

# CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

## A Phase Model Approach

By Daniel G. Hopwood and Wyatt Bradbury

**I**F YOU ARE PART OF THE YOUNGER GENERATIONS in the workforce, you probably entered a workplace full of buzzwords and corporate initiatives to engage and turn employees into “leaders.” One of the programs often found is a mentoring program. Such a program is likely structured with an assigned mentor who is at a senior level and seasoned in the organization. The mentor has a checklist of items to discuss with their newly assigned mentee and the ultimate goal is to ensure their mentee’s assimilation into the organizational culture. While these programs certainly have a place, they should not be called mentoring. Ultimately, they do little more than create hierarchical relationships within the company, typically designed to elicit a specific and tangible output. Additionally, these programs present a means for bias to creep into the workspace, as noted by Marquet (2017), based on the typical design of managers mentoring subordinates. These programs tend to focus on doling out management advice in support of a predetermined destination (Vaynerchuk, 2017).

Within the OSH profession, there seems to be great interest surrounding the topic of mentoring and interpersonal collaboration. Between July 2018 and July 2019, one-third of the editions of *Professional Safety* contained articles referencing the need or opportunity for mentoring and mentors. Diana Stegall’s January 2020 President’s Message, “Experience the Power of Mentoring,” focused solely on the topic and referenced the work

of one of this article’s authors. Mentoring is something that has become distorted in our workplaces, yet it is an activity that professional membership organizations such as ASSP support, and credible sources such as the Society for Human Resources Management say it is important for success in our professional and personal lives (Gurchiek, 2020). So, what is mentoring? Is it formal or informal? Is it passive or active? Can mentoring be provided on demand? Is mentoring focused only on those entering safety? Although a grand, unified answer to these questions may be “yes,” the authors come down on the side of more formality than less, a more active than passive approach, and mentoring that utilizes on-demand efforts strategically, not as par for the course or as a standard approach.

The safety profession and ASSP place great emphasis on mentoring. For example, the ASSP Women in Safety Excellence (WISE) Common Interest Group promotes mentoring extensively within the group, and those seeking to create mentoring opportunities elsewhere are often referred to the WISE model. The group has discussed the benefits and value of a mentoring relationship and has issued guidelines for being either a mentor or mentee. Although to a large extent nuance, the value statement on ASSP’s “Mentoring in Safety” website highlights opportunities for both formal and informal mentoring relationships. Through those relationships, a member can “better navigate the safety profession and solidify your career path while forming lifelong friendships that can help you grow personally and professionally” (ASSP, n.d.). This article supports the argument for more formality rather than less. However, that is not to say that less formal relationships have little or no value, but that they may better be referred to as something other than mentoring in the truest sense of the word. Alternative terms include “resources,” “guides,” “sounding board” and “collaboration.” All of these are essential, but do they rise to the level of mentoring?

The earliest references to mentoring that the authors identified appear in Homer’s *Odyssey*, from approximately the 8th century B.C.E. The mythological Mentor is sent to Telemachus to guide and ensure his success in the absence of his father,

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Mentoring and mentorship have been a topic of interest within ASSP communities over the past few years. This article continues an analysis of that theme.
- The article highlights the important characteristics of both the mentor and mentee. For a successful mentor, these traits include being motivational, empowering and ethical, while for mentees, it is important to be committed and active in the relationship.
- Additional emphasis is placed on the importance of strengthening the formality of the mentoring relationship.
- Natural phases occur in the mentor/mentee relationship. It is critical that these phases are properly aligned to ensure success.

King Odysseus (O'Donnell, 2017). This makes the first mention of "mentor" in recorded history a who, not a what; mentor was originally a person, not a process or procedure. Mentor was an individual expected to nurture, support, protect and ensure that Telemachus was instilled with a "heroic mentality" in the absence of his father's ability to do so (O'Donnell, 2017). This approach has arguably been lost with the corporate mentoring process we know today. Mentor was someone with whom Telemachus was familiar serving for all practical purposes, as a substitute parent to the young man (Dova, 2012). Mentor and Telemachus had mutual affection and respect, but due to outside forces, the original mentor struggled. At this point in the story, Athena the goddess of wisdom, war and crafts, impersonated Mentor and returned to Telemachus. The reception and response were no different than had the real Mentor been present; the mentoring relationship was powerful, and the predetermined respect and relationship blossomed (O'Donnell, 2017). While ultimately it was Athena/Mentor (a person) who guided Telemachus to success, it was the mentoring process that won the day.

