew his mentor was right:

> EARL: So I collected myself, I said [to my mentor]: *Thanks for calming me down, sir*. I walked in and said [to the platoon leader and his NCOs]: *Guys, I was about to lose my head. You probably all felt it, because you could cut the tension with a knife*. I told them: *Here's what we're going to do. Platoon Leader, this is your range, you failed to do this. I want you to get into this reg. Go talk to the Master Gunner, come back to me at this hour with this solution. We're not going home tonight, so call your spouses. We're going to sit down, sort this out, and tomorrow we're going to go out and conduct this range.* It worked out in my favor, because it made more sense for the soldiers. [My leaders] called their guys, said "Don't come in until 9, we're going to draw weapons, PMCS them, clean them, make sure they're ready to go." So it worked out to take a calm approach, but it was from the most absurd source.

EARL was poised and ready to exactly mirror his mentor's conduct, but his mentor understood that a different approach was warranted. EARL's willingness to heed his mentor's advice made a difference that EARL references to this day, years after the incident itself. This

also highlights the difference between mentoring and coaching: a coach's solution to this problem would have been unhesitatingly accepted without question, while the mentor's suggestion was colored by the protégé's knowledge of the mentor's background.

Write for Your Life

Another aspect of psychosocial mentoring is professional communication, both written and oral. The Army has its share of formats: the 5-paragraph OPORD, the stoplight chart, the standardized slide deck. All of those are subcomponents of a larger competency: the ability to communicate effectively on a personal and professional level. Although the importance of this seems self-evident, competing organizational pressures often inhibit an officer's ability to engage in professional dialogue:

> JOSH: I remember asking [a mentor] about people that wrote: *Is it showboating or is it good for the profession?* I remember him saying to me that, unless he sees otherwise, everything that somebody does out in open, like writing and publishing, they're doing it for the good of the profession until proven otherwise. Just that talk there helped me start getting towards a level of comfort with writing.
>
> DARREN: By having those people that aren't directly in my chain, if there's something I want to write about that might not be 100% in line with the thinking of my

> commander, I can get them to look at it. That way I can make sure I'm not writing something that should be close to the vest, or that it gets written in a manner that's more professional and gets the point across without generating anger around it.

For verbal communication, mentors helped their protégés frame presentations in a way that went beyond simple regurgitation of data. Sometimes it was helping to narrow down to the essentials of what had to be addressed at that particular point in time:

> COLE: [My mentor] tightened my understanding: "This is the kind of thing we're looking at when we're briefing generals. Focus on this kind of stuff. When the boss asks this, he's not looking for information, per se; he's looking for your recommendations on an action. This is how we tighten our shot group to give the boss information that he needs to make a decision, not just throwing data at him to analyze." He walked me through it: "We analyze data to get knowledge. We analyze knowledge to gain understanding. You need to be functioning at understanding. From your understanding, you need to develop recommended courses of action for the boss. The boss doesn't have time to do the analysis. He doesn't have time to try to understand every single piece of the pie; that's why he has a staff, to help him make the right decisions."

In other cases, it was about understanding how to respectfully and professionally disagree:

> DARREN: If you've got two people that enjoy discourse and the ability to talk back and forth, make their arguments, but can do it in a respectful manner, it

> can help and it gives you things to talk about. I think it exposes me to ideas that I otherwise wouldn't consider. It at least forces me to think about it. I think [my mentor] likes it because he likes to have someone that he can hear arguments from and make counter arguments, so he enjoys the argumentative side. I'm not the type of person that goes out and reads an article that I knew was completely different from what I thought. By having this discussion with him, it helps me, because it forces me to listen to an argument from the other side, it forces me to consider if it's a good argument, and consider how to listen to it.

For professional writing, some protégés felt that their mentors played a major role in opening them up to the importance of that discipline. Those protégés specifically identified greater opportunities for input or feedback on writing through mentors' social networks:

> DARREN: [My mentor and I] don't have a direct job lineup in terms of officership and professional development. The reason I think we really connected is both of us think outside of the mainstream on a lot of issues. We pass along a lot of those ideas, what if we did this, what if I do that. If I do write and consider publishing an article, which I haven't done in a while, I will get his advice on what I'm writing.

> JOSH: He's opened me up to a whole bunch of networks. He's really helped develop my writing, providing me with feedback and editorial work. Just giving me an honest assessment. We teamed up together when we did a reading program. While I was just kind of talking about it, N was the one who said, "Let's just do it." He's a little bit older than me, a

> couple years in, but when it comes to experience on the stage that N is on right now, that I'm slowly getting to, N has been the one that's kind of led me through this process.

The impact that these communication opportunities have had on the protégés' lives is an entirely separate topic. Suffice it to say that those protégés who developed greater skills in communication via their mentors saw them pay off in unexpected and positive ways.

Life Outside Your Profession

Perhaps the most important distinction between career mentoring functions and psychosocial mentoring functions is that the latter are intended to have an impact beyond professional conduct. As JOAN told me, "It's not so much about being a lieutenant, or being an officer, or being in the Army: it's about being a good worker and developing good work habits overall." When we spoke, ARLO was near the end of his Army career, and said this about one of his Army mentors:

> ARLO: I talk to her on the phone once or twice a year. We email regularly, quarterly is commonplace. I push to her far more than she pushes to me, but that's what mentoring is supposed to be about. She gives me some nudges on my azimuth, she talks to me about things I'm supposed to be doing. It won't change when I leave the Army.

For some officers, the fact that mentors exposed them to cultural aspects both inside and outside of the profession was a significant change:

> JOSH: There were other aspects of the profession as well -- heritage, traditions, expectations -- like you need to have a little bit more culture behind you. He actually related a story of [his mentor] checking out jazz clubs in California. I was like, *OK, this is an accepted part of the profession*. So we started going out to nice dinners, taking our wives to a Broadway musical.

> ARLO: I kept going to him for stuff, just over and over and over again: *Sorry to bother you, but I've got some questions on this.* He was nurturing. He'd come, pull up a chair, sit down with me, and work on stuff. That was great. It was more than sharing TTPs. It was more than sharing tricks. It was more than teaching me to fish so that I would stop asking him for fish. He was instilling in me that same passion for and love of the things that he loved. The profession, the topics, the interests, the niche fields. It was great.

In other cases, mentors helped protégés think through potentially life-changing personal decisions:

> ARLO: He was trying to figure out things like, how did he find the right type of spouse with the right type of values. Because the women he was dating in the military community weren't the right ones. Things like that. That's not an easy thing to say. It's beyond coaching, at that point, when you start saying things like, *OK, let's talk about ways for you to start meeting the right type of women when you live on an island.*

Perhaps most importantly, mentors helped protégés decide when and how to move on from the Army. This is a decision all of us will make at some point in our lives. In these cases, mentors helped protégés think through how to leave in a way that made sense for them:

> EARL: D was an older guy, he and his wife had midlife marriage things. They had a new kid. He was at a crossroads in his career, deciding whether he was going to get out or stay in. He was older than me, but I was still senior to him in Army years. Bringing my experience to bear for him ultimately got him to take a job outside of the Army as a social worker. So even though it was completely not related to [my branch], having that ability to understand where people are wanting to go in their lives and be able to say: *It's OK to want to get out. You're not going to be in the Army forever, so if your heart's not in it, get out. Just make sure you have a plan.*

> ARLO: It is completely OK for your mentor to say, "Where and when are you planning on fitting kids into this? When and how do your personal finances tie in? We should talk about that." In the outside word, that would be a violation of something or other. We also don't seem to grasp any limitation on time constraints. I built timelines with mentors that far exceeded my projected time of service in the Army. That was OK, and they were totally comfortable talking about courses of action and helping me move on courses of action that were actually going to get me out of the Army. It would be good for me, it would be good for the Army, and it would be good for the nation. That was part of their roles as a mentor. They didn't have to put shields up and say, "Whoa, stop. I need to keep you in the Army. I

> need to retain you, so we can't talk like that." Good mentors will talk like that, and I value that.

Again, the distinction between career functions and psychosocial functions is starkly represented: many of these same mentors were helping their protégés become more capable Army officers at the same time they were helping them understand potential life paths away from the Army. This seems inherently contradictory, but it's not.

A Reflective Practice for Mentors

Just as with career functions, the benefits of psychosocial mentoring are not solely limited to protégés. Mentors derive value from psychosocial mentoring, primarily as a reflective practice. Mentors felt that participating in psychosocial mentoring gave them multiple avenues to improve their own lives.

The most basic psychosocial benefit experienced by some mentors was the satisfaction of knowing that their assistance was meaningful to another soldier:

> WILL: [It gave me] a sense of self-awareness, that I do have attributes than I can offer to people, whether they're senior or junior to me. A sense of pride that people can come to you, confide in you, and ask for assistance and guidance. It says a lot about them and a lot about the character of the individual they're approaching.

> EARL: [My mentor] has no benefit in talking to me, other than he tells me that I bring him up with my enthusiasm. He, every now and then, gives me some advice. Now it's more of a friendship, in a way, a professional friendship, but I definitely consider him a mentor, just because I know he's going to do something great.

> COLE: That back and forth discussion [with my protégé] was an incredibly fulfilling moment, to know that you're having those kind of crucial conversations, and causing people to think, helping people to think, to become critical decision makers. It was a cool moment.

Other mentors saw improvements in their own psychosocial practices that they directly attributed to interactions with their protégés. For ARLO, it was a mission focus:

> ARLO: [My mentor experience] made me a much better leader. It really did. I'm very business focused, very mission focused. As a company commander, I actually had an NCO ask me if I had ice in my veins. He wasn't kidding, because I was mission, mission, mission, mission. It has made me a much better leader.

For COLE, it was the realization that he had an obligation to conform to a new set of norms:

> COLE: It took a lot of work for me to understand it was no longer my job to be the doer. I didn't want to be a bad officer, that guy you read about, that lieutenant who drops his troop off at the motor pool and disappears. But when I'm down there all the time, constantly doing things, it really makes it difficult for your soldiers to

> believe that you trust them. So I'm sitting there, explaining this to my lieutenants, and I realize, *I just spent three hours inside the wall lockers helping organize supplies because I want them to be exactly a certain way.* Is that sending the right message to the soldiers and to these cadets? Am I being a hypocrite? Am I a party apparatchik[xlv], spouting lines but not living them? If I'm doing that, how do I expect these future officers to actually achieve that? We talk about this: "You're not being a platoon leader unless you're in the motor pool for an hour, double-checking every single HMMWV." It really forced me to stop, think, re-evaluate how I was acting.

For DARREN, it was an opportunity to reflect and improve:

> DARREN: In mentorship, that's where you become a better leader, because you're considering things…It gives you the opportunity to put that thought exercise to work into the practical implementation of leadership and your craft. Not every single thing is like that; if I'm giving career advice, it's not benefiting to think about doing a job I'll never be able to do again. If I'm advising someone to go to the Ranger regiment as a platoon leader, I'm not getting any leadership benefit out of that; but if I'm talking about a situation that they're under, and I've been in that experience, I can think about the experience and can talk about similar situations. That kind of exercise helps you out.

In a few cases, mentors identified their psychosocial mentoring as opening up opportunities for growth that they didn't fully appreciate until years later.

