

# Lateral Mentoring

by the @'s\*



\* A group of 18 members of the Class of 2000  
Pepperdine University Online Master of Arts in Educational Technology

# The @'s

Pepperdine Master of Arts in Educational Technology, 2000

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# Foreword

by Linda Polin

Every now and again a rare event happens in classrooms, the real world forces itself in through the door, and if you're clever enough to embrace it, you can greatly improve upon classroom learning. This book is one of those rare events.

The book you are about to read began as a response to a challenge I set for 22 graduate students in a class on mentoring and team leadership. I wrote in the syllabus:

*Descriptions of mentoring represented in the education literature are derived from a behavioral or cognitive psychology of the individual learner; a notion that knowledge resides in the head and is acquired (cognitive), or that it is a matter of habit strength attained by reinforced practice (behavioral). As you know from Ed 633, there are newer views of learning as a social experience, as enculturation, if you will, and views of knowledge as distributed among community members and embedded in practice. There are not mentoring texts, yet, written from a "community of practice" or sociocultural historical perspective. We'll have to figure out the implications of that theory for our actions as mentors and team leaders in our work settings. And, we'll have to write our own text.*

Now I did assign texts, but I also asked students to post mentoring journal entries in our class newsgroup (threaded discussion list). My intent was to use their postings as the text for the course, i.e., as the object of discussion. Indeed, most of the class interaction arose from discussions of procedural details in those postings, at first. But then later, talk shifted to joint efforts to identify the larger meaning for oneself as a community member with expertise.

In early February, shortly before the one face-to-face (f2f) meeting of this mostly online program, the group enthusiastically decided to take up the challenge to write their own mentoring book. This enthusiasm arose in part from students genuine excitement at participating in a community of practice as a place for learning, seeing their own expertise in that context, and watching others respond to their sharing of that expertise. I believe they saw glimpses of the power of situated learning, especially for professional development in teaching, a profession which has been ravaged by the effects of terrible staff development models and implementations.

At the f2f meeting, they tossed me out of the room to have a private group discussion about whether or not they were all committed to this. They hacked out the sections, argued and tortured over the sequence and contents. Then they went home only to experience and survive the additional stress of collaboration at a distance. They did appoint a "traffic cop" to handle all the drafts and interactions across subgroups working on sections, and they made extensive use of tools such as iDrive and TK3, and versioning in Word. They worked on multiple computer platforms and in a variety of time zones. But they did it.

As the course instructor, I was thoroughly pleased with just the endeavor, the process itself, let alone the actual finished product. For the students to cooperate in doing this they needed to have the very discussions that instructors dream of: arguments about meaning, negotiations about representations of meaning, and jointly constructed insights about their own practice vis a vis theory.

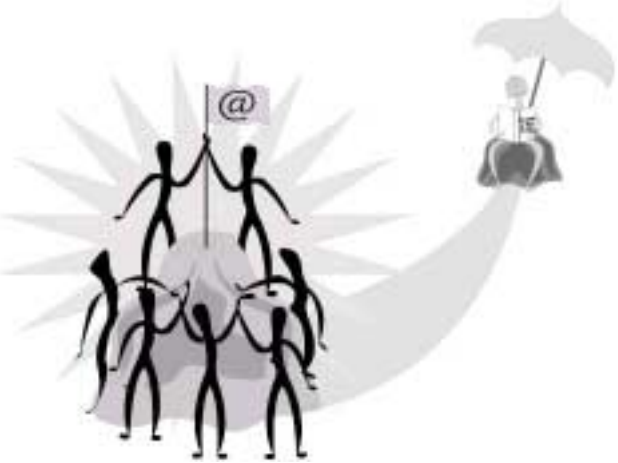
The result is this book. The authors intend it to capture their learning, to make use of examples from their real worlds, and most of all, to frame all this in a view of “learning” as cultural knowledge that is situated in the context of its use in practice, artifacts, and tools. I have tried to play the role of project sherpa. I have been porting some useful objects to help them with their climb. I have tried to keep them out of the crevasses, keep them warm and dry, and be sure everyone gets home alive. But, like a sherpa, I have tried to stay out of the way, in the background, to be sure this is their climb. This publication represents their successful ascent to the summit and the planting of their flag on the peak.