Entering the 1970s and 1980s, depictions of Mentor in modern literature references slowly began to focus on the what and not the who, highlighting the functions of the mentor, as opposed to the understanding of who Mentor was to Telemachus and why he was left by King Odysseus to guide his son into manhood. Thus, the actions and influences of Mentor became more important than the relationship and person. These depictions within literature focused on specific aspects of mentoring, identifying them almost as if they were a formula to follow or series of boxes to check. This quickly moved the concepts surrounding mentoring away from the idea of relationships providing for growth, development and the transfer of knowledge from the mentor to the mentee.

As noted by Bradbury (2019):

The concept of passing the torch from one generation of OSH professionals to the next cannot be imagined as a relay race in which we run a designated portion, hand off the baton, and let the next person run with the legacy and glory of all hanging in the balance. Our profession is a marathon in which the destination, in many ways, is the journey. (p. 14)

In a mentoring relationship, both the mentor and mentee are committed to finishing the journey together. They work to successfully push each other to success, completion and ultimately improvement. It is up to the mentor to provide, direct and support opportunities and give access to that which might help the mentee gain and sustain personal or professional success.

This development can only occur with consistent application. Hickey and Kramer (2018) share that "formal mentoring is both planned and intentional, and occurs when two individuals agree to enter into a mentor/mentee relationship" (p. 31). Mentor, for example, was left by Odysseus to nurture, support, protect, role model and exhibit a visionary perception to Telemachus demanding integrity, personal investment and the development of a relationship with the young mentee based on deep mutual affection and respect. This formality of the relationship puts the idea of mentoring in a highly active sense. There is a high level of engagement required of both parties for the relationship to be successful. Informal relationships have a passivity to their nature. The same intentionality or mutual commitment is not present in informal relationships.

This understanding of commitment, formality and activity plays into the definition of a mentor. Notice that the discussion is on who a mentor is and the specific relationship they have with the mentee, not on what they actually do or should do. Defining a mentor as an experienced and trusted advisor has advantages. Other terms that apply and can be used synonymously with "mentor" include "confidante," "counselor," "consultant," "master" and "guru." A mentor is a person who imparts knowledge and supports development.

According to the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania (2007), "Modern employees need mentors as much as Telemachus, especially in these times of corporate upheaval." In many ways, this statement is especially true as we continue to work through and respond to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The discussion, research and writing of this article began prior to the pandemic. As dynamic as the world and business were at the time, the spread, identification and immense steps taken to control the catastrophic impact of the virus served as a starting point for the authors' thoughts and this article. Although some corporate upheaval was precipitated by the pandemic, it serves as a ready model for the need and value of mentoring; some mentees may now be responsible for what their mentors once led and some will one day be responsible for managing events like the pandemic. The implication is straightforward: mentees must take learning from a mentor seriously and mentors must equally consider how they spend time with their charge, the mentee. Hopwood (2004) addressed this dynamic when writing about the driving forces of safety management: "The second driving force concentrates on factors that modify one's view to safety—specifically the management function." The ability to modify a view or even consider alternate views is often the result of being taught not only the value of, but also how to consider and adopt, where appropriate, modified views to safety management. The mentor serves as that guide, sounding board and quality control check before alternatives are put into motion.

If we agree that successful, meaningful mentorship generally requires formality, what we have is a covenant, or a formal agreement between parties, between the mentor and mentee. In the legal sense, it is a formal written clause whereas theology would describe it as a relationship of commitment. In any event, there is a formal understanding that needs to occur between parties as a result of this formality and the authors liken that agreement to the concept of a covenant.

It is then essential to recognize the prevailing traits of that covenant required of both parties. As shown in Figure 1 (p. 36), these traits are distinguishable from the characteristics of the mentor and mentee. Although the traits listed in Table 1 may seem intuitive, the authors stress that each party to the mentorship covenant must be familiar with and honor them.