> ARLO: Great people with great minds, who process information in great ways, help me to process information and make great decisions. I'm always looking for people who are great decision makers, who are logical and sound. There aren't enough people in this world who do that well. So I'm always attracted to those people. Some are ones who have had great experiences, and I need them because they're off walking different paths than me.
>
> JOAN: I called it the [unit] sorority: the female lieutenants ended up living on the same floor in studio apartments. I felt badly for the warrant officers and senior NCOs who lived on the first floor, because on the second floor, we were wandering in and out of each other's rooms, having dinner, things like that. Those relationships have stuck with me since that experience. I set myself up as mother hen to all of them: at that point in time, I was two and a half years into my military experience, mentoring lieutenants who had 6, 8 months in the Army. There's a lot of growth that goes on in that timeframe.

The benefits that accrue to mentors are as individualized as the mentoring relationships themselves; no two are alike. But thinking of psychosocial benefits as solely accruing to protégés misses out on a significant set of outcomes.

Through Another's Eyes?

All of the above experiences had significant impacts on people's lives. They should give potential mentors and

protégés alike hope for what can be achieved in a mentoring relationship on a personal level. But because psychosocial functions are so nuanced and complex, it's appropriate to end this chapter with a caution:

> EROL: When someone says, "Here are my options, what do you think I should do?" I don't ever think that someone should give advice and put yourself in their shoes. You can highlight the positives and negatives of each course of action. You're not in their situation: you don't know what their family is going through, they may not tell you everything. But you can say: *If you go down this path, it's going to limit you this way. If you go down this path, it's going to give you these choices, but you may not be able to do this.* You clear it up and crystallize it in their mind. Typically, they know what they want to do, they just want the information to solidify it in their mind. The worst thing you can do is to take someone who is gung-ho for one thing and tell them, you should do something totally different. That's not the intent of it, in my opinion.

EROL's admonition should infuse an appropriate amount of humility into potential mentors. We are not mind readers and we can never know all of the forces acting on a protégé's personal life. All we can do is be there when they need us.

Chapter 5: Role Modeling: *Who* Do You Want to Be?

I try to be the leader that I want to have. That might be the reason that the people I've grown close to as mentors mirror the way that I interact with people below me. That was always my rallying point as a commander: Be the commander you want to have. - DARREN

Let's get this out of the way up front: mentoring is not about producing clones. It's not about growing little Mini-Mes. But role modeling is an established part of mentoring and it's worth discussing what it looks like in practice.

First, a caveat. Kathy Kram (as described in chapter 1) originally included role modeling in 1985 as one of several psychosocial functions, mainly because of its strong connection to other functions like identity management. 20 years later, in collaboration with Belle Ragins, she amended that position to break role modeling out as a separate function. Subsequent scholarly research has largely supported that change.

As I discussed mentoring with my participants, I found it hard to differentiate role modeling functions from psychosocial functions. Only half of my participants used language that specifically emphasized role modeling as separate and distinct from the psychosocial functions. That

may be because military service is such an all-encompassing career choice. We often say, "You're a soldier 24 hours a day." Therefore, it makes sense that role modeling would be more tightly bound with psychosocial functions in a military context than in other professional settings. Because of that close connection, this chapter will be substantially shorter than the preceding two. You may find yourself asking, what truly differentiates the experiences in this chapter from the other functions? We'll return to that question at the end of this chapter.

When I Grow Up

The participants who did discuss role modeling usually focused on it as part of their own development. They felt that being able to see their own mentor's example helped them to develop those characteristics in themselves. EARL discussed how one of his deployment mentors sparked a different understanding of how to lead:

> EARL: [My mentor] was coming from a different unit; the reason he was there was because the last guy couldn't hang in that environment. I wanted to feed him that detail and that detail earned me his trust that I was thinking on that level, that I was up to par with what he needed. That was good. It also, in turn, provided some shields from the glare of that detail being picked apart. As long as I fed him the information that he needed, he could articulate it in a way that was favorable. It was a

> symbiotic relationship. I learned more from that: I learned about the processes, I learned how to wield influence instead of just using rank. Some guys just use the rank on their chest; other guys know how to wield influence. I channeled every day what he taught me to do. I might be a brand new captain, but the position that I'm in has a sphere of influence that's able to be projected out and, when used in the right way, can be more powerful than what I wear on my chest.

Other participants saw their mentor's interest or skillsets as being something to develop further:

> JOSH: Here was this [individual], who I'd heard so much about. It was all of the stories I heard when I was a second lieutenant about what he did as a commander to develop his guys. I was just enamored with the guy for those reasons. So here I was, ten years later, I'm sitting across the table from him, and we're discussing strategies for developing maneuver leaders. It was amazing. Once a week, I'd come in, he'd just start talking about some book; I'd go home, order it, devour it in a week.

One participant noted his appreciation for being able to use different mentors as role models for different characteristics:

> ARLO: P has a lot of qualities that I would sure like to emulate when I grow up. That's how that started. She's a good, a truly good all-around [branch] officer. B is the consummate analyst, he's the analyst I want to be when I grow up. I want his brain. But P is the leader I want to be when I grow up. Those are two different things.

In some cases, just the presence of a mentor was seen as reaffirming particular goals or developmental objectives:

> EARL: When it came time for me to change command, I sent her an invitation: *Ma'am, I would be honored if you would come out to my change of command and watch me. This has been a goal since I was your platoon leader, to have my own company.* She actually came out; she had just had a baby and brought her children out, she made the two hour drive just to see me take the guidon, and then she left. I just wrote back and forth with her yesterday.

Feet of Clay

The question sometimes comes up: what about negative examples as a mechanism for role modeling? On the surface, this would appear to be a contradiction; why would a person voluntarily associate with someone that they viewed negatively? But discussions with my participants brought out an interesting phenomenon: negative examples from their mentors actually helped bring out and accentuate characteristics that protégés wanted to model. As JOSH put it:

> We put so much stock in great leaders. We also need the bad leaders too. You need darkness to realize there's light. I've been thinking about that a lot; both of those aspects, good mentors and bad leaders, at least what I perceive as bad leaders, helped bring to life to me what mentorship is.

JOAN agreed:

> A lot of time I've gotten my professional development and my growth from watching other people's mistakes, because I'm a firm believer in learning by observation. There are too many mistakes for every lieutenant to have to make all of them. In those small snapshots in those interactions I've had with various people, many small grains of sand eventually make a sand dune.

In most cases, the negative examples stemmed from a specific instance or event that showed a different side of a mentor. In those instances, protégés were able to look at the mentor in the context of the whole person and see them as flawed but still competent individuals:

> TRAVIS: Even when we weren't talking to each other, I felt like I was learning a lot from [my mentor.] I learned some things not to do; he did have the occasional gaffe where he'd say something insensitive or didn't gauge his audience correctly. That taught understanding to think before you speak. It's one of those fundamentals, but as you accrue experience, you see many different people handle it many different ways. We were at a hail and farewell with some spouses there and he got into some gallows humor about something that happened during the deployment. It was not something spouses should have heard. That taught me to be careful; even though you've just come back from deployment, you have to realize you're back in civilization again and act appropriately.

Officers who described negative examples were reflective about why they didn't see that trait or characteristic as being appropriate for them:

> ARLO: I wouldn't emulate B on leadership issues, because he's a short angry Bostonian. He's gruff. The reason he retired at colonel is because he's a short angry Bostonian, he's gruff with everybody. He would do things like stop by when I was doing my quiet little rehearsals by myself before briefing the deputy commanding general. He would find me and say, "So, what do you think you're going to be saying? Because whatever it is, it's wrong. So just tell me now." I had my 5x8 cards, everything all marked down, I would go through it with him. He would correct me, coach me, train me, and mentor me, right there: "Good but...you need to fix this, and here's why." And then he'd be gone, and he'd leave me to go do it. He was there in the brief and he'd come back up to me afterwards and give me feedback on it. Observers would think, "Oh, he's such an angry man, he's totally giving it to him." But I knew exactly what he was doing. I knew he was giving me the feedback that was needed to be better at it. He's just a gruff Bostonian. Once you get past the culturalisms of it, he was doing all of the right things.

Participants also found that the negative examples in their mentors spurred them to look at problems differently or consider alternative approaches. They found that these perspectives were especially helpful in avoiding complacency:

> DARREN: I've found that a lot of people in [my branch] are not always dynamic thinkers. I love my branch, but I think a lot of times, we think in only one way of doing things. You always come across battalion commanders and brigade commanders that are like that. A lot of times, if you've been successful, you have no incentive to consider better ways of doing things or

> other ways of doing things. It's something I've seen in my current job. We're a highly successful program, we're considered one of the best in the nation, so we don't spend a lot of time thinking about how to get better because we're already doing really well.

One participant even described how he consciously used his own negative examples as learning experiences for his subordinates, two of whom went on to become his protégés.

> JOSH: I only had an FSO, an XO, and two platoon leaders. There were just times where things were going wrong, and I'd pull them in and say: *Hey, this is what's going on, this is what I wish I could have done.* The only saving grace for me in some of those mistakes I made was being able to sit down with those guys and share my lessons learned with them and tell them what I would do better next time.

There's no question that role modeling is part of Army mentoring. Each participant described things about their mentors that they admired and wanted to mirror. Most participants described how their protégés had similarly seen aspects of character that they, in turn, put into practice. The challenge is separating out which experiences were purely role modeling versus those that served another developmental purpose. It's extremely difficult to bin those deeply personal experiences into a single category. Perhaps the best way to leave this for now is to remember that our

mentors and protégés alike are constantly watching and learning from us.

Section III: Mentoring Practices & Contexts

Chapter 6: Mentoring Communication: More than Eyeball to Eyeball

Whether it happens later in Facebook or in person, the whole process of mentoring has to evolve with society as we have. Life exists now in social media, in chat, in text messages, in person, over the phone. It's just looking at all the different methods by which we communicate and trying to utilize all of them. – EROL

Communication is at the heart of mentoring. In fact, mentoring cannot occur without candid conversations where both parties are willing to put themselves out on the table. The easiest way to do that is by sitting down, face to face, and talking; but in Army mentoring, our mentors or protégés are often separated from us. So are conversations over the phone, over email, over social media really mentoring? Absolutely, when we understand them in the context of the larger mentoring relationship and its progress.

A quick note on terminology: Chapter 1 used the term *e-mentoring* to describe mentoring communications that happen outside of a face-to-face (F2F) setting. The scholarly term for these engagements is Computer-Mediated Communications mentoring. Putting this term into common usage is clunky and doesn't lend itself easily to explanations. E-mentoring falls more easily into the

common vernacular, even while acknowledging that it encompasses engagements like phone calls that may not be truly electronic in nature. This book uses e-mentoring as the least bad term to describe non-F2F mentoring engagements.

Why E-mentoring?

The experience of my participants suggests that e-mentoring is helpful when mentor and protégé are physically separated from one another. E-mentoring provides a means to connect during those times when personal meetings are impossible:

> JOAN: A lot of the time, when the Army sends you on your way, you can be three to eleven time zones away from your friends, and that makes phone calls difficult. The DSN network, when you're all deployed, is awesome when you're all deployed; you can call DSN to Iraq from Afghanistan, and talk about situations and issues and problems. You can even talk on a secure line, sometimes. So in considering communications, distance is an interesting one to contemplate as well. Peer mentoring can be an after-hours thing; I can Facebook my friends at 1130 at night and no one is going to care. But I can't call my mentor at 1130 at night because they have lives.