The reader is encouraged to make a similar climb him or herself, to experience the exhilaration and anxiety of mentoring others from within a professional community of practitioners. Hopefully this book can serve as a guide.

LP

# Introduction

In the summer of 1999 sixty-six people converged on Culver City, California. Quickly the Pepperdine University Cadre 2 members were split into three groups and the @'s (the group formerly known as orange) emerged. Never again would these individuals lives be the same as they forged a new way of learning and mentoring through the creation of a **Community of learners** gaining knowledge and **Practice** in educational technology (**CoP**). This Community of Practice goes beyond friend, it goes beyond family: the mentoring of all and by all within the community is what sets it apart from all other groups we have experienced to date.



We created a community of learners in which sharing is the key ingredient for success. We formalized our community using technology as the backbone to make it all work. Through it all, we've taken all the bumps and hurdles and we've over come in stride. Feelings of ease, frustration, anger, and joy were shared. On our journey down this arduous road we've stayed committed to the community/mentoring ideal and the practices within. We took this ideal stretched it, bent it, and almost turned it inside out. When we were finished we found we had a new ideal... **Lateral Mentoring**.

In the past Mentoring was seen as a relationship comprised of only two people, and the purpose of which was very vertical and goal-oriented: to put a new member in touch with an old member, often for training. We present a new model: Lateral Mentoring.

Lateral Mentoring occurs within a group of individuals with a shared commitment to knowledge. This community is ever changing and growing as individuals are freely encouraged to move both within and with-out the circle as expertise evolves and changes. Groups emerge out of necessity, as people find themselves drawn to one another by a force that can be social, professional, or both. Collaboration can happen directly or indirectly. Members use one another as sounding boards, teachers, and learners. Lateral Mentoring occurs within a diverse group of people that are engaged in a task over a period of time. Together this Lateral Mentoring community builds things, solves problems, learns from one another, invents new things, and shares the group's expertise and knowledge.

A commitment to knowledge, problem solving, learning, and building can take many forms depending on the focus of the community at any given time. How does this happen? New members come into an existing community with their own ideas. These ideas become a part of the community as they are discussed and synthesized by the other members. The knowledge within the community continually changes as each colleague's practice grows and evolves.

The redefinition of mentoring within Communities of Practice results in a larger community working collaboratively toward shared, significant goals. It is this combination that we call Lateral Mentoring. The environment is one in which competition, if not absent, is at least de-emphasized. In a Lateral Mentoring community, all participants are given the opportunity and the responsibility to learn from and to help teach each other. New members begin to engage more actively with old members and with each other. The role

of the old members as the transmitters of information diminishes and all help facilitate the new members' sense of the group's purpose. The new members soon know what the old members know. All involved become the experienced, the expert guide, the coach, and the master learner.

Lateral Mentoring gives all community members access to the group's body of knowledge. This knowledge includes the tools, the documents, the images, the symbols, the procedures, and the regulations, that make up an explicit work or educational setting. The beauty of Lateral Mentoring is that it gives each member access to subtle cues and rules of thumb that are unique to their setting. Lateral Mentoring occurs through friendship, collegiality, teaching, coaching, and counseling. Lateral Mentoring has been an integral process used worldwide but, until this book, has remained nameless. Lateral Mentoring occurs when people work and play together with a shared goal or interest in mind. People choosing to help each other grow and develop: it's that simple.

