

Stepping up to the Plate to Mentor!

By Kathryn Graver

Several months ago I was asked to be a mentor for a new employee here at the McCormick Center. As I began thinking about how to approach this mentoring request, I remembered how I was mentored at one time.

Years ago, I worked for a very gentle and kind man at a social service agency. As an education major with not much background in social service, I went to Kent many times for guidance and mentoring. After several years of working with him, I felt that I had learned much from his example and words of wisdom; he never tried to tell me what to do or how to do it and respected my ideas and creative approach to situations. As my mentor he would often make suggestions, offer help, and encourage me to reshape my thoughts on a topic by giving me a journal article to review, a few pages in a book to read, or by asking me to contact someone who might have had a similar experience. I learned so much from this experience. I think that whenever I have had the chance to guide or help anyone I have used this exact approach.

MENTOR! WHAT DOES IT REALLY MEAN?

One type of mentoring is a relationship that is formally established for an introductory or short period, often to meet specific organization objectives. For example, a new employee may be paired with a senior employee (Shea, 1992).

After doing a little homework, I learned that my mentoring job at the McCormick Center was just that. I would be helping a new employee become familiar with our culture and norms.

I found the formal mentor title a bit intimidating, so in preparation for my new role, I decided to create a job description to help sort out what the responsibilities could be. I found myself reflecting on my experience as Kent's mentee. Here's what I scribbled down:

Job description of a good mentor:

- *Serve as a guide and coach*
- *Answer questions*
- *Provide assistance and direction (but don't do the work for them)*
- *Be a good listener*
- *Lead without pushing*
- *Provide referrals*
- *Mentor, don't supervise (These are different roles)*

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Does this list look familiar? Does it fit into your job description? As an early childhood leader, it seems to me we all take on these roles as we work to cultivate a strong team.

In many ways I feel that my mentoring experiences have come full circle since I was able to channel much of Kent's mentoring style into my own. By sharing my knowledge and ideas I was able to steer the new employee in the right direction when he needed resources or additional information.

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT YOU IN YOUR ROLE AS MENTOR:

Bloom, P. J. (2007). *From the inside out: The power of reflection and self-awareness*. Lake Forest, IL: New Horizons.

Bloom, P. J. (2005). *Blueprint for action: Achieving center-based change through staff development (revised edition)*. Lake Forest, IL: New Horizons.

Shea, G. (1992). *Mentoring: A practical guide*. Menlo Park, CA: Crisp Publications.

Edelman, M. W. (1999). *Lanterns: A memoir of mentors*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.

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