The transition to e-mentoring is also a logical one given the increasing encroachment of online space into officers' day-to-day lives. To some extent, that encroachment is

filling a void left by the death of earlier mentoring spaces like officers' clubs:

> COLE: The old officers' club mentality was dying out when I was a young private; where everybody would leave duty early and go socialize at the officers club or NCO club for a couple of hours. There was a lot of mentoring that took place in that time. That piece has died out, and with it, some opportunities to mentor went too. What's replaced it for the younger generation is social media: rather than being face to face in a club or a bar, it's all about the digital and online aspect of it. It's fun sometimes to watch how threads go, how they react via electronic media. Our unit has a family readiness room, but it's really a holdover officer/NCO club. It's really only an older group that goes there. A few younger folks will come, hang out, and talk, but that's it.

E-mentoring conversations largely mirror F2F conversations in how they progress. Participants noted that tone and the lack of body language was a challenge usually overcome by the established trust that already existed between mentor and protégé. TRAVIS noted one significant difference in e-mentoring conversations, in that they were almost always initiated and sustained by the protégé:

> TRAVIS: It's on the protégé to transition it from short-term to long-term, especially when you can't elicit an answer. It's on the protégé in the virtual experience to come forward with something. Once their number one problem is solved, I can send an email asking what else

> is going on; if they don't respond or they just say life is great, there's nothing for me to offer any advice about. They just didn't throw me a bone in that respect. That's what I've seen.

The Right Tool for the Task

One point that should be emphasized here: there were no participants who had exclusively e-mentoring relationships. All of their pairings involved a F2F meetup at some point, though some protégés credited electronic mechanisms like online professional forums with identifying potential mentors. In the same vein, participants consistently stated that they varied the type of e-mentoring tool used depending on the interactions they wanted to have:

> JOSH: With the phone, if J and I get really excited about something, and the excitement level is high, and we're too excited to jam something out on email, or we just want to talk about it here and now, it's a straight up phone call. Or if we want to go in depth about a potential topic or something else, we'll set aside time for a 45 minute or hour-long conversation on the phone.

> DARREN: The lieutenant I mentioned who went to my unit after I left, it's always been email. That's what I had of his and I never really sought him out on Facebook, nor did he seek me out. That's the medium we've always used. One thing that's nice about email: you can expand a lot in a conversation, but you lose some of the rapid interaction that can happen on a

> phone or on a messaging platform like Facebook. So it can be a lot more thoughtful response.
>
> ARLO: [My mentor and I] are going to make some time in January to talk. We go back and forth on email, there's a certain amount of shaping operations that we do ahead of time. Then we'll talk on the phone for an hour or two, to clean stuff up afterwards, and then email some more. It's very much like a Key Leader Engagement when we talk on the phone. It really is. He's very generous with his time, but he's a busy guy. I don't want to go and just make social talk with him. I try to bring to him stuff that is ready to be discussed and ready for action. I told him, at the end of this week, I'll have back to him two variants of my resume. I'm not going to send them to him until they're ready, because I know when they are ready, then he'll make time and he'll pour over them. Like he's done before, he'll probably send them to people he knows to get those additional thoughts on them. Because he'll pick up that lance and charge at the windmill right there with me.

Other participants noted that they vary the means of engagement depending on how likely they are to physically meet their protégés at some point:

> JOSH: I had emailed T about this issue I was having, and he was the one that said call me, and we started talking on the phone. If I'm in the position, it's face to face, but once I leave, most of that mentorship actually continues via digital media. Either Facebook, messaging, through email, or text messages, with maybe a phone conversation once a year. With J, specifically, we've had the good fortune to see each other once, maybe twice a year since then. I think those

face to face encounters help to re-energize the relationship. With N, it's the same thing. It's the occasional phone call, I've seen him twice in 2014, once in 2013, but mostly it's been through email and digital media.

DARREN: We have talked on the phone a couple of times. We were both in Afghanistan at the same time and so we talked on the VOIP a couple of times. For the most part, it's been emails. It's not a frequent back and forth. It's when one of us needs to get in touch with the other about something or has a question.

EARL: With K, if I'm in the neighborhood, I'm stopping by. If I'm CONUS, it's a phone call. If I'm overseas, it's an email. If it's T, it's a Facebook chat or an email with an attachment. One time, I was asking her for a product that we made in 2008, that I needed to be a UMO. She said, "I'm really digging deep for this one. I have no idea if I still have it." She pulled something out, I don't think it was the exact document, but she was able to regenerate something close. Or in person, like when she came to visit. With C or B, it's usually by Facebook or email just because the time zones are so different, they're literally night and day. That works out the best: I float them an email, they get it the next duty day, or on SIPR, it's a couple of days. When P was here, or in the States, we would talk on the phone every month or two. He hasn't been around in the States for a couple of years now. It's a mix of everything, it's a question of what's available, what's the need.

Other participants stressed that the choice of mentoring communications was largely driven by the preferences of the mentor:

ARLO: I have probably a half dozen mentors, and I use them all in different ways. I would email B, lay it all out, and it would take a few drafts to get the right one. I'd get back about a half page. And that would be it, but it works. When I would go see him, when I was traveling through Europe, he would clear half a day to talk. He doesn't check in on me.

I have other mentors who do check in on me. I got an email from G on Monday, saying "I haven't heard from you in six months, what's going on?" Ok, that's valid. Because I do hear from her, periodically, and it has nothing to do with some crisis or some decision I'm facing, some decision point. B is very much about a logic piece.

DARREN: It's easy to overlook an email and let it slide all the way down your list. I'm a terrible email manager. It's not my preferred form of communication with someone that needs to talk to me about something important. If I get 30 emails, I might skim them, and miss something important, versus going email by email, doing a quick search for anything that's important. It's a definite weakness of mine, and it's probably why I don't use email as much.

I think Facebook is a little more informal of a system; if you send an email, it says Captain and it's got my signature block, it's very formal. Facebook is less formal; it makes it easier for a lot of people to have that informality. It's easier to keep up with people, have lots of conversations at once. It's a quicker way to reach out to somebody, because they can answer on their own. You can keep up with people, see where they're at; if they post something that they're obviously frustrated about or they're talking about a career move they're making, I can reach out. They might need advice or they might just want to talk about something. It

> revolutionizes your ability to track people, versus trying to have email back and forth. Phone calls are good, but you can play phone tag for a long time. If you don't set up a time to call, there can be five or six calls back before you reach somebody.

Although stereotypical, there does appear to be a generational difference in selection of e-mentoring platforms. Older military members tended to favor phone calls and email, while younger members placed more emphasis on social media and chat messaging:

> JOSH: With the older guys, the S3 and the XO, that's a lot of text messages and stuff, the phone calls are usually when they initiate. I think that's what they're more comfortable with, that's my opinion, anyway.

> WILL: Just via Facebook for the orderly room soldiers. For the [senior NCO], he and I are, I would say, close friends at this point. We talk mostly about life in general, we still keep in touch. With him, it's face to face; we've been out to lunch a few times since I've been aide-de-camp as well as talking on the phone or via Facebook. A little bit of everything. If he ever needs products at the company level, he'll email me because he knows I kept a lot of what we built together as a team.

> COLE: A former brigade command sergeant major bemoaned the state of the Army by referencing the lack of clubs. He told me one day, "We never used to have the suicide problems in the Army and in the Guard when these clubs were the expectation and the norm. Everybody could talk and communicate then." I understood his point, but what I see is that the

> complaining and commenting that used to happen in clubs after people drank and barriers were lowered, is now more likely to happen on social media. That's the difference in generations; but there's still a desire, a need for social interactions. The mechanism by which we get it has changed; less face to face, more digital, more virtual.
>
> JOAN: You [the author] may be the first colonel I ever reached out and friended. Facebook is one of those things that, it's your job as a superior to reach out to your subordinates and Facebook friend them. It's a lot more personal. I also feel that I'm the transition age in the military. I'm 31, my lieutenants that I continue to mentor are 24, 25; the people I've been looking to for mentorship are in their 40s. I don't know what FB usage looks like amongst that older generation: my mom uses it to play games and talk to our family. I don't know how senior officers perceive Facebook. From my perspective, it's not appropriate to reach out and try to Facebook friend them. I have noticed, though, that the younger generation, my lieutenants and cadets, they have no problem reaching out and Facebook friending someone. That's why my name is spelled so strangely, because my cadets from this past summer found me on Facebook. I said: *No, no, no. You're not lieutenants yet, you're still babies. This is a fast ticket to badness.* I don't normally accept those requests.

Facebook: The Weapon of Choice

Facebook consistently came up in conversations as being a useful platform for e-mentoring. Several participants pointed to Facebook's ease of use:

> EARL: It's an easy medium, you can gauge what they're doing, and how they're doing based on their posts. It makes it easy. You've got Messenger, it goes right to their phones. They're usually within 12 hours of being reached, at any time, ever, even when I'm [deployed].
>
> DARREN: I think mentorship has been easier on my part because of stuff like Facebook, which allows me to reach out to a lot of people. It's a lot easier than ten years ago, when you had to do it all by phone or email. I can keep up with people a lot easier with a system like that.
>
> JOAN: With my actual friends that I mentor, of course they're on my Facebook. It's a great method to do it; it's a lot more convenient than email. I don't know what your email address is right now, but I can Facebook message you all day long and it will get to you.

Other participants credited the extent to which people now live their lives on Facebook as being useful for e-mentoring. In this view, the insights Facebook gives mentors and protégés into one another's lives helps to focus conversations and make them more meaningful:

> DARREN: You can tell if someone's having a bad day by reading their status and you can reach out to them; that's something I can't see if we're just using voice or email. There's a lot of things that it enables if it's used in the right capacity. It can hold multiple conversations at once; you can involve multiple people in one conversation, share things, you can keep up with people. It allows me to do a lot of stuff with less time than on the phone, where it's only one person, back and forth, and e-mail, again, where it can get lost in the

> shuffle. Facebook messages can too, but I get far less Facebook messages than emails on a daily basis, so it's a lot easier to focus in on those.

A related point raised by many participants is that Facebook is where protégés and mentors spend more of their time. Therefore, it only makes sense that more e-mentoring conversations would happen there as opposed to other venues:

> COLE: I'm finding, particularly with my soldiers that are 30 and below, that they live their lives on social media. That has changed how I use social media as well. They will go quickly to social media: it's right there on their phones, it's easy to send, it has, to their minds, some degree of security and anonymity. It's also, if you're an E5, a little easier to approach your company commander that way, especially when you live so far apart. Calling or texting someone on the phone has different connotations to them than does sending a Facebook message. I was surprised at how much more willing they were to hit me up on Facebook than via any other means. Plus, with my name, it's very unique, I'm the only one by my name on Facebook, so I'm incredibly easy to find.
>
> DARREN: Facebook is right there, you can manage all of your information and conversations at once. Most people that used to work for me use Facebook; that's where my former lieutenants are; Facebook is the most convenient and probably becomes the default.

The pace of information technology is such that, if you're reading this book two, three, or five years after

publication[xlvi], Facebook is probably a distant memory. Odds are, it has joined Friendster and MySpace in the digital graveyard of forsaken spaces. The crux of this section is not that Facebook is an immortal platform for mentoring; it's to bring out those key elements that make Facebook so good for it. Facebook's ubiquitous presence in people's lives, ease of use, and sharing of personal experiences all combine to make it a preferred platform for e-mentoring.

Meals and Mentoring

Although the majority of this chapter has focused on e-mentoring means and mechanisms, it seems appropriate to close with a discussion of a F2F mentoring technique that is often overlooked. Several members mentioned meals as being an effective venue for F2F mentoring. They noted that the meal environment takes some of the social pressure off of participants and allows conversation to flow more smoothly:

> ARLO: I favor face to face, I really do; there's something about having a meal that's actually sort of my preferred medium. This one protégé who's up at Meade, we're overdue: we haven't had a Thanksgiving or Christmastime meal for an airing of grievances, which is one of our normal ones. Normally, she comes down here for Thanksgiving and it's a long evening. We're trying to figure out a timeline for how either I

> can go up there or she can come down here. Honestly, I just need to get in a car and go see her for a day. She's kind of pinging around, trying to figure out some stuff.
>
> EROL: More often than not, the preferred method was over lunch. I think you can have a good, meaningful dialogue sitting down face to face over lunch when you're at the same venue. To me, just from a purely personal perspective, there's something about sharing a meal that forges relationships, more so than other things. Someone taking someone else out to lunch; it's a small gesture, but I think it goes a long way, without having to be seen as a bribe or favoritism. But somebody senior taking out somebody junior, or vice versa, there's just something about it that's hard to replace. This is purely just the corny side of me: breaking bread with somebody, it just opens up a different world, especially if you're going to a different kind of place that the person's never been to before, and they're trying something new. It winds up being something they like. Sometimes, if you take a little risk, versus going to a Subway, it pays off.

Ask yourself: *When is the last time I talked to my mentor/my protégé? How did we talk, and why did we choose that means?* Often, we don't get to choose how we connect with our mentors; we simply pick the path of least resistance, whether that's a phone call, a Facebook message, or a drop by their office. The next time you reach out to your mentor or protégé, consider that **how** you connect with them may be just as important in shaping the conversation as **what** you talk to them about.

Chapter 7: Chain of Command Mentoring: Rare but Fulfilling

As a commander, if you're not mentoring while commanding, you're flat out doing it wrong. – EARL

To this point, the mentoring topics covered have been fairly uncontroversial and probably easily recognizable. But now we're at the point in the book where we're going to start pushing the boundaries a little bit. I deliberately picked the above quote to start this chapter precisely because it challenges some preconceptions and appears to violate some of the mentoring rules laid down earlier in the book. Let's explore the idea of mentoring within a chain of command together to find some nuance and get a better understanding of this seemingly paradoxical idea.

A Violation of the Rules?

I say "paradoxical" because, on its surface, mentoring within a chain of command seems to violate the idea that mentoring requires a voluntary and mutual relationship. Can that really be said to exist when one member of the relationship has UCMJ authority over another? The very hierarchical nature of our organizations seems to scream out "No!"

That was my position when I began this study and I was determined to prove that people who referred to mentoring within a chain of command were misusing the term. Imagine my surprise when I found eight of my nine participants describing mentoring experiences with a chain of command, either as a mentor or as a protégé. In each case, I pushed back, reminding them of the requirement that mentoring consist of a voluntary and mutual relationship. Each of those eight pushed back in turn, telling me precisely how those relationships still fell into a mentoring category.

Nearly all of them agreed that chain of command mentoring begins when the level of concern for professional development goes beyond what is required for mission accomplishment. In this view, a supervisory relationship crosses into mentoring when the superior takes an interest in developing the subordinate for responsibilities beyond those of the current position.

> WILL: There were times I would seek them out for guidance and assistance, but more times than not, they would come to me. It wasn't just because they were my rater and senior rater, it was because they cared about me personally and professionally and wanted to see me do well in my career. Giving guidance, you can use one line or two lines and say, *Go, get this done*. Mentoring with guidance is - I see a clear line - it's “Come in, sit down, let me stop what I'm doing, let me give you my

> full attention so you can fully understand what I'm needing you to do." Maybe even give some options, instead of: *Go do it this way. Here's what I need, get it done, get out of my office*.
>
> DARREN: Maybe it's just that I've had other commanders who were more rigid in terms of the way they counsel or the way they do things. I don't know that [my mentor] extended the same care to every person. Maybe he did, maybe he didn't, I didn't see it. On my part, it was a lot more voluntary. I could have easily just gone to my once a year evaluation counseling and sat in. A lot of times, we think of a mentor as someone outside of your chain, but being that he was two levels above me...a lot of times, while the person that is two levels above you is supposed to train you, they don't spend a lot of time trying to mentor you, they spend that time mentoring the person one level below them. I think that he personally saw something in me, maybe that I was rough around the edges to a degree, but he knew that I had a lot of potential, to make sure I was fulfilling that potential. I've never had a relationship like that with any battalion commander before or since.

One participant countered when I pointed out that the chain of command mentoring he was describing could potentially be considered favoritism:

> ARLO: What he would do for me, he would do for anybody. Anyone getting a raw deal from branch, he would step up and fire that silver bullet. No doubt. It wasn't an ARLO thing, it was fixing the Army. That was far more important to him than I am by far. I know the concept: "Let me get ARLO a sweet deal, because going to Hawaii sounds awesome," right? Until you

> realize that, of my time on Hawaii, I didn't really spend any of my time on the island, I spent it all in Iraq. Hooking me up? Yeah, he hooked me up, he got me back to Iraq for two more tours. That was not a hookup.

Perspectives from the mentor's perch mirrored those voiced from protégés: chain of command mentoring can, in fact, be voluntary and mutual as long as there is a sustained interest in development from both sides of the relationship.

> WILL: When they continue to come to you for sustained assistance and suggestions and guidance, then it turns from my role as a supervisor to more of a mentoring relationship. With both situations, I had that happen on some level. I think that was a start of mentoring for those groups of soldiers.

> EROL: As a battalion commander, I had seven company commanders under me. I spent time with each one of those captains trying to map things out for them, and show each one of them where those resources and tools are along the way. I got some positive feedback from one in particular, who said, "You're the first person to ever sit down and show me how to do this stuff." People talk about it, but they don't follow up and take the time to make sure that you know how to do it. That was one of those commander-subordinate type relationships. As I was leaving command, he asked me, "Would you be willing to continue talking about things?" To which I replied, *Of course*. I think that's a relationship that started out as commander-subordinate, but will continue as a mentor-protégé relationship.

> ARLO: It started at a time when I was his rater and it continued after I was no longer his rater. Even when I

was his rater, the level of openness and the level of intimacy in topics that we discussed, the issues we went into, went far beyond what it needed to. There are things that you have to discuss with your boss in our culture, that's in the Army culture. There are those things that your boss asks you that you have to answer. There are those things that you have to come forward and say, *these are things I have to discuss with you*. His was far above and beyond that.

EARL: I really think it was voluntary because I chose to do it. Not every officer that I've worked for made time during the day; that was a huge incentive. If they were to give me feedback, "Hey, you're wasting my time," I'd have understood that. They never said that, and you can sense it, if you're an empathetic person: *Hey, they're not really getting anything from this*. If we ran into a dry spot with nothing else to talk about, we'd say, *OK, back to work*. And that was OK.

JOSH summed it up well in this exchange, which also shows his reflective processes:

Me: In command, how would you differentiate mentoring from the inherent developmental responsibilities that come with command? Or would you?

JOSH: I don't know that you really can. I'm thinking through this for the first time. [pause] The only thing I could say is, that with the inherent responsibility, you don't necessarily have to have that additional level of care. With mentorship, you have to care, and it has to be voluntary. Would I be willing to do everything that I'm doing now if I wasn't in charge of him? For all of these instances, the answer is yes.

> Me: So, to return to the example of your struggling lieutenant, you could have argued as a commander that he was a lost cause, and it's not worth your putting more effort into him, and you should sideline him until you get a replacement. Therefore, the fact that you put the extra time and effort into him constitutes mentoring. Am I understanding that?
> JOSH: Yeah, I think so.

Based on the experiences above, there is a strong case for a small subset of relationships within the chain of command being mentoring. Let's take a deeper look at this phenomenon from both the protégé and the mentor's perspectives to flesh it out further.

The Narrow View: From the Protégé's Perspective

It's harder for the junior member in a supervisory engagement to tell whether that relationship has crossed over into mentoring. It may be difficult for that junior soldier to differentiate between counseling focused on development in their current role and mentoring aimed at growing their skills for future roles. Often, it takes reflection on past experiences to truly grow a protégé's comprehension of mentoring interactions:

> WILL: It was really all the times that [my commander] would come to me, sit down in my office, and ask me how things were going, and give me guidance and advice. One of the times, she came in my office and

went over what the budgeting in the military looked like; she had been an S4 and had prior experience. She was able to guide me through setting up the budget for the company. Other times were when I was having issues at home; she was able to work me through that, talk to me about it. She not only assisted me professionally, but she also assisted me with my personal life. She gave me some assistance, was an ear for me to listen to.
[My second battalion commander] was more approachable than my first battalion commander, he would pull me into his office. He would pull me in and we would talk about long-goal career planning. For my career, he would lay out what kinds of experiences I should have as a young lieutenant, as a company commander, as a captain. We would go through my career path, he would give me suggestions, positions to look for, things that would suit me best, knowing my personality.

DARREN: I also had a great battalion commander, who really sat me down, talked me through my career path, talked me through my strengths and weaknesses, and really took the time to counsel me in a way that hadn't happened before that. He gave me ideas, what I should be looking for in my career. He gave me a greater understanding of the Army and my role in it. It was always professional, but definitely someone I felt I could talk to, that I could bring up issues that I was having. If he saw something, he would correct it there, he would talk to me, and let me know where I was and where I stood and give me an honest assessment. That allowed me to really do a better assessment of myself, and I could move forward as a leader.

In some cases, soldiers may not realize that they truly had a mentor in the chain of command until after the fact. In other cases, the seeds of the mentoring relationship may be sown during command but only fully blossom after the command relationship has ended:

> EARL: I would classify him as a mentor due to his relationship with me now. When I was commander, the battalion commander had moved on to command a brigade-sized element. He called me the day before I took command, he was talking to me, and said “Don’t do some of the things I did.” He sent me a message about the wolf, the sheep, and the sheepdog. He said, "Remember your role, don’t do what I did. Have some compassion."
>
> EROL: It's ironic that, as he was pinning [general’s stars], I asked him if he still wanted to continue and if he'd be willing to mentor me while he was in his current role. He said yes, said he hoped he wouldn't disappoint me…It was definitely an inflection point. I was at a point where I was considering getting out, I kind of got re-motivated to go forward and keep doing things. It actually started during the initial hail and farewell we had [at his command], when I came in. I got a chance to sit down and chat with him for a little while. He tried to help me with some joint credit I was trying to get, even though he was unsuccessful. He said, later on, when he was a three-star, that it was one of the few things he was unable to complete while he was a two-star, was to help me get that. Because the regulations around it were so hokey. It definitely evolved out of those initial meetings, out of working for him, under his command.

Chapter 7: Chain of Command Mentoring

Because the protégé's perspective on the mentoring relationship is so limited, it's important to examine these relationships from the mentor's perspective as well.

Growing your Own: From the Mentor's Perspective

Study participants who mentored while in chain of command positions drew a direct link between their developmental responsibilities for their subordinates and the establishment of the mentoring relationship. In their view, it was the receptivity of the subordinate to development and the recognition of additional potential that led to a deeper relationship.

> JOAN: I formed a really strong bond with several lieutenants. I had a very personal reason for them to become better officers and supervisors: if they didn't know how to handle what was going on at 3 am, they were going to call me. I put a lot of effort into developing them up front, teaching them the way I wanted to run things: *Calm, quiet days*. *This is my mission; this is my expectation; this is how things will be handled*. I put a lot of effort into it because I wanted them to be brave enough to make decisions at their level, but I didn't want them to be overconfident and be a headline in the New York Times the next morning. Some of it was altruistic, but at the beginning, not all of it was. At the beginning, I didn't have the time to consider them as people, they were AOICs; but as I got more comfortable in my battle rhythm as a camp commander and OIC, that changed a lot. I became a

much better mentor for it, but at the time, I had a very specific set of requirements.

WILL: I remember sitting down with my second platoon sergeant, who was a lot more appreciative of having initial sit-downs. It was someone who had eighteen years' experience and never really had a leader sit down with him and actually do a formal counseling, going over their performance. That was a mentoring experience for him. Towards the end he expressed that he really appreciated being able to sit down and talk about his strengths and weaknesses in a candid, open discussion. Previously, his counseling had been here or there, not really getting a full disclosure of where his strengths and weaknesses are.

Several participants noted how this chain of command mentoring often went into personal topics and areas that supervisors normally wouldn't enter:

JOAN: Mentorship becomes a very personal thing. I did a lot of my mentoring in the middle of the night, just because that's when everything slowed down. I was sitting on a curb with my XO, talking about the world, the universe, leadership, what that meant, how we develop those things. I shared the reasoning behind some of my decisions, the things he wasn't seeing. Just discussing. He remembers that night very clearly. I remember that night very clearly: it was one of the first times he had really opened up to me. He'd been with the unit for a couple of months; he realized that I was loud and boisterous and obnoxious most of the time, because that's my personality. I'm not actually as abrasive as I come off, I do care. We had a great discussion that night, which continued, and culminated in a by name request for him to go to [a special assignment.]

ARLO: His [needs were] far above and beyond that. "I'm going through things with my father, here's what's going on with my Dad's finances, here's what's going on with my sister, this and this and this, do you have some time? I want to talk about that." That has nothing to do with, "I work for you, and you're going to do my evaluation." That has nothing to do with the tasks that I'm asked to complete in the course of my duties in service to the United States Army. That has everything to do with him coming to me as a mentor, and facing decisions, and seeking counsel on the best ways to approach them. Even after I was done rating him, it still continued, and that was at his choice. I had an interest in making sure he was going to be OK, but he could have cut off those conversations at any time he wanted to. You can't compel someone to continue to be open and keep having those kinds of conversations.

DARREN: It's an interesting thing to think about, because I was probably the same age as these guys, but it shows the different positions you'll be in as an officer. They were all receptive to it, even though I was the one that pulled them in; it's not like they walked up to me and said, "Hey, I want life counseling." It was the continuation of mentorship. These were all guys that I spent a lot of time talking to informally, especially the ones that were in my vehicle. I guess you could look at it as the culmination of a lot of informal chats, a lot of listening to them tell me where their lives were at, and realizing they had potential and a lot of prospects in life, but they needed something to codify that, get them to think about it. It started off as a very informal relationship, but I think that was the culmination point of what we had done together as a platoon, but also with me as their lieutenant. At least a couple of those

guys I kept up with since then. For a lot of those guys, it was the first time someone actually sat down and gave them advice on life.

Some mentors noted how their time mentoring in the chain of command continued to be personally or professionally fulfilling for them:

EROL: On the mentoring side of the house, there's generally a senior to more junior type of relationship. As it evolves, when the two of you become closer to peers, and the fact that you just get to know each other over time, you'll call each other or just shoot them an email, saying, I haven't talked to you in a little bit, things are going well. It becomes less about the professional discussions around, *How can I help you with your career*, to *Hey, how are you? How's everything going in your life?*

JOSH: One of those lieutenants is currently in command right now. For me, his successes right now are the highlights of my mentorship. I feel like a lot of the stuff that I did as a commander, he's taken and is making it a lot better.

Not for Everyone

All of the above experiences have laid out the amazing things that can happen when a mentoring connection is made in a chain of command. But just as it was wrong for me to initially write off the possibility of the existence of chain of command mentoring, it would be equally dangerous to say that it is an inherent part of command.

Several participants shared caveats on things that limit the possibilities for mentoring connections in a command relationship.

As suggested previously, the receptivity of the potential protégé to developmental guidance is important. Junior members may not be in a point in their lives or careers where they are interested in growth. As two participants put it:

> EROL: I think the onus is on the protégé to make stuff happen. A lot of folks will make themselves available [as mentors], but it's not on them to continually follow up to make sure that the protégé is doing well. It's really on the protégé to keep the relationship up if they need it, if they want it.
>
> ARLO: It's dumb luck when you have someone in your chain of command who also makes for a suitable mentor. You and I understand that, but I am conscious that the wording of that quote may not capture the epiphany of that. That [my protégé] was willing to open up about all of these things was not inappropriate; that he was choosing me as a mentor was not inappropriate. But, that both things were happening at the same time was uncommon.

Of equal importance is the level of emphasis that the leader puts in individual development. Different leaders may have different viewpoints on their responsibilities to their subordinates, and may not be in a position in their lives to provide that development. In a perfect Army, no

officer would be placed into a command position without the necessary tools to develop subordinates; real life seldom works out that way. Some participants were particularly emphatic on this point.

> JOSH: I had a tool that my platoon leaders thought was cool: "Wow, the CO is giving us $30 books and we're discussing it, talking about it." From their aspect, where the previous commander may have had sporadic [professional development] events, "Come in this week, we're going to talk about whatever", they saw an actual outlined program that I was providing. I think it helped facilitate trust between [me and] my guys.
>
> EROL: When you're a mentor, you're investing as much time and trouble into the relationship as the protégé is. Hopefully, the folks that are doing it are doing it for the right reasons. If you're going to get something out of it, you've got to put something into it. Whether you're a mentor or a protégé, it's not enough just to show up for a half hour bitch session every couple of months and think that's it. You've got to take an active part and an active interest in that person's career, that person's life. But when you see someone who, when given an opportunity to do well, takes something and runs with it...When you see that kind of thing that they're investing time in, you say, this is the person I want to invest time with. Not only are they learning, but they are performing beyond your wildest dreams of what they could do with that type of assistance.
>
> DARREN: It's also a reflection of my ability to be open, I try not to shut people down when they come to the front door. We've all seen those officers that were

> like, “Don't bother me unless you have a serious question.”

WILL summarized the requirements of a chain of command mentor well: “It’s important to note that the approachability of a leader and a mentor is extremely important in how well the mentor can relate to others.”

Other participants noted that some positions are much more conducive to chain of command mentoring than others. All of the instances described took place between leaders and direct subordinates or senior staff officers and junior staff. Participants who had served as service school instructors found it much harder to mentor in those positions:

> JOSH: The entire time I was in the course, teaching, throughout those three weeks, I felt like all of the energy and effort was dedicated to making those guys all better leaders. If a guy came up and you could see that he was very interested and wanted more, I immediately jumped on that and tried to help him along and provide him the tools. There was one individual that showed up at Defense Entrepreneurs Forum; he said that my talking about the Defense Entrepreneurs Forum and leader development and all that in class really left a mark on him. He wanted to be a part of it, contacting me recently. I really haven't had too much contact with many of my students after the fact. Only a small handful have written me asking questions, asking for help on stuff. The way the class was structured, there was a lot of work on your own, the instructor overseeing you. I think what we missed out on were

> shared experiences together and time. There weren't shared experiences; there was some teaching there, but nothing impactful.
>
> DARREN: It's tough to [mentor as a platoon trainer] because you've got 40 lieutenants at one time, and not a lot of time to spend with each one of them. There are certainly lieutenants that would come and seek out advice more, but I don't think it ever crossed the line into a mentorship relationship. I'm Facebook friends with a lot of those guys, but I haven't provided them a lot of career advice or any advice since they've left the battalion. Every once in a while, I'll get a question here or there, but it's not that developmental relationship. As a company commander, for the most part, you're going to have between four and six lieutenants. I had a lot more in the headquarters company, but they had a staff officer who was in charge of them, so I only would have considered the three platoon leaders and my XO to be my direct protégés. As an instructor, you've got forty or so lieutenants, so that stands in the way of your ability to really reach out. It's a 13-week period versus a year or two year long relationship. I don't think mentorship starts from day one as a company commander, because you're trying to figure out who the person is, get them going in the right direction, make sure everything is going right. As a commander, you're doing leader development; as an instructor, you're trying to develop and ensure that person has those basic skills they need to succeed.

DARREN went on to differentiate how and why he saw mentoring opportunities as an ROTC instructor, when he didn't see any as a platoon trainer:

> DARREN: I think cadets will definitely volunteer to seek out advice beyond what's in the schedule. Because of the way we do things around here, there's a lot more opportunity to do that. Although I have 27 students, I don't spend every hour on the job with those guys like I did when I was [a platoon trainer.] Here, I teach students for three hours a week in my class; then we have a lab and I'll see them at physical training. Some of those students will come in throughout the semester and ask for advice. I don't teach the seniors, but a lot of those that are looking for advice in our branch come in. It's all voluntary, because these are people seeking advice outside the classroom; they're not asking about an assignment or a training event, but they're voluntarily coming in because they decided that I have the information they need. I'd say there's at least a handful of cadets that my relationship has progressed beyond being the guy in the classroom teaching them, being out in the field when they're training.

Finally, we cannot overlook the fact that there are professional restraints on chain of command mentoring. Beyond the previously discussed concerns about favoritism, potential mentors and protégés alike should be aware of the possibility of undermining established leaders or being seen as currying favor.

> EARL: [I'm not in contact with the lieutenants I mentored] by choice. Their unit is here and some of those guys are scattered into some of the shops I work with. I still professionally keep in touch, but as an outgoing commander, you have to allow that incoming commander some leeway. You don't want to unjustly influence them. So I told them I would disappear off the

> radar: *When you leave, if you ever need anything, reach out, but I need to leave you guys with your new commander.* It was a conscious choice to do that. I don't want to influence them in any sort of way, pro or con, against that new commander. I wanted him to have that opportunity to have a fresh start with them, however he wanted to lead his company.
>
> JOSH: I don't know [if I consider M a mentor.] I wondered that. The only thing that's holding me back is that I've seen way too many officers grab the first coattails they find and call that general officer a mentor. He's been a huge influence on me, as a writer and in self-study. He's greatly influenced what I've read, how I view war, and how I view stepping out onto a stage to share an idea.

So where does all of this leave us? Is mentoring in the chain of command an imperative or a mismatch? The experiences of my participants suggest that it falls somewhere in between: feasible, but only under the right circumstances. That nuanced understanding may open some doors for officers to consider new possibilities for mentoring in their current or future jobs. Again, the driving imperative should be whether it is the right time for the relationship for both the protégé and mentor.

Chapter 8: Peer Mentoring: Making the Connection

With a peer to peer piece, especially if you're right there at a unit level, there's a little bit of a mirror there. It's easy to convince yourself when you're standing on the scale that you're mostly muscle and not as much fat, but when you look in the mirror and you see your gut hanging over, you have to look at it and say, yeah, OK. – COLE

Our usual conception of mentoring dyads is pretty simple: older individual sits down with younger individual to share their worldly wisdom and teach them the ways of their profession. Think of all the ways it's represented in popular culture: Ben Kenobi and Luke Skywalker. Batman and Robin. Gandalf and Bilbo Baggins. All of these are dyads of older and younger, senior and junior; their adventures either consciously or unconsciously shape our perceptions of how mentoring proceeds.

But what about peer pairs, individuals who are at roughly the same age or professional level and seek one another out for support? Here pop culture is less forgiving: Ren and Stimpy. Thelma and Louise. Abbott and Costello. Most popular conceptions simply can't encompass the idea that peers can be a source of mentoring growth for one another.

Chapter 8: Peer Mentoring

Strictly from a definitional perspective, there's no reason that should be the case. Let's revisit our definition of mentoring from the introduction: "the voluntary developmental relationship that exists between a person of greater experience and a person of lesser experience that is characterized by mutual trust and respect." As the definition makes clear, a delta in experience, not age or position, is the key criteria for a mentoring experience. Therefore, strictly from a theoretical perspective, there is nothing standing in the way of a peer mentoring relationship. But because theoretical possibility often runs aground on practical reality, let's take a close look at what peer mentoring actually looks like.

Is This Really a Thing?

It is significant that four of the nine participants either had no real peer mentoring experiences they could recall or explicitly stated that peer relationships could not meet a mentoring threshold. These individuals all acknowledged that there could be elements of a peer relationship that edged into mentoring territory, but felt that the totality of the dyad had to be kept separate from mentoring's developmental processes.

One example of a participant drawing a clear line between friendship and peer mentoring was DARREN's relationship with a fellow captain. The two men are close friends who served together in a challenging service competition and continually sought to learn from one another. But when asked if he considered the relationship to be a mentoring one, he replied:

> DARREN: I did not. Part of that was, he's a great guy, but I felt like I was further along in my development than he was. If I did seek advice from him, it wasn't in the same way that I would seek advice from someone with more experience, so much as someone that had a different experience from me. It would be like someone in the same job asking someone a question, and less about someone seeking mentorship. Even then, it was friendlier than it was professional.

Other participants made similar distinctions about where they drew the line between friendship and mentoring:

> WILL: [It] really has to do with the level of help that they're needing. If it's just small things, then it's really peer to peer. If it's bigger projects, maybe issues they're having with their command, or the way they are as an individual, then they're more self-aware and they're coming to you on things you wouldn't necessarily go to other leaders with. Things like saying, "I realize that I have this weakness, how do you see me?" That's something that not a lot of peers are willing to do on most levels. There's definitely a clear line of when

> you're just being helpful to when it turns into mentorship or coaching.

However, just the act of discussing peer mentoring made some participants who initially rejected its existence begin to soften their position:

> EARL: I wouldn't say [peer engagement is] mentoring in the classical sense; it's a calculated risk you take, opening yourself up, because you're giving away your secrets. How much you shared depended on who that person was, so you had to gauge what you wanted to share with them, where you thought they would be in relation to your foxhole. I wouldn't classify it as mentoring, but it's definitely something to consider. You have to learn from everybody. You also have to be able to compete with them. That's a really interesting question, I think it's worth exploring a little bit.

> DARREN: I guess, when I think of a mentor, I think of someone that's a couple ranks higher than me, someone that I have a very professional relationship with, whereas I have more of a personal relationship with JOSH and J. I feel like it's more of a two-way street. I wouldn't expect a mentor to ask me for advice. We bounce a lot of things off each other, so I don't think it fits into the definition you're using for a mentor, but it's definitely different than a friendship. It's more of a relationship built on the exchange of ideas, advice, and things like that. It's maybe a different type of mentorship, not a traditional hierarchical mentorship.

Participants who did believe that peer mentoring exists pointed to the wide disparity of experience that often exists among officers of equal or close ranks. In this conception,

individuals who are nominally peers by virtue of rank are still able to have mentoring relationships with one another, focused on specific competencies where one or the other is lagging.

> JOAN: I do see that as peer mentorship in terms of, *I may have been doing this longer, but you're still a major*. You go up one, you go down one, and you end up on the same level. I feel like when you lead up or you mentor up like that, it's a different flavor, a different dynamic than when you're a company commander leading lieutenants or a professor teaching cadets. I still have to remember, he's a major, I'm a captain, and work through some of that.
>
> COLE: The nice thing about a peer mentoring piece is that there is still that growth, that development that occurs, but it's more relevant, a little more meaningful. When you're seeking out help, on next steps, and what works, how to go forward, that ability to find someone who's your peer, who can help grow and develop you, is huge. When I went to the [CompanyCommand and PlatoonLeader] forums with questions, issues or problems, I would find someone who was in or near that position; we would work together to develop and make the next step. I had people that were close to the same rank and we would go through the discussions: we would formulate next steps in our careers, key positions, experiences, challenges, all of those growth opportunities. Bouncing it off of a peer allowed me a little more ability to really assess what's going on.
>
> TRAVIS: The first platoon leader I had, I worked for him, and I worked with him. I worked with him in the sense that the commander was still my rater, but I

> worked for him in the sense that it was his platoon and I needed to respect that. The platoon leader I worked principally with, he was my peer, he had about 12 months' seniority. The brigade itself had just gotten back from a deployment to Iraq; he had served in and around Baghdad. He had my respect from that, where he had been deployed, that he had done his job in combat. I listened a lot to him because he had a better idea of how the Army works and what needed to be done. I would still say he was my peer, but being as green as I was at the time, it felt like there was a huge difference.

ARLO noted his belief in peer mentoring, but was very careful in caveating his answer:

> ARLO: I am cautious with regard to peer mentoring, just like I'm cautious in talking about peers being involved in professionally developing each other. We choose our mentors, I believe, because there has to be something in them that we seek and need. So I thought it was funny when, as an old captain, this young captain kept coming back to me and choosing me, when all I was trying to do was help him prep for his company command. I saw us more as peers, but he didn't. 10 years later, I still joke that we're peers, and he jokes that we're clearly not. I mean, we are, but we aren't. The range of experiences that we have is so radically different. What we've been through is so radically different, that it's easy to see that we're not really peers. We are and we aren't. In that case, being the near-peer works, but I am very cautious when people who really are peers talk about trying to mentor each other, because it is our experiences that allow us to serve in that capacity as a mentor. If you're truly peers and you're side by side, what the hell do you know about

> any of that? You don't have the experience or any advantage in viewpoint to know what's up ahead. That's where the differences in stages in life, the differences in experiences, come in; there HAS to be something in life that differentiates you two, to give you that different vantage point, or that aperture. Some sort of high ground that lets you do that.

ARLO's insistence on the importance of differentiating experience from peer status brings us right back to our starting definition of mentoring. It is fair to say, therefore, that when we talk about peer mentoring, we have to focus on individuals who are comparable in age or rank but have significantly different experience bases that they draw upon to develop one another.

A Shared Experience

In fact, when we look at participants' descriptions of peer mentoring experiences, that exact emphasis emerges. In all cases, the participants felt that they grew and developed in specific areas or helped others develop in specific areas through peer engagements.

> JOSH: J [an officer the same rank as JOSH] is older, he's prior service, and he's got a lot more experience than I do. He's very passionate about the profession because of his education background. Mixed with his passion, he's very nuanced in using social media and exploring technologies for learning. I've always gone to him with stuff, and he's always approached me with

things. I've learned a lot from him. When I saw that he was blogging, writing, putting his stuff out there, it took a lot of barriers away from me doing it. Initially, when I started writing, I talked to J a lot and got feedback. Some of the other ventures that I've taken on in the last two years since we've known each other, J's always been there to shoot an idea and get his thoughts on it, and just ask general questions about it. I'd say from the aspect of my career where the writing started, was my interaction with J and our friendship.

ARLO: I picked [a peer mentor] up through ACAP. I've got a retired coast guard O5 that I'm working with. It all came out of when I sat in on some ACAP briefing. They said, there's this program, if you need mentors, you should look into it. I thought, *I got nothing to lose. I know how mentoring works. This thing won't work, it's an Army program, they're going to screw it up*. I got matched up with this guy, and it's totally working. He is the exact opposite of everything I've ever done in the Army, and I'm working with him on my transition out of the Army. Because of that, he is, in fact, perfect. He keeps trying to tell me that it's a peer-based relationship, but for all of the exact same reasons I know it's not. It truly is a mentor-protégé relationship. He's ahead of me in the process: he's been out for about eight years. He's wise and knowledgeable, he's invested in my process, and he wants the best for me. The things I'm struggling with, he is picking up and fighting for with me, now.

JOAN: As the [facility] OIC, my motto was: *Calm, quiet days. We're going to do the same thing every day, with very little variation. Professionally. Calm, quiet days.* Teaching that mindset, which is very antithetical to the perception of what you'll be doing, was one of

> my specialties. When I was an OIC, I mentored each of the new OICs after they started taking their positions. I was the first in a domino cascade amongst the leadership. Most of [the new OICs] were told, "You should sit down with [JOAN], she's got a good perspective on this. It's not that you have to run your organization the way she's running hers, but she's got a good philosophy going on." I had a Navy lieutenant commander reservist who was taking over one of the other facilities knock on my door at 6 pm one night with a six pack of beer. He said, "Can I pick your brain?" I said, *Come in, I just made dinner*. We had dinner, drank beers on the back porch, and we talked about the concept. He was there for his facility, and I thought that was a really effective conversation. It wasn't a one-time occurrence. That has been one of my better leading up, peer mentorship experiences.
>
> WILL: I do have one example of [peer mentoring.] One of my friends, he was the XO that I took over for and we've kept in touch. He's now in Korea, post-captains' career course, he's contacted me to get my help with budgeting and finance. He knows that I'm really into personal finance and stocks, retirement funds. He was laying out his financial situation with him and his wife, looking for financial assistance.

The literature review in Chapter 1 discussed the phenomenon of mutuality, where the roles in a peer mentoring relationship flip between mentor and protégé depending on the topic. Mutuality in a peer mentoring relationship derives from the reality that peers are likely to have one area where one member has greater experience

than the other, but another where the experience delta is reversed. This played out in participant descriptions of peer relationships. Two of the study participants have a peer mentoring relationship with one another; comparing their perceptions of the relationship is instructive:

> JOSH: I've got a reputation as someone who writes a lot; it may not be well, but it's a lot. It's the same thing that J, T, even my first commander did for me. They showed me that it's ok to write, to get your ideas out there, that it's a good thing for yourself and for the profession. Others have approached me, I've been able to get others to write. Two guys since I've been here have written blog posts or articles, and I directly contributed to that interaction. I don't want to start writing above everyone's head. I don't want to come off as somebody who's completely self-promotional. I've started sharing my posts with these guys before I publish them, just to get feedback and ask for help. Some other things, too. I'm asking advice on different things.
>
> DARREN: JOSH sent me an email after I had commented on his posts and given him some advice, he asked "What do you think about me going public with this, putting my name on it?" I told him, *I think you should, I don't think anything you're writing here is controversial, it won't come back to bite you*. Not too long after that, I sent him an article, and he came back saying "You need to think about this, this, and this." He's now become the person I seek advice from on writing; he's using his experience as a published author to say, "These are things you need to work on, you don't back this up well here, you don't handle this well." Within a month or two, our relationship flips: I'm back

> to looking for advice, he's back to being the person with experience. So there's a lot more mutual benefit, a lot more back and forth.

The instance of mutuality here is interesting, because although it focuses on a particular discipline (professional writing), the variance of experience and writing topics generates swapping of mentor-protégé roles.