If you are in search of:

- a broader base of shared experience
- sharing responsibility in your work place
- involving more people in your practice
- fewer political dangers, no stepping on "toes"
- eliminating jealousy, unfairness, gender/racial issues, and splinter groups
- a more practical way to seek guidance, collegiality, knowledge, resources, motivation, support, and a good listener
- a mentor/mentee relationship where the lines may not be clearly drawn
- improving communication skills with coworkers
- utilizing technology to improve your technology skills in the constructivist manner
- a healthier starting point for the mentee; less vertical more cyclical in nature
- reducing the feeling of inadequacy
- a non-threatening environment to nurture your desire to grow and change

Then this book is for you!

# What is Lateral Mentoring?

*No One of Us Is As Smart As All of Us*

Brian “Bydee Man “ Joseph

**Let’s begin, with a description of traditional vertical mentoring**, the type of mentoring most of us have received. A traditional mentor can be defined as someone who is a wise and trusted counsel. This person can also be looked upon as the one with the answers who guides the mentee in the ways of the community that brought them together. The relationship is vertical. The mentor is the expert and the mentee the recipient. The mentor is the fountain of information and the mentee is merely an empty vessel. Information is exchanged one way - from the expert to the newbie.

The mentor gives and the mentee receives. This form of exchange continues until the mentee has been totally absorbed into the group in which they both participate. The mentee can only become a member of the community once she/he fully subscribes to and understands all of the nuances that make an individual a full and active member of the community. Up until this time the mentee does not function as a real member of the group. He/she may be assigned tasks that resemble the work of the community but never the real work.

## **So, what’s different about Lateral mentoring?**

Lateral mentoring or mentoring within a “Community of Practice” occurs when groups of people are brought together with a common interest, formed by choice. You might be asking, what kind of interest? The commonality may be their profession, a course they are taking, an organization to which they belong, a hobby, or an outside interest. Individuals in this group range from newbies – the newest members of the group - to old-timers. All members possess varying degrees of skills, abilities, and talents.

Participation in the group is central to successful mentoring because it is what defines the relationships and the practices of the group, and also establishes the desire of the new member for greater inclusion in the community. For example: Our online cadre continues to develop technology skills because this is our major form of communication with one another. When the communication of an individual is hindered because of a lack of technology knowledge, the group members reach out to offer assistance.

Initially the mentor/mentee relationship might be established between an expert and a newbie, much as a traditional mentoring relationship would. However, because the new member is encouraged by all members to assimilate into the group, their newbie status is not held for long. By virtue of their participation in the group, all members of the community will be participating in the mentoring/mentee relationship to varying degrees.

Often, times arise when a newbies mentor each other. This happens frequently in our cadre when members help each other through group projects, technology difficulties, and research issues. An excellent example occurred during the editing process of this book. Several members would meet online, take a portion of a section, edit the portion, and pass it on to the next member. This member in turn would edit and then pass it on again. This procedure would continue until all involved were satisfied with the edited copy. When an issue or problem arose other members of the cadre were available for help, guidance, and/or assistance.

There may also be situations when an expert is mentored by a newbie. The fresh perspective of a newcomer allows the expert to see things s/he might otherwise have overlooked. For example: One of the most technologically savvy individuals in our group is responsible for setting up our book ordering system with several online booksellers. He had everything set up beautifully for the upcoming trimester. However, it was a technological newbie who called his attention to books that were missing from the list to be ordered. Our technology old-timer took no offense. In fact, he was very appreciative which heightened the positive feelings the newbie had for being able to contribute to the group. Through meaningful participation in the groups' activities, the newbie becomes a practicing member and is able to move beyond newbie status.

What about the group members who are neither newbies nor experts?

There are members of the community that have developed some expertise but are still in the process of becoming acknowledged experts. There may be times when these newer members can offer valuable insight to the newbie because of their own personal proximity to newbie status. A wonderful example of this is the structure of Pepperdine's Virt Camp. Last year the members of Cadre One were the facilitators for Cadre Two. While they were near expert status, they had the connection to the group because they had only recently lived through the experience of the program.