Throughout history, the best and brightest have benefitted from a mentor and the rigor brought by formality in the relationship. At age 14, Leonardo da Vinci was placed as an apprentice to his first mentor, Andrea del Verrocchio, a contemporary of his father. In his biography of da Vinci, Isaacson (2018) notes, "Verrocchio conducted a rigorous teaching program that involved studying surface anatomy, mechanics, drawing techniques and the effects of light and shade on material such as draperies." Although nuanced, what this and other chapter elements highlight is the rigor (read: formality) applied to the apprenticeship, or rather, the mentoring process. None will argue that da Vinci's work in anatomy, drawing, and use of light

**TABLE 1**  
**FUNDAMENTAL TRAITS**  
**OF MENTORS & MENTEES**

Mentor	Mentee
Knowledge	Committed
Resource(s)	<b>Active</b>
Motivator	<b>Honest</b>
Support	<b>Inquisitive</b>
Role model	Seeks clarity
<b>Teacher</b>	Respectful
Attributes	Attributive
<b>Empowering</b>	Skilled
Skilled	<b>Available</b>
<b>Networked</b>	<b>Perspective</b>
<b>Available</b>	
Ethical	
Perspective	

**Note.** Adapted from "Mentorship in Professional Safety—A Mentor/Mentee Phase Model," by D.G. Hopwood, 2019.

and shadow has stood the test of time. Although da Vinci was immensely talented as a child, Verrocchio's hand remained in and influenced da Vinci's work for the rest of his life. Anyone who has served as a mentor, even in a less prolific and renowned career than da Vinci's, would be proud that their contributions lasted throughout a mentee's working life.

Those who have been in formal mentoring relationships recognize how critical it is that the mentor be knowledgeable of the field the mentee wishes to enter, strategy development and other critical elements necessary for the mentee to make progress both in the relationship and their journey. Many of those elements (traits) the authors believe to be essential are listed in Table 1 in the "Mentor" column.

Let's briefly address one additional mentor trait that most will likely recognize as critical: being a resource ally. This trait is highlighted separately as the implications to and for the mentee are broad and serve as a great exemplar for who the mentee may seek out as a mentor. Here, the term *resource* is purposely broad. It implies that the mentor both *is* a resource and *has* resources available. Part of the covenant is that these resources will help answer the questions that the mentee brings to the relationship and help provide the mentee tools, relationships and, in some cases, opportunities. While this article does not specifically address the resource trait in this discussion, mentors must be cognizant that mentees will likely seek to leverage this trait. Although the mentee may not overtly indicate that they need or want resources, they almost always will, especially when the mentee is young or new to a field and seeking entry to it.

The fundamental traits for mentees listed in Table 1 are different from those of mentors, and they should be, for the most part. Let's concentrate briefly on a few of those distinctions (indicated by bold text in Table 1). This discussion highlights the traits of each party to the covenant that should be present or rapidly developed to ensure that the mentoring engagement is as successful and meaningful as possible.

Lastly, as to the thoughts on formality, there may be what has been described as "on-demand" moments in the mentoring relationship. While these moments are inevitably needed, mentoring cannot be built on a foundation of these activities. If a mentor finds themselves "winging it," the relationship they have with the mentee is something other than a true mentoring effort; it may be meaningful and have value, but it is different from mentoring.

### Mentor Traits

At this point in the discussion, it is important to understand the need for a mentee to focus their attention on an individual in the mentoring relationship. Most mentoring relationships are best focused on one individual occupying the role within the covenant described. The mentee should not look for a mentor in each of the mentor traits listed, but rather, the mentor should guide them to appropriate resources to fill the gaps on traits where the mentor may not be strongest.

A good example of this various technical safety skills. Although the mentor should be capable of helping with the core safety principles that the mentee must be aware of, the individual may not be the best resource for fall protection or confined space entry, for example. Here, ethical mentoring suggests that the mentee should be referred to someone within the mentor's network who is a better resource on these technical topics.

The following discussion highlights four of the mentor traits in detail. These are not listed in a specific order. What is most critical for one mentor or mentee may be fall lower in importance on another's list. These traits all have value and they can be ordered as needed in a specific mentor/mentee relationship.

### Teacher

The biggest question the mentor faces when considering their responsibility is what they should teach. The best answer is likely "a lot." What is taught varies based on the experience level and maturity of the mentee. A younger, perhaps college-age mentee may need guidance on almost everything: professionalism, technical skills, relationship-building and more. In this case, those traits in Table 1 can be co-opted as a quality control list of what should be taught. For the scope of this article, let's focus briefly on teaching specifically, and three others. (The authors encourage readers to develop their own list that addresses what to role model as a mentor. The authors support the same approach for mentees: create a list of traits you would like to see role modeled by your mentor.)

In many cases, succession planning is tied to preparing someone else to assume one's position in the future and might be a component of mentoring particularly in the sense of teaching a mentee. Buttino (2019) indicates that as many as 75% of those surveyed did not have a succession plan in place for their organization's safety function. Planning for someone's exit and the resulting transition is a hallmark of management. It can easily be deduced that a mentor could assist a mentee, even a mature one, in the process of succession planning both their exit and handing over the reins to another professional. In this case, the mentee may also serve as a mentor in some capacity as they help prepare the person who will be taking over their responsibilities.

At times the mentee is from a different generation than the mentor. Today's workforce is multigenerational, and certainly three, but frequently four and on occasion five distinct generations are present in many workplaces. Although it may seem intuitive that a mentor is from an older generation than a mentee, that is not always the case. With the differences in generations comes varied preferences within communication styles. Smeak (2020) highlights distinctions of the various generations and provides, inferentially, how a mentor and mentee can best communicate with each other. The best teachers are great communicators. Whether the discussion with the mentee is about transitioning away from the field or another important topic, recognizing the generation of the mentee and capitalizing on that recognition will improve the mentor's teachable opportunities.

Assume for a moment that the mentoring relationship is focused on developing a mentee's technical safety skills. Safety professionals should seek a mentor who can demonstrate the core principles of safety and safety management (teach these principles or connect the mentee with someone who can). The mentor should be able to discuss the commonly accepted approaches to safety: the hierarchy of controls, hazard and operational management, behavioral approaches, training, regulatory compliance and so forth, not just talk about their way of managing safety. Their way may be important, but the mentor's responsibility when voicing their way is to be clear and honest about it, not leave the mentee thinking that what they have heard is the preeminent safety methodology or philosophy of the day, or as colloquially noted, gospel. There is a critical element to why we concentrate on having a mentor who can demonstrate core principles, who can teach them and has put them into practice. That element: The mentee must develop skills that can be applied and help keep people safe and healthy. In the end, the mentor must be capable of helping the mentee develop the skills to undertake safety activities that matter and make a difference.

### Empowering

Asking a group for the definition of "empowerment" would yield dozens of varying responses. In some respects, this is because empowering someone often has the quality of giving permission in an operative sense and is found to be truer in a boss/subordinate relationship. Most often, that operative permission is not part of the mentoring relationship being discussed. Empowering a mentee falls more in line with building strength and confidence (e.g., developing skills) in what they do, decisions they make and what their future may hold.

In a solid mentoring relationship, the mentor will see that the mentee organically becomes empowered as their familiarity, knowledge and skill grows throughout the mentoring relationship. One way to observe this development is in the type of questions the mentee asks. As their empowerment grows, questions will shift from "why" and "how," to "will you (the mentor) provide feedback on a strategy I developed or what I did." This shift is most clearly identified by Marquet (2013) as moving from a position of following orders or asking permission to act and instead declaring one's intentionality to do so and allowing for the exchange of information and guidance, not direction, along the way.

### Networked

It is helpful when a mentor is "networked." This network capability and structure will benefit the mentee in many ways. As noted, a network is a resource and a mentee taking advantage of a mentor's network strengths will take on a different level of criticality depending on the experience and maturity of the mentee.

For example, if a mentee is seeking a college and program to study, the mentor has a significant role to play in that decision. If the mentee is already in college, having a mentor who is networked within an industry or among a group of companies may be leveraged, aiding the mentee in gaining an internship, interview or perhaps that first job. Many mentees who have been there appreciate those first few doors that were opened by a mentor. Mentees who are more experienced and may have reached a crossroads (e.g., whether to go the management route, stay technical or teach) need a mentor with a network who may encourage talking to a career counselor or a colleague who has

already experienced what the mentee is going through. This network assists the mentee in determining direction and value: the pluses and minuses of a decision.

This article has discussed relationships that are critical for technical needs. Few safety professionals are well-versed in every technical aspect of OSH. A mentor will almost certainly have a network to refer the mentee to, make essential introductions and help the mentee follow through in their quest for technical advice.

But, for many, the mentor's most powerful networking advantage may be most strongly capitalized upon when the mentee is faced with significant career upheaval. When a mentee's position is eliminated or the individual has been asked to leave an organization, a true, dedicated and formal mentor will spring into action and assist their mentee through that complex time. This might take the form of coaching, guidance or the mentor simply acting as a sounding board; the mentor uses their experience and skills to help the mentee through a rough patch.

### Available

Of the qualities to look for in a mentor, Abbajoy (2019) emphasizes the need for a mentor to be available: "The ability and availability to commit real time and energy to the mentoring relationship." In this context, availability is more than being physically present at predetermined times. It also implies as-needed availability (e.g., in times of stress, turmoil or change for the mentee), and mental and emotional availability. A mentor who is steady but whose availability is dynamic, emotive and energetic breeds the same in the mentee. Again, the authors suggest that the mentoring relationship be as formal as possible; doing so will serve as continued motivation of the mentor, helping to ensure their time, physical, emotional, professional and energy availability.

Story and Kight (2019) focus on a close cousin to mentorship: worker participation. Worker participation can serve as an effective element of a mentoring relationship when a mentor seeks to help a mentee gain experience, test ideas or get involved in something the individual has previously been hesitant to take on. They discuss six elements of worker participation that can be easily converted to efforts that may be undertaken by the mentor on behalf of the mentee, and that likely fall within several of the traits described in Table 1 (p. 33). These six elements are:

1. information
2. procedure
3. creative
4. integration
5. collaboration
6. participation maintenance

The active component of these participation elements is described using the terms "allow," "require," "integrate," "involve" and "ensure." One can easily recognize that each of these elements can be utilized by a mentor to double-check their contributions to the mentee. For example, a mentor can ask themselves whether they are a true source of essential information; whether they can demonstrate a technical procedure for the mentee or find someone who can; or whether they breed creativity, which is so critical in today's business world. Story and Kight (2019) have hit on some important mentoring terms, approaches and value. Those who have been or will be mentors should keep these terms in mind when evaluating their contributions or planning a mentorship strategy with a new mentee.

Table 1 (p. 33) includes many other mentor traits. As suggested, those acting as a mentor should develop their own list, taking the traits the individual deems valuable. When adding to or modify this list, remember one thing: take each trait seriously and honestly deploy them with a mentee. Doing so not only validates the formality (or the covenant) described, but also is simply the right thing to do.

### **Mentee Traits**

Mentees have a nearly equal responsibility as the mentor to bring something to the mentoring experience. While all of the traits listed on the mentee side of Table 1 (p. 33) are important, this discussion expands on five of these traits. For mentees engaged in a formal mentoring relationship, these traits should be firmly established and demonstrated consistently.

#### **Active**

Once initiated, mentoring requires action by both the mentor and mentee. However, much of the energy should be expended by the mentee. As with many trades, it is the apprentice who tackles the tasks that require expending the most energy. Journeymen take on tasks that need more technical skill and capabilities, while managers plan, organize, control and administer operations. As noted, the authors do not see the mentoring process as an occasional or as an as-needed process. Once a formal mentoring relationship has concluded, checking in with a mentor, touching base with a mentee and getting together to see how things are going make perfect sense. But such activities are not the hallmark of an ongoing mentoring relationship and caution should be exercised that this not be the substance of the mentor/mentee relationship; the relationship requires more consistent activity. The mentee needs to expend the energy needed, staying active in meeting the assignments of the mentor and consistently engaging the individual.

#### **Honest**

The mentee owes the mentor absolute honesty: honesty and clarity about goals and time commitments, and honest effort in the agreed upon activities of the mentoring relationship. A mentee who cannot be honest at any stage of the relationship should expect that, once the mentor recognizes this, the mentoring relationship may be recalibrated, paused or perhaps canceled altogether.

Honesty is fundamental and demonstrates the respect that a mentor is owed and has earned. It is better for a mentor to limit effort toward initiating a mentoring relationship than to initiate one in which the mentee's effort is less than required, whose availability is hit and miss, and whose feedback and dialogue are disingenuous.

#### **Available**

Of the traits discussed in detail here, availability is the only trait described for both mentor and mentee. While one other specific trait, perspective, is on both lists in Table 1 (p. 33), many of the others listed are in the same "trait family." Such is the case with ethical and honest behavior, and attributes (e.g., the mentor in our discussion focuses on the attributes of a job, career, pathway). While in the spirit of being attributive, the mentee recognizes and provides attribution to the mentor for all their contributions.

With respect to availability, Abbajoy (2019) puts it simply this way: The mentee must be "ready, willing and able to meet

on a regular basis . . . so, mentees must also be committed to upholding their end of the bargain." It is certainly not suggested for a mentoring relationship to be one where a mentee is, for practical purposes, an anvil with the mentor wielding a shaping hammer forcefully demanding that meetings only take place at specific times. While physical availability is essential, emotional and interest availability share equal space on the mentoring marquee. Factors often change and relationships shift. Regardless, the mentee must be physically present, emotionally ready to tackle the tasks that a mentor has laid out and must be consistent in their commitment to being available.

#### **Perspective**

Clarity of perspective is another baseline requirement. The mentee must be capable of sharing with their mentor their intention in the relationship, what they wish to accomplish, why they want to accomplish it and when. Each of these considerations informs perspective and, without them, the mentor does not know where to lead the mentee; to use a football analogy, the mentor does not know where the goalposts are. Getting to the goalposts defines success; both parties in the relationship must know where the posts are. Again, perspective provides that clarity.

Mentoring matters; good mentoring matters more. Abbajoy (2019) says, "The benefits of mentoring are many. Studies show that good mentoring can lead to greater success, including promotion, raises and increased opportunities." Success has many measures, but in most mentoring relationships these are among a mentee's primary goals, perhaps second only to gaining a meaningful job.

#### **Inquisitive**

The mentee should be inquisitive throughout the mentoring process. Inquisitive does not solely mean asking "why" at every opportunity. Being inquisitive entails a healthy balance of curiosity and critically probing deeper, all from a position of learning. The approach and attitude are key.

One should not simply seek information nor conduct themselves in a manner that challenges what one finds. The mentee should be open to new ideas, means and methods that arise from their study and development of their craft. Simply asking "why" has developed an association with challenging the process in place or information presented. It tends to quickly create walls and leads to a guarding of information. Being inquisitive requires being open to anything that might be learned during a process of discovery, no matter how wrong or nonconforming it might be. It requires looking past one's beliefs to understand the perspective of others including the challenges, resource conflicts and motivations they must navigate daily. Being inquisitive requires a genuine desire to understand in a comprehensive and fundamental manner.

Inquisitive also denotes that a mentee will undertake some study independently. The individual should actively look for opportunities to engage with the mentor and the resources, processes and opportunities introduced by the mentor for the benefit of the mentee. The mentee should seek to critically evaluate that which they know while gaining new knowledge, context and information. The synthesis of these elements should occur with the mentor to ensure that conclusions both promote learning and support the development of the mentee.

Note that the mentee list is not constructed of absolutes. It is, however, built of solid elements that can and should be con-



**FIGURE 1**  
**THE MENTOR/MENTEE PHASE MODEL**

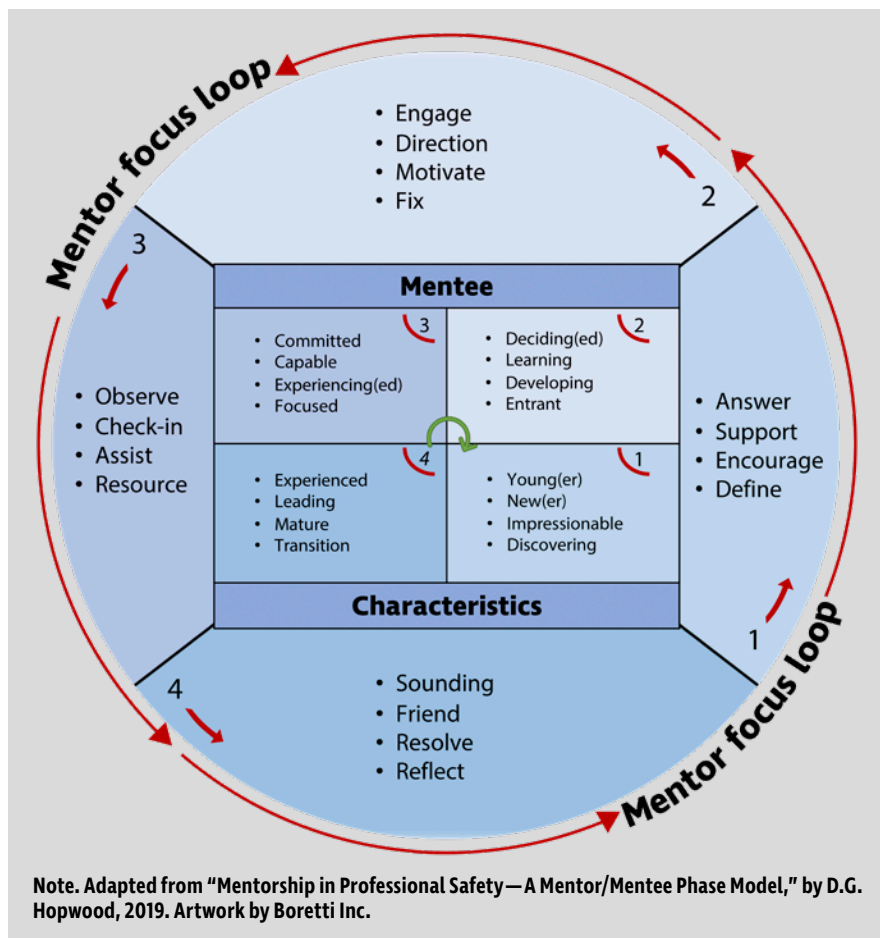
sistently demonstrated. It is possible that other mentee traits can be added to the list in Table 1 (p. 33), and the authors encourage meaningful additions.

### Framing the Mentoring Relationship in a Four-Phase Model

The characteristics of the mentor and mentee reside within a process or phases (Figure 1). While some of the mentor traits may be more strongly demonstrated in certain parts of the phases, each mentee trait flows through all four phases.

In Figure 1, the phases that exist in a mentoring relationship are described for both the mentor and the mentee. Within the interior of the model, mentee characteristics in each phase are described. These characteristics for the mentee are based upon experiences and intuition.

Correlated to each phase of the mentee's characteristics are the focused efforts of the mentor. As in many phase or maturity models, the construct demonstrates that as the mentoring process evolves, both the characteristics of the mentee and the role (focus) of the mentor shift.



### Phase Alignment

In this model, the mentee characteristics and the mentor focus are numbered; they should be read together, that is, aligned. Thus, in Phase 1, the mentee is quite possibly some combination of emerging, newer, impressionable or discovering, for example, relative to academic or career pursuits. The mentor's role in this phase is to answer questions, be supportive, encourage the mentee and help define options that may be pursued. What the mentor provides in Phase 1 tracks with what the mentee needs. To contrast, benefits would be limited, if not outright confusing for the mentee if they are in Phase 1, but the mentor deploys or demonstrates the characteristics of Phase 4.

It is notable that early in the mentoring relationship, in Phases 1 and 2, the mentor's efforts are more direct and tactical. As the relationship matures, interaction with the mentee flips and the mentor's efforts become more strategic, as seen in Phases 3 and 4. Note that the mentor focus loop moves counterclockwise as the mentoring relationship takes its course and especially as the mentee develops and matures.

At the center of Figure 1, an arrow indicates a clockwise rotation. This demonstrates that the mentoring relationship is dynamic, not linear. The mentee may, for various reasons, move back a phase or two in the lifespan of a mentoring relationship. The dynamic qualities that may trigger this clockwise movement might be job issues or change, scholastic challenges or life-changing events, as examples. What is clear is that the mentor/mentee relationship changes, matures and evolves.

There are no time frames associated with this maturation process. For some, the movement from Phase 1 to Phase 3 or 4 may be quick, while for others it may be slow. The pace, while important for both parties to manage, falls primarily to the

mentor to guide (this contrasts with the active element of the mentee as discussed). Although the characteristics in each phase proposed may be generally understood, following are a few clarifying comments to help put the perspective presented here into context.

In Phase 2, the mentee may be in learning mode; the mentor corollary is likely that of being a motivating force. The dialogue from the mentor may be, "I know, it is hard and complex. But stick with it, you'll do OK. Let me know where I can assist or if I can help find someone who can better explain fluid dynamics. I'm confident that if you put one foot in front of the other, you'll achieve this goal." The same supportive voice will be present if the mentee is making a decision, such as choosing a school or a job. In the spirit of engagement and direction, the mentor voice may be one saying, "Hey, let's get together and discuss your possible decision or options. This is a big deal in your life, let's just talk it through."

As the mentee becomes more focused and capable (see Phase 3), the mentor role moves along accordingly. In this phase, the mentor may observe and comment or be an essential resource for the mentee. In Phase 4, there is a continuation of the evolution of skills, capabilities and, necessarily, the relationship between the mentee and mentor. In Phase 4, there are a couple of distinct mentor characteristics, such as "sounding" and "friend." These two characteristics tend to go together. It is not unusual for a mentee and mentor to become friends, perhaps lifetime friends. An attribute of a true friend is to be a sounding board. The mentee may say, "I just need you to listen for a minute." Being a sounding board may incorporate characteristics from other phases, such as supporting, engaging and observing. Sometimes be-

ing a sounding board to a mentee means the mentor listens and that is mostly what they do. As we mature, it is often the case when we are given an opportunity to discuss what is on our mind, our own voice resolves whatever conflict we may be experiencing. A sincere, experienced mentor may do just that: allow the mentee to talk through things and work out whatever needs to be mostly on their own. They are present physically, emotionally and otherwise should the mentee stumble and need them.

As shown in Figure 1, matching the mentee and mentor phases is essential. It is more the responsibility of the mentor to help ensure that the mentor and mentee are phase-aligned. And, should the phases start to get out of alignment, making subtle corrections and shifts is preferred over big corrections.

Certainly, like other types of relationships, some pitfalls can reduce the effectiveness of the learning and growth taking place. One pitfall is not sustaining the mentoring efforts. A trait shared by both the mentor and mentee is availability. The mentoring relationship, like the people in it, will evolve, and both participants should ensure that they are working to sustain their efforts toward remaining open and available as they grow personally and professionally. The authors believe that there is no post-mentoring period, rather, an evolution of the phases described.

Another key pitfall is not following through on commitments. Like the failure to sustain, this can be detrimental to the growth that has occurred. Failure to follow through demonstrates the lack of a covenant between the mentor and mentee and will likely lead to a breakdown in the relationship.

Finally, not being honest and clear can lead to mentoring outside of one's capacity and the relationship slipping into an unhealthy "everything to everyone" dynamic. The mentor should know their own abilities and utilize their network and resources to their advantage, setting this same example and teaching this understanding to the mentee.

## Conclusion

This article focuses on articulating qualitative, experiential elements of a mentoring relationship within the OSH environment. The thoughts presented here have some universal qualities, but the mentor and mentee traits discussed here, as well as the four-phase mentoring relationship have a special applicability to OSH practitioners. Looking closely, OSH professionals will see themselves within the traits and phases, the latter describing where they have been or may wish to go.

Looking at the phase model inevitably leads to the question, "what is the time frame engaged in the mentoring process or required for all four phases?" The short answer is we do not know. The more complex answer is that a true mentoring relationship will take the time needed to ensure success, whatever that time frame is. It is OK, for example, if the mentor and mentee agree that their engagement is to last a year given two caveats: 1. the traits in Table 1 (p. 33) always apply; and 2. mentor and mentee agree on which phase they are in when the mentoring process formally concludes. Success, then, can be measured by intent, effort and support as well as an understanding that at the conclusion of the mentoring engagement, both the mentor and mentee are operating within the same phase. This is important in that the mentor may be sending the mentee on their way with guidance on how to best continue their journey. And, in a true

mentoring relationship, the mentor will always be available to support, guide and encourage. **PSJ**

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**Daniel G. Hopwood, M.P.H., CSP, SMS, ARM**, is a vice president and regional risk control leader for Sampo International Insurance. With 42 years of professional safety and risk management experience, he has worked in the insurance industry, served as a director of safety and risk management, and taught various undergraduate and graduate safety classes for more than 25 years. A 43-year member of ASSP, Hopwood has long been engaged in Society activities including serving as a chapter president, regional vice president and various committees, such as the Leadership Conference Planning Committee. He is a professional member of ASSP's San Diego Chapter and a member of the Society's Risk Management Practice Specialty.

**Wyatt Bradbury, M.Eng., CSP, CHST, CIT**, serves as an HSE advisor for Hitachi Rail and as an adjunct professor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. He has experience in aquatic and recreation risk management, electrical construction, powerline safety, rail safety and safety consulting. Bradbury holds a Master of Engineering in Advanced Safety Engineering and Management from the University of Alabama at Birmingham and is pursuing a Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Engineering. He is a professional member and past president of ASSP's National Capital Chapter and a member of the Society's Emerging Professionals in OSH Common Interest Group.