



Mentoring It is a Two-Way Street

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Most of us have heard of the butterfly effect, where small things can profoundly affect complex systems. We cannot think of a more complex system as can be found in human interaction. Intentionality within the system can create conditions in the future that are significantly impacted by small interactions. Mentoring can be purposeful and, when applied with intentionality, can create great things in the future for both parties. Simply said, mentoring is incredibly important as it can shape the world in the future.

Mentoring has been a hot topic for a long time, especially since the pandemic and the work from home movement. However, as we have grown and progressed in our careers, we realize that it was because of the many people that have taken the time to teach and coach us. We are who we are because of their careful and well-timed tutelage. We both appreciate their time and realize that mentoring is not as easy as it sounds. But the more we do it, the more rewarding it can be.

Most people think of mentoring as a top-down teaching or coaching assignment. The mentor teaches, and the protege learns. This is a very traditional view of mentoring. Instead, mentoring is a two-way relationship in which both parties simultaneously give and receive. This symbiotic relationship is vital for both parties to learn and grow. There is an old saying that one teaches the things they most need to learn, and a two-way mentoring relationship provides context and content to support this idea.

Developing this approach to mentoring is fulfilling and creates strong bonds between the parties that are enduring.

We want to highlight a mentoring relationship we have developed over the past eight years. Both of us share similar passions for creating great experiences within our work as well as how we treat others in the world. We have been mentoring each other around each other's growth needs and believe this article would be perfect for highlighting the strengths of this type of relationship.

Leah's story

Two of my greatest mentors in SMPS and throughout my career have been Andrea Story, FSMPS, CPSM (my Alaskan mentor and friend) and Craig Galati, FAIA, FSMPS, CPSM. These relationships have grown beyond traditional senior-to-junior coaching mentorship into two-way education and inspiration spanning many years and miles. Along the way, I have discovered just how critical it is to have mentors at every step of our careers, not just when we are starting out. Both of these relationships have also taught us some key approaches to maximizing the value of a mentoring relationship.

Say "Yes!" to new opportunities

Craig's mentorship and partnership have inspired and guided my career and my mindset for nearly a decade. Craig approached me at the Build Business conference in 2014, with his trademark welcoming smile and contagious enthusiasm, to help create



something that would disrupt and inspire SMPS members and Build Business attendees to think differently — SMPS MAX. Market. Act. eXchange. No idea was too crazy to explore; in fact, that ideation was expected. My MAX experience with Craig was truly the first time in my career when I felt not only empowered but also 100% expected to innovate and apply every ounce of my creativity. Craig helped assemble the perfect cast of partners and simply paved the way and parted the waters to allow the full vision to come to life.

At the time, I thought I was only helping to create a conference program; I didn't realize that Craig's belief in me and his support and encouragement would inspire self-growth I had never expected. Craig was mentoring each of us, even though he didn't realize it, and pushing us all to achieve what was possible to get every one of us to our next levels.

Strive to inspire and elevate each other

Craig has taught me to always strive for the SMPS vision of transforming my business (and myself) through marketing leadership. So it was a pivotal moment when Craig took the MAX stage the following year to tell his story of reluctant leadership. Never had I heard a leader in our industry tell such a personal account of the real, raw side of building a business. And never have I met someone so committed to thinking big, living his "Why," and making big dreams a reality. I was incredibly honored when Craig asked me to help be his sounding board and coach as he prepared for his MAX talk. More importantly, that coaching transformed our

relationship into a two-way mentorship — with a mutual goal of helping push and encourage each other to achieve our potential and our biggest visions. It doesn't matter that we are at different points in our careers; what matters is that we share common philosophies and values, have high expectations for each other, and always push each other to reach that next level.

Learn between the lines

The most significant value in mentorship is often found beyond the structured content chosen solely by the mentor and delivered directly to the mentee in a mentorship program. I have learned so much from observing great leadership in action and applying the lessons learned in my own life. In many ways, Craig's story and the leadership he models daily ultimately motivated me to take the leap and become a principal of my architecture firm. Today, I get the most joy in helping empower my team to achieve what's possible, a lesson I learned from seeing Craig's leadership style. I take any opportunity I can to hear Craig speak at SMPS events. I always keep a thoroughly dog-eared copy of Craig's book, "The Reluctant Leader," with me as a reference guide and a reminder to strive for excellence in leadership.

Be authentic and open

Since first working together, Craig and I have had many spirited conversations exploring the "what-ifs" and the "why-nots." As our firm's brands and philosophies are very similar, "What would Craig do?" is often a question that guides me. Craig has

Colorado State University
Shepardson Building for
Cannon Design, Adolfson and
Peterson Construction, JVA,
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become a friend, a teaming partner, a champion, someone I look to for marketing-led inspiration, a creative resource, and the first person I think of when I'm trying to solve a tough business challenge or push myself or my firm to achieve our true purpose and potential.

Craig's Story

I met Leah in 2014 when we were both working on the programs for the 2015 Build Business Conference. I was so impressed. We couldn't live in more different parts of the country—me in Las Vegas, Nevada, and her in Anchorage, Alaska, and we were in different stages of our careers. But even with this distance, we were able to develop a great relationship. The following are some things one should pay attention to when looking for a mentoring relationship.

Look for Common Values

Although Leah is younger than me with very different life experiences, we both share similar passions and a desire to make the world a better place. Having shared values and purpose made it much easier for me to have deep discussions with her. I knew we could relate to one another, which was important to me. We did have another commonality; we both worked for architectural firms focused on creating meaningful places of experience for our clients and their patrons.

I don't think our relationship started as the old-style mentor/protege relationship. From the beginning,

I learned so much from her about her work and how it applied to mine. Leah has been through experiences that I have neither contemplated nor experienced. And my experiences running my own business are ones she has not experienced. I have watched her blossom as both a principal in her firm, and as a mother. I have learned that a personal passion can result in creating better communities and can result in her ability to bring work of meaning into her firm.

Leah is an outspoken advocate for accessibility and access for all to parks and community places which has resulted in her firm becoming experts in the design of accessible places for everyone. This passion has caused me to think differently about the world around me — to put on a new lens which has impacted the work in a very positive manner. It's not that I didn't know of the need for this type of thinking, but Leah has helped me see it differently and act accordingly. These deep lessons are invaluable.

Find Someone You Trust

I knew from the beginning that I could trust Leah. She helped me tell my story, which I presented in my MAX talk and subsequent book, "The Reluctant Leader." If not for her encouragement, coaching, and convincing me it was a story worth telling, I don't think I could've found the courage to tell it authentically and humbly. She was purposeful in her coaching and never judged me or the situations I had found myself in. She just helped me tell my story the best I could.

Teach to Your Strengths

When Leah became a principal in her firm, I was able to help her anticipate some of the things that would come along with the title. Not just the typical business-related things but the new interactions she would have with her colleagues. When one becomes a principal in a firm, each word and action is placed under a microscope and judged differently than before. I think these interactions can be met best through transparency and vulnerability. Leah has these characteristics, but it is sometimes nice to simply be able to talk about it with someone who has been there before.

Make it About the Relationship

One needs to make the time available to keep the relationship fresh. Even if we haven't talked for months, we can pick up right where we left off. So it is important to check in regularly. You never know

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Photography



what a word of encouragement or a quick "hello" can mean to someone. The relationship is meaningful so treat it that way. Our two-way mentoring relationship has grown over the years, and I truly look forward to our calls and the chance to meet at conferences with great anticipation. I know both of us will be better for taking the time to talk.

Conclusion

In addition to the traditional benefits of learning and growing our careers and lives, there are many unexpected benefits of developing two-way mentoring relationships. It can help you learn to listen better in daily work and meet people in different industries or practice areas. We can't tell you how often a simple discussion or dialogue has opened new fields of discovery for us. Mentoring relationships also open windows to new perspectives on issues and can help you put on a new lens to view the world. The relationship also opens up new networks and opportunities for collaborating.

Another benefit of mentoring is learning more about yourself. We both believe that our calls have inspired us to dig deeper into our own understanding of "what makes us tick." It helps us remember the 'whys' of what we do, which often become forgotten as we grow in our careers. Mentoring helps us learn how to interact more effectively with others and be more respectful in our interactions.

Mentoring relationships are very rewarding. We suggest that you begin developing them. Wouldn't it be something to help create the butterfly effect for others? ■

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Tips From CPSMs

During the pandemic at the SMPS Pinnacle Experience there was a presentation on "horizontal mentorship" by Ambition in Motion. This peer mentorship paired senior-level industry leaders based on 360-degree reviews, a mentorship survey, and a needs assessment. The program provides a structured, data-driven mentorship and strives to pair people who are at similar places in their careers or have similar philosophies in a non-competitive environment.

This innovative mentorship structure was hugely valuable to me during a time when I needed a sounding board. I had become a principal and partner in my firm at the beginning of the pandemic and spent too much time dealing with imposter syndrome. "Surthriving" during the pandemic was largely due to having a partnership where we could vent about professional and personal challenges, ideate and dream in a safe space, ask each other tough questions, and hold each other accountable for setting and achieving goals.

- Be open and honest, but remember that confidentiality is critical
- Be open to learning
- Create a safe space
- Define boundaries for communication methods, frequency, availability, and response time
- Ask more than tell
- Commitment is important. Never waste the mentor or mentee's time
- Honesty is the top priority
- Set the parameters for the relationship up front, so all parties know needs and expectations
- Prepare for each interaction
- Recognize that a person's time is a gift
- Audiobook recommendation: *How to Help and Be Helped*, by Russell Brand