What are the significant features of Lateral mentoring?

They are peers performing real work. The tasks the CoP is involved with are connected to the business of the community. For example, in our cadre many projects are connected to our work situations. Even though none of us actually work together day to day, the dialogue we share in newsgroups, during class sessions, and in projects supports our growth as professionals in our specific environments.

The mentor/mentee relationship takes on a lateral orientation. The role of mentor is shared among all members of the group. The sharing of this responsibility allows each member access to the thinking of all. In this way, invisible knowledge of the community is available to all members. Everyone gets to peek inside the organization or school setting getting a "birds eye view".

Lateral mentoring leads to improved communication among participants at various levels. Since all members are participants, ideas, concerns, questions, and inspirations are open and available to all. Difficult questions about how the organization really works are answered. Frequently these issues are addressed by virtue of the open communication fostered by this type of mentoring. An example would be the way in which this group worked through concerns about writing this book. At various stages of writing this book our group confronted difficulties. We faced them head on together and each member came away with a renewed sense of commitment.

New members are active participants in the group, not merely waiting in the wings or sitting back and watching the experts. They are involved in the work of the community. All are encouraged and expected to participate fully in all aspects of the life of the community. For example: When we returned home after Virt Camp we were expected to be able to communicate with all members of the group through Newsgroups, TI, and the creation of web-based projects. Several of us had just learned these communication tools at Virt Camp and were struggling to use them the first few weeks at home. Members of our group who had experience prior to Virt Camp were more than generous with the time they gave to those who were new to the technology. This shared expertise allowed us all to be fully functioning members of the community

right from the beginning. It was important to the whole community that every member felt comfortable with these online arenas.

In Lateral Mentoring the community shares the responsibility of mentoring. The community has many experts in several areas that show themselves as the group needs their expertise. As stated in the preface of this book,

*“A CoP is a group of individuals within a circle of shared commitment to knowledge. This circle is ever changing, as individuals are freely encouraged to move both within and without the circle as expertise evolves and changes. They emerge out of necessity; groups of people find themselves drawn to one another by a force that can be social, professional, or both. Together the community builds things, solves problems, learns from each other, invents new things, and shares the groups expertise and knowledge how to change it.”*

A Lateral Mentoring community supports all of its members. In this age of knowledge management, it will be these communities that sustain successful organizations. The power of the group is acknowledged and recognized. The expertise of all evolves because of the spirit of shared knowledge. Each member's creativity and resourcefulness is allowed to develop. It assists in solving work problems. As our By-Dee t-shirts state:

“No one of us is as smart as all of us.”

Kass' Story:

February 29, 2000

*There was an open house at my school tonight. The purpose of this function is to open up the school for prospective students and their families. Traditionally the teachers' role is to come and act as an escort to the various families as they arrive. Last week I asked the headmaster if he would mind if I invited a few of my fifth graders to come to the lab so that people could see the students in action as they meandered through. He thought this sounded like a good idea. Well, it was amazing! The lab was packed all night long. But the most incredible thing was I didn't start a computer or turn on a program. My students, (and there were only three girls) the other teachers, and the parents were all involved. I stood in the background and video taped much of it. One amazing conversation I heard was from one of the fifth grade teachers, who is very reluctant about computers, tell one of the visiting parents that her students were creating HyperStudio stacks about particular states. And she sounded so “expert” about it! Near the end of the evening the principals of the middle school and high school stuck their heads in my door and commented about the huge crowd we had had in the lab all night and how great it was that the fifth graders had been in the middle of it. I think the thing that made my heart sing so much was the integration of generations. And I loved seeing the other teachers in the observer/hostess mode while the fifth grade students took over the “teaching” with all the guest students. Great -CoP material.*

