

Defining a Research Question

For some time I've been intrigued with the topic of mentoring. From my roots of German heritage where grandfather trained as a carpenter/apprentice in the European culture and later brought that giftedness to America, I've reflected and cogitated upon how society at large wittingly or unwittingly facilitates and blocks mentor/mentee relationships.

As post-modern technology captivates the minds of America's youth (such as the latest computer games craze with X-Box), I see youth's contributions to society generally dwindling. Idle time seems to be rampant. I observed this especially over the holidays in 2005 as both sides of my extended family have children consumed with computer games. And in my church single moms are crying out for surrogate dads to "big-brother" their sons into substantive adults rather than allow them to become "nerd" consumers of society.

While recognizing that student/teacher relationships offer a different dimension in the classroom, I recall one teacher that took the time to mentor me in extracurricular weekend travel to churches for speaking appointments. Another blessing for me occurred in the process as I caught an appreciation of nature from my teacher—we enjoyed bird-watching during the journey to those churches. This teacher went beyond the scope of the classroom to invest in me as a person and in my future maybe wittingly or unwittingly. He was more than a classroom teacher. You could say he was a friend, but "friend" would not describe the complete dimension of our relationship. He was a mentor to me that added perspective and substance to my life that I would never experienced by strict classroom curriculum.

Watching my father work on cars, cultivate a garden, and facilitate the leadership of a home gave me a legacy that further underscores the contribution of mentoring in my life. My father was a barber that purposefully chose not to encourage me in that career path, having to stand on his feet sometimes 12 hours a day. Dad still remains my friend and counselor, but in our earlier days, he was training and disciplining my character, pouring qualities of Christianity, self-respect, and work-ethic, etc. into my life.

Observing mentoring in its many relationships, I've been curious as to how mentees develop based upon the mentor's contribution. More specifically, I've been intrigued by what causes a mentee to *follow or trace* the discipline of a mentor. Some mentoring relationships seem to happen spontaneously while others are assigned. That has specifically piqued my interest. Thus far in my pastoral ministry I've now supervised some seven interns. But supervision is different from mentoring.

Since taking up this subject of mentoring I've avoided the checklist of tasks with my own assigned intern (called young-in-the-ministry candidate now in our Georgia-Cumberland Conference) and rather worked more on developing a relationship with the intern, allowing my contributions to rub off in the process. (Sometimes very unknowingly, I'm sure.)

Assigned intern or mentee situations are different from those that simply happen serendipitously such as Elaine Cox's article touts, "For Better or for Worse: The Matching Process in Formal Mentoring Schemes."

With that in mind, I've chosen to wrestle with the question of mentee follower-ship of the mentor: Do assigned or voluntary relationships best determine the success of a mentee following a mentor? What are the factors that can predetermine the success of a mentee following a mentor?