One last aspect of peer mentoring that should be addressed here is that a peer mentoring relationship can exist even when the disparity in experience is so great that one member of the dyad no longer feels they are peers. Again, the crucial element here is to distinguish between age/rank and experience. The former is what makes individuals peers while the latter is what makes mentoring possible:

> ARLO: I think of him as a peer and as a friend, and we are like that. But I know that he also views me as a mentor, because one, he says so, and two, he comes to me for all of the types of advice that tells me he's treating me as a mentor. I know he has several, because we talk about it, too. Whether it's assignments, ways to approach problem sets, things like that, it's just kind of weird. I didn't see it coming when it started; I was doing all the right things just to set up a guy who was coming back into the Army to get him ready for command, just like I would have done for anyone else. He chose me and here we are, 10-plus years later. Two months ago, we were talking about three options he had for next assignments, and things he could do to shape

how best to keep all three as viable courses of action, to keep those doors open, so that he would be able to influence making them his choice and not leaving them in the hands of others. Because he had ideas, he wanted to talk about what I thought he could do also, if there were other things that I could think of that he could do. Which is crazy: what do I know about that kind of stuff? Sure enough, we spent a couple of phone calls talking about it.

JOAN: Instead of doing the face to face thing with my classmates, I had an internet relationship with my friends from Korea as they grew (or didn't.) Their challenges changed. We used cell phone, email, Facebook; being able to reach out to them and help them solve their problems was my method at that point. It was more of a well-formed friendship than traditional mentoring. This wasn't coming to Mohammed on the mountain; it was coming to a friend who was in some ways a peer; I'm not sure they saw the same difference between us that I did, because we'd been friends for so long. To them, I was JOAN; to me, I was practicing for when I had lieutenants, although it was a slightly different relationship when I did get lieutenants.

Competition: the Great Inhibitor

Given the clear differentiation between age/rank and experience, why are so many of the participants reluctant to call peer engagements mentoring? One answer may be the systemic competition that the Army requires among peers. Army officers compete with their peers for everything from assignments to education to rank. In this view, it is difficult

to view someone as a mentor who is simultaneously competing with you:

> EARL: Is [peer engagement] a form of mentorship? I would say yes, but I would say there are some professional nuances that make it not a reliable form of mentorship. You do have people who are out there for themselves, and you have people whose number one goal is to crush you, to be the #1, and you're in their way. That's how they view you. There are guys out there that I went to the career course with and they want to be [the branch chief]. That is their goal, and they are going to be ruthless in seeking out the positions that, somehow, I fall into. I'm a roadblock to them. That's the way it is. You can learn from peers, but I don't see it being mentoring in the classical sense.
>
> JOSH: I think when it comes to peer mentoring, I think it's very hard. Maybe it's J and N; maybe they're the ones that break the barriers down. I think it's hard for a peer to look at another peer as a mentor. I think we have a natural slant towards competition. You've got the Type A personality thing going on, so for me to look at them as mentors, I have to throw that out of the window. Which I'm perfectly fine with, since I have a desire to learn more and get better at what I'm doing.

The convergence between these two views is striking: one believes that peer mentoring cannot exist because of competition, while the other sees peer mentoring existing in spite of it.

We gave COLE the opening comment in this chapter, so it's probably appropriate that we let him close it out. His

observation on the need for balance between traditional mentoring and peer mentoring nicely encapsulates the differences between the two, the utility of both, and the challenges of competition in pursuing the latter:

> COLE: There needs to be both to be effective. To really truly grow, you do need that senior person, who's actively engaged in the relationship, helping you, providing the depth of experience, providing the perspective that you're not always going to get from a peer and you can't get yourself. At the same time, there is a lot of value in that peer to peer mentorship, where you and another group of peers are actively working together to help each other grow. But it takes the right group of individuals to do that. I've been in situations where the peer group are all vested in being the top block: "I have to be the best, and if you have to fail for me to be the best, so be it." As with any relationship, the people in it are just as critical as what it is. I'd say it's 75-25, 75% traditional, 25% peer.

Chapter 9: Cross-gender Mentoring: The Undiscovered Country

I don't know if [cross-gender mentoring] is different. I do think you're more willing to go to someone of the opposite sex. It's the nature of humanity; it's just easier to talk to them sometimes. I don't know if I have an answer to why it's easier. It just is. – WILL

Does the Army officer corps have a problem with cross-gender mentoring?

It's an uncomfortable question, because a lot of this book is about how the Army does mentoring right. When I talk to colleagues in other professions, I often hear expressions of envy about how Army culture encourages and supports mentoring. That makes it all the more jarring to encounter an area where we may not be doing as well as we think we are.

In the introduction to this text, I alluded to shortfalls in minority representation in my study. The truth is, my study fell short both in terms of ethnic and gender diversity when compared to the Army as a whole. I had no African-American or Hispanic participants in this study, despite their making up 12% and 7% of the Army Officer Corps, respectively.[xlvii] I also only had one woman participate in the study, even though women make up 20% of the Army as a whole. I initially glossed over this shortfall with the

caveat that the study did not purport to be a representative sample but rather a window into the larger trends of mentoring in the officer corps. But some of the insights gained from the study seem to point to larger issues on how female officers participate in Army mentoring.

Participants' experience with cross-gender mentoring varied more widely than any other characteristic in my study. Three participants had no experience at all in cross-gender mentoring: they had only mentored or received mentoring from other men. Three participants had engaged in cross-gender mentoring as either a protégé or a mentor, but not both. Only three, including the lone female participant, had experience with mentoring between genders as both mentor and protégé. JOAN pointed out one reason why this is so important:

> JOAN: Being a female officer can be really lonely; sometimes there's not a lot of you around and you can't make friends with some male officers due to the perception. Or their wives are going to lose their shit. Sadly, your mentor relationships with your protégés or your mentors can substitute for some of that day to day social interaction. I feel that my male counterparts get that talking about football scores, or hunting, or fishing, or whatever. It's stuff that doesn't interest me or doesn't apply. So some of [mentoring] is social, as weird as it might sound.

Barriers to Cross-gender Mentoring: Assignments

Chapter 9: Cross-Gender Mentoring

It is not a coincidence that the three participants who had no experience in cross-gender mentoring served in the traditional direct combat arms: infantry, armor, and field artillery. The lack of positions for women in these fields means that many officers in those positions never come into regular professional contact with women until later in their careers:

> JOSH: Being a combat arms guy, I've only very rarely come into [professional] contact with females. As a matter of fact, I was thinking about it: I've been in the Army now for 11 years and only 6 months out of that time was I working with someone of the opposite sex. That plays a huge part. Now, because of writing, because my professional reach has grown, there is one person. I don't know that we stay in touch enough to call it a mentoring relationship. I think that's the big thing, where I've been in my career.

> DARREN: Up until I was an HHC commander, I never had a female subordinate. I never had a female above me in any type of capacity, where I had a relationship with that person. I did have a female lieutenant in my HHC; we talked about things but it didn't become a mentorship role. We developed a relationship where she would come to me for advice. Since leaving that job, she and I haven't kept up in any kind of mentoring role. I've reached out to her, she's reached out to me, but never in a mentoring capacity. Here at school, because I haven't taken on a direct mentorship role with any of the cadets yet, I just haven't had anything in that capacity with a female. I don't think it's a gender thing so much as I'm in a branch that has kept me away from being able to develop that relationship.

TRAVIS pointed out to me that the divide is not always a conscious one:

> TRAVIS: You know, I had not thought of that before. Part of it was, at my first unit, there were no women at all, either in the field artillery battalion or infantry battalion. During that time period, the battalion staff was closed to women as well. So, as far as unit experiences, [women] weren't around.

JOAN echoed that from her service in an Infantry brigade HHC:

> JOAN: I don't feel that a lot of the things that I look to a mentor for, that any of them could help me with. They're all infantry, all male, and all at a different point in their career. I wasn't sure that the issues I was having as a company commander or as a battalion staffer were things that I wanted to take to them.

Even in branches and career fields that are open to women, the relatively small number of female officers often means that they do not figure prominently in mentoring experiences:

> COLE: On the officer side, in the Cav we had so few female officers. In the units I've been in, there haven't been as many females. We did have a female in our senior command group, but she was focused more on her people.

> EROL: Within the unit I was in, there just happened to be more male commanders, I only had one female and she went AGR. I think it just happened to be luck of the

> draw there. I don't think there is necessarily a bias towards one or the other.

JOSH reflected on what this lack of diversity means for his own development:

> JOSH: It hit me when you brought it to my attention, that I didn't mention any female mentors. The reason why is that the assignment system is determining, almost randomly, who I come in contact with most of the time and who I'm influenced by. I think it's so important, because of that, to reach out beyond the system, to link in with people. The older female who is providing some insights and a little bit of coaching along the way is somebody I met outside the system.

Barriers to Cross-gender Mentoring: Perceptions

Even once male and female officers come in recurring professional contact, significant barriers to mentoring practice remain in place. The biggest challenge by far is that mentoring relationships are, by definition, close relationships. Mentors and protégés share information with one another that they don't share with a broader audience of peers, superiors, and subordinates. That makes it very easy to mistake a professional mentoring relationship for something more personal:

> EARL: There's something to be said that distinguishes between environments where we're in our duty uniform, in an office setting, and when you're at a pool with a brand-new female lieutenant in a bikini with a beer in her hand. I don't think our [Army] culture is

mature enough for that. I think there's room for misperception….Those concerns always exist in that informal atmosphere; you run the risk, if you're not careful, of losing that professional context if you're not mature and guarded against it. It takes discipline to be the older person in a mentoring relationship and still maintain some semblance of professionalism, even when your hair is down.

JOAN: With cross-gender mentoring, I've found that if you can both approach the relationship as a professional one, with the understanding that it's professional, with no romantic component, you can still have a great mentor-protégé relationship. But you have to be careful: you have to be cognizant, you have to accept facts. "Nothing was going on" is not going to fly. It just isn't. I enjoy mentoring, I like having protégés, and I enjoy being a protégé. But I am not about to put my career on line for that.

DARREN: At least in the Army, some people are concerned about perceptions of mentoring, male mentor to female protégé; high profile cases like what happened with General Sinclair don't help that perception. If you develop the right relationship, it can be done.

ARLO: Sadly, there's always a concern of perception; for me, that's a sensitivity that dates back to my days at OCS, where we were taught things like "Never be alone with a female for the sake of appearances." That's to avoid being in a situation you can't explain. But I've never had anybody accuse me or, I think, even suspect me of anything inappropriate, because there's never been anything. But it's always been a concern, because

> in the Army, we can be stupid at times about things like this.
>
> JOAN: It also becomes an issue when "perception is reality," and people have nothing better to do than poke holes and prod. With same-gender mentoring, I have no problem doing that alone, or even alone in the building. I do have a problem doing that when it's a dude. It's not about my personal safety or his personal safety; it's about the safety of our reputations. Even with the lifting of Don't Ask Don't Tell, you and I both know that perception is much more likely to spring to mind with a male captain and a female lieutenant than with a female captain and a female lieutenant. That's just the nature of the beast: it reduces some of your opportunities to be a better mentor to your lieutenants and to your protégés in general.

Two participants mentioned how the Army's crackdown on sexual harassment and sexual assault has made cross-gender mentoring more challenging. I do want to emphasize that the tone of their responses underscored their support for the Army SHARP program, and I would ask that the reader take the following statements in that spirit:

> COLE: For me, while I was attempting to be a mentor, I was trying to be mindful of being careful. There's the big concerns about sexual harassment and sexual assault. I was always a little concerned about creating opportunities for someone to think something inappropriate was going on. I wouldn't think twice about grabbing a guy to talk to him, pulling him aside into a room, and closing the door. When you're dealing

with a female, especially in a deployed environment, pulling her into a closed door room can create an awkward situation. It does make the relationship a little more different. There were times when [a female protégé] sought me out, and I would ask, *Do you want to leave the door open or close the door and have discussions?* It adds a level of consideration that you have to take into account. Even the language I would use would be different with women than with men; you don't want to come across as offensive, inconsiderate. When talking among guys, you can engage in guy talk; but in my experience, guy talk won't gain you points as helpful or useful with women. It's an added difficulty in communication as you try to communicate. That's not to say you can't have effective communication, but it was definitely different; there are extra things to be careful of and think about.

EROL: As I get more senior, I try to be more politically correct either way. I think especially in today's age of SHARP culture that we're living in, some of the locker room talk that might have gone on years ago needs to stop in general. It's not something I really do, I don't have that kind of personality to begin with. I didn't have to tone it down or change myself, regardless of whether I was talking to a female SSG or a female major general; we're professionals regardless of what gender we're talking to. That might be different for a couple of guys in an infantry unit, but from a cultural standpoint in [my branch], I haven't experienced anything along those lines. But that also speaks to how we're evolving as a society. That whole locker room talk thing, it's good that the Army is starting to stamp it out, saying that it's just not good in general and needs to stop. We kind of winked at it before, that it's OK to say certain things around certain people; I think we need to

> finally clarify, that we need to be the same around everyone. Just don't do it.

One unexpected source of opposition to cross-gender mentoring came from female spouses of male military members:

> JOAN: As a woman, I find it difficult to make [a mentoring] connection with my superiors, because most of them are dudes and most of them have a wife. I've had to work something out with my NCO before, where, when his wife called him, I was to shut my face in my own office, because he didn't want to have to go home and deal with the question, "Who was that girl in the background?" "That was my boss." That didn't work out well: his wife came to a hail and farewell and he introduced me to her. He'd managed to go without gendering me for the entire 6 months and that was the first time she realized he worked for a woman. That was apparently an epic interaction once they got home.

> EROL: In that group [of lieutenant protégés], I had a female [officer]. I still keep in touch with her on Facebook. She doesn't approach me as much as the guys do; I'm not sure why that is. I honestly don't know. I'm sure my wife wouldn't appreciate her writing me too much.

But Is It Different?

All of that begs the question: is cross-gender mentoring for Army officers different from single-gender mentoring? I asked that question to my three participants who had

experienced cross-gender mentoring as both a protégé and as a mentor. Their answers varied wildly:

> ARLO: [pause] No. [pause] No, I don't think it's different. I'm running this through my head. My mentors treat me the same. We have the same levels of intimacy; they ask me all the same questions; they function the same; they ask after me in all the same ways. And I don't think there's a difference in how I've handled protégés. From the pure professionalism of the concept of mentoring, being a mentor and a protégé, the functionality of it; no, I don't see a difference in it.

> JOAN: I do [see a difference in cross-gender mentoring]. Some of it is because, I know that when I've sought out mentoring for various situations and issues, sometimes I have very specific issues or questions that I don't know that most men will understand. Things like having a family, or working professional planning around personal planning, or dealing with male subordinates who don't respect you… I can't ask a dude because one, from their perspective, they have no idea about the questions that I'm asking or their experience is only second hand and two, I don't know that I would have those life planning conversations with many of the male officers I've met. Their implicit and explicit biases that show up in casual conversation, things that are not done at a knowing level, would make it a really odd, awkward conversation.

The third response is the quote from WILL that opens this chapter, where he expresses a sense that cross-gender mentoring is different but can't put his finger on how, exactly.

To return to the question that opened this chapter: Does the Army officer corps have a problem with cross-gender mentoring? My participants' experiences suggest that we have a perception problem and a practice problem. We need to get comfortable with the fact that professional relationships between men and women can be close without being physically intimate. And we need to think about how and if the practices of cross-gender mentoring relationships differ from those of same-gender mentoring. There is much to be done.

Epilogue: Mentoring in Other Domains

Talking to these nine officers about their mentoring experiences was an immense privilege for me. I hope I've conveyed their observations in a way that has been useful for you, the reader. I especially hope that these narratives have pushed you in your own thinking about mentoring and what you get out of your mentoring experiences. There are no “right answers” in this book; not all of these experiences may match yours and not every technique described is going to feel like something you can do. But if you walk away from this book with even one new insight or fresh perspective on Army mentoring, then I’ve done my job.

Although these officers do not constitute a representative sample, I believe their experiences are authentic and allow us to ask deeper questions about the practice of mentoring among Army officers. The following are just a few of the questions that I think would benefit from further study in this specific domain:

- How do we update our mentoring doctrine to adequately reflect the benefits that accrue to mentors as well as protégés? How do we get that doctrine to acknowledge the subtle differences between peer mentoring and coaching?

- What can we do to better understand how senior-subordinate relationships evolve into mentoring? Specifically, how do we harness that evolution to ensure that low-performing officers can still receive mentoring when they are receptive to it?
- How do e-mentoring practices fit into Army officer's worldviews on mentoring? How do things like network access policies and regulations on mobile device use impact e-mentoring practices?
- Do we have a systemic problem with cross-gender mentoring? How will that phenomenon evolve as women take on greater roles in career fields previously closed to them?

Any one of these could form the basis of a solid CGSC or War College thesis.

But why limit ourselves to thinking about Army officer mentoring? As I noted previously, my study only included Army officers, so I only felt comfortable assigning their experiences to that narrow subset of practice. But my findings also suggest some ways that these areas can apply to other areas of Army mentoring, as well as other services and even other professions.

NCO Corps

Epilogue

Mentoring in the NCO corps is a vital aspect of their professional development. In the 2013 CASAL, active component junior and senior NCOs both reported having mentors at higher rates than company grade and field grade officers (62% and 68% versus 59% and 55%, respectively).[xlviii] The reserve component numbers differed slightly, with 58% of both junior and senior NCOs having mentors as compared to 62% of company grade and 56% of field grade officers. The numbers is even greater when discussing those serving as mentors, with 83% of active duty (and 76% of reserve) senior NCOs serving as mentors, compared to 70% of field grade officers. In terms of mentoring benefits, NCO-to-NCO mentoring relationships were seen as being more beneficial than NCO-to-officer relationships.

Why the difference? Generalizing from my findings, I see two possibilities. The first is that NCOs may find it easier to build peer mentoring bonds. Their longer service in brigade and below units means that they are more readily accessible to soldiers of all ranks for mentoring practice. They also may be more comfortable with the performance of their own jobs and thus more willing to share ideas with others. Additionally, although NCOs are boarded both for promotion and schooling, they are not in direct competition

with one another in their evaluation schemes. Specifically, there is currently no mandated forced distribution of NCO "top blocks" as there is for officers, although such distribution may happen in practice. As a result, there is less of a perception of direct competition between NCOs than between officers.[xlix]

The other possibility is that the traditional NCO role emphasizes coaching, which can in turn facilitate mentoring practice. Army NCOs are expected to coach junior soldiers, junior NCOs, and junior officers alike as all of them grow into their new roles. This daily engagement in coaching may help NCOs build skills that readily lend themselves to mentoring practices as well. This routine engagement may also lead to some confusion in terminology, as other soldiers may not distinguish between coaching and mentoring. It may also mean that less of a divide exists between NCO coaching and NCO mentoring, with mentors easily slipping back and forth between the roles as necessary.

Other Services

Bridging our understanding of mentoring into other services is much more challenging. We've seen how specific aspects of Army culture impact mentoring

practices in the chain of command and cross-gender mentoring realms. In the same vein, the emphasis that other services place on different parts of professional practice is bound to have impacts on mentoring. A recently published set of research on US Navy mentoring gives us a window into how some of those impacts may manifest in a different service.

First, it is important to note that the U.S. Navy does not have a leadership doctrine as soldiers understand it. That does not mean that the Navy doesn't produce leaders; however, the standards for those leaders and the mechanisms for developing them are far more diffused and community-based. In 2014, the Navy took a small step towards a common leadership doctrine by publishing the Navy Leader Development Strategy, an effort to provide a comprehensive common framework for leader development.[l] That strategy mentions mentoring, along with coaching and counseling, as a component of personal development but does not explain the differences between those functions.

In an attempt to get a sense for how mentoring functions among senior Navy NCOs and "deck plate" officers[li], two Naval War College researchers conducted a multi-method study encompassing both survey and

interview data. Participants were asked about how their mentoring relationships formed, what they encompassed, and the relative effectiveness of formal mentoring programs versus informal mentoring engagements.

The study found that approximately half of all mentoring engagements were begun by the senior member of the mentoring pair, with another third begun as a mutual decision. Only a very small percentage (3.7%) began as a result of formal mentoring programs. In a striking symmetry with the results of this study, more than half of the officers felt that one of their prior commanders was their most significant mentor. The same was not true of the enlisted personnel, of whom only 1.2% listed a former commander as a significant mentor.

The benefits and functions of the Navy mentoring relationships corresponded closely to Kram's mentoring functions described in Chapter 1. One notable difference from the findings of this study is that the most cited function played by Navy mentors is "advocated on my behalf." In fact, all of the emphasized functions in the study focus on benefits to the junior member of the mentoring pair, with no attention paid to any development of the senior individual in the process. Tellingly, the study uses

the term "mentee" rather than "protégé," further reinforcing the one-way perception of benefits.

One interesting insight from the study is that many Navy commands have formal mentoring programs; these were largely perceived as unsuccessful by the respondents. Specifically, respondents felt that formal mentoring was a poor fit for some individuals and undermined the importance of mutual participation in mentoring. The smaller number of positive comments about formal mentoring programs centered on making sure all sailors had opportunities for mentoring and ensuring leaders were accountable for their mentoring. This reinforces the concern, voiced in Chapter 3, about those who get left behind in mentoring engagements. The overall dislike of formal mentoring echoes the strong preference of Army officers for the maximum amount of latitude in their own engagements.

We can see a great deal of commonality between some of the challenges and practices in Army Officer mentoring identified in this study and the Navy's concerns highlighted by Johnson and Andersen. This suggests that mentoring conversations between services could be productive if they focused on areas of shared concern and common worldview. The most productive engagements between

Army and Navy officers, for instance, would likely center on the career, psychosocial, and mentoring functions, as well as on discussions of how e-mentoring works in a service context. The heavy Navy focus on benefits to the protégé and career advancement as compared to Army norms suggests that those conversations would not be as productive.

Other Professions

Since much of the literature review in chapter 1 centers on findings from civilian professions, it is not necessary to do a deep dive into those areas. It is notable how welcoming Army culture is of mentoring as a whole, compared to some civilian contexts. Many participants noted the expectation that Army officers would make themselves available for mentoring without thought of compensation. By contrast, in K12 teaching in the United States, a new teacher's mentor is often a compensated position responsible for their development.

All of us will eventually transition into civilian life in one form or another; when we do, we are likely to encounter very different takes on mentoring than what we're used to. In dealing with that culture shock, it may be helpful for former soldiers to go back to the basics. Placing

emphasis on mentoring as a voluntary, mutual relationship where both parties can benefit is a good start. Being realistic about mentoring outcomes by focusing on the mentoring functions may be helpful as well.

In all of these contexts, it's worth remembering:

Not everyone is ready to be a mentor.
Not everyone is ready to be a protégé.
But when you are ready,
It's a beautiful thing.

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First and foremost, I need to thank my study participants, nine officers whose candor and trust made this book possible. Half of them never met me in person and still shared deeply personal experiences and concerns for the betterment of the profession. I hope other soldiers will be inspired by their example to capture and share their own mentoring experiences.

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Ray Kimball
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