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## Activity

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*Think of a time or situation in which you've experienced the traditional vertical kind of mentoring. Were you the "mentor" or the "mentee"? How did it make you feel? How do you think the other person felt? Keep this picture in mind as we offer what we consider to be a more effective alternative in the coming chapters.*

# Benefits of Lateral Mentoring

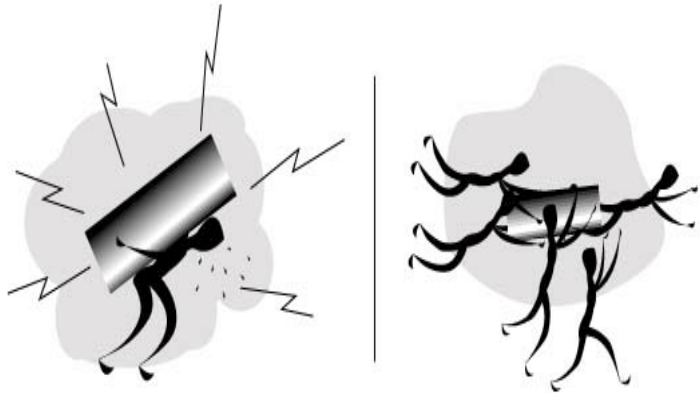
*Those who seek mentoring, will rule the great expanse under heaven.  
Those who boast that they are greater than others, will fall short.  
Those who are willing to learn from others, become greater.  
Those who are ego-involved, will be humbled and made small.*

Shu Ching as translated in “Tao Mentoring” by Chungliang al Huang and Jerry Lynch

## Sam’s Story:

*Here’s a very personal reason I believe lateral mentoring works in all communities.*

*About seven years ago, I was supporting two children, a house, and myself on a third year teacher’s salary, without the benefit of child support. My brother had just been released on probation, and needed to complete his education and make a fresh start. My father wanted to help us both, but financially helping both of us would be taxing and some would probably add, enabling. What he did was to consolidate my loans and paid the monthly payment which was equivalent to fair payment for room and board while my brother attended a local junior college.*



*If you looked at this example from a mentoring perspective, he took a lateral mentoring approach instead of a paternalistic vertical approach. Giving each of us financial support would have been a typical one-on-one vertical mentoring approach. By building on the resources each of us possessed, my dad strengthened our family unit by creating a stronger sense of community. I received the financial support, for which I provided my brother a supportive environment. My brother in turn became the “man of the house” for my children and helped with maintenance and picking up the children. My father was able to help us both without draining his pension, and had the satisfaction of strengthening our family unit. We all benefited from giving and receiving help.*

*Additionally, my father didn’t have to choose one of us to help. He didn’t have to bear the responsibility of keeping us all together either. Lateral mentoring creates a broader base of resources and allows more people to be mentored simultaneously. It acknowledges the value of existing community structures and the resources and experiences each member brings.”*

Sam’s story is a beautiful illustration of some of the prime benefits of lateral mentoring such as shared responsibility, larger pool of mentors, healthier starting point for new members, more individuals benefiting from mentoring, better communication, a greater sense of community.

## ***Shared Responsibility***

The lateral positioning of mentor and mentee eliminates the burden of responsibility upon one individual. Instead, as leadership shifts, all members of the community share the responsibilities of the situation. There is a broader base of support both in experience and responsibility.

### *Positive Manifestation:*

Leadership can be a sensitive issue in a group where everyone is on an equal plane. In lateral mentoring, leadership shifts like a conversation. Everyone can participate in a good conversation, as long as there is give and take. Conversation becomes difficult when someone tries to dominate or two people try to speak at once. Similarly, one person should not dominate in lateral mentoring. Instead, leadership shifts from one person to the next. If the group acknowledges that leadership exists, even though it is shifting, its members will be more able to accept leadership from themselves and from others.

## ***Larger Pool of Mentors***

Since responsibility is shared, mentoring becomes less burdensome and more individuals may be interested in being a part of a lateral mentoring relationship. This is particularly important in our current culture, where many of us are pulled in multiple directions balancing the demands of career and family. Rather than “another thing to take on,” lateral mentoring can be a more rewarding way of working as a community.

Shifting leadership and sharing of time and talent becomes an opportunity for mentors to be mentored. Lateral mentoring is mutually beneficial, and not an act of charity. In fact, you may be mentoring already in a casual sort of way.

With the disappearance of the vertical mentor/mentee structure, individuals may feel “ready to mentor” not because it is a rite of passage, but because it is a natural part of being a member of the community.

### *Positive Manifestation:*

All members bring with them a different set of interests, talents, and experience. When more members are acknowledged as mentors there is a larger pool of talent and experience. In lateral mentoring roles shift fluidly from member to member as needed. One member may be needed to be the counselor offering emotional support, while another is called on to organize information. Others are needed to paint the big picture while still others watch the details. These are not disjointed roles, but overlapping, fluid ones.

## ***Healthier Starting Point***

This arrangement of shared experience can also create a sense of empowerment rather than dependency. This is particularly important among new members. Shared responsibility eliminates that sense of inadequacy that often accompanies a new member because support is coming from more than one place. The former subordinate status of mentee does not exist because the new member is recognized as a fully contributing member.

### *Positive Manifestation:*

Lateral mentoring encourages active participation in all members immediately because it acknowledges their diverse interests and experiences. In a vertical mentoring relationship, the mentor would sit on the

drawer side of the desk like the “keeper of the keys”. The mentee would sit on the other side of the desk, like a student in a principal’s office. In lateral mentoring, members are more like knights at a round table, where all are in an equal position to contribute. All ideas are considered, and no one is burdened as “keeper of all knowledge”.

### ***More Individuals Benefiting from Mentoring***

Still another benefit is that mentoring in a community of practice allows more people to be mentored. It becomes a practical solution for those situations in which there are not enough mentors, let alone funds to support mentoring, to go around.

Mentoring as a community means that several people can be mentoring each other at once. The former one-on-one mentoring meant that individuals were being excluded, which created political issues such as jealousy, fairness, gender, age, cultural heritage, and position. Since this type of mentoring is horizontal, and the perspectives of all members are valued, these political issues have less opportunity for becoming an obstacle in the developing relationships. In fact these varying perspectives contribute to a healthier community.

#### *Positive Manifestation:*

To facilitate interaction among diverse members in lateral mentoring communities, it is helpful to establish group norms. The group needs to formulate its own rules of personal and group conduct, its own ground rules. Norms should not be imposed on the group from an outside source. Some communities find it helpful to post their norms, others find it oppressive to do so. Examples of group norms may include:

- Active listening
- Start on time, end on time
- Stay on topic
- Hard on issues, soft on people

Keep the list of norms short and simple. In virtual communities, the norms may be similar in spirit, but adjusted to the online environment.

### ***Better Communication***

With more people involved in the process of mentoring, multiple perspectives are available from which to view issues. Dialogue among members is critical to the success of the community and thus becomes an important mechanism for sharing perspectives and ideas. Additionally, since members are communicating to many instead of a single individual, communication skills are improved.

#### *Positive Manifestation:*

Allow for the fact that collaboration takes time. For some, this slower process may be frustrating, but it is worth it because the collaborative product will be richer and broader in its appeal and perspective. An eighth grade student in an Advanced Computers class said it best:

*“I thought that working alone would be better because you get focused in right away. But then you only get your point of view, you don’t get anyone else’s.” — Colin C.*

## ***Greater Sense of Community***

Another benefit is that a sense of team is fostered because all individuals are involved in the process. Finally, lateral mentoring encourages camaraderie and community building because the contributions of all members are recognized, encouraged, and necessary to sustain the health of the community. The group has greater resilience because it has critical mass.

### *Positive Manifestation:*

Nothing is perfect. Lateral mentoring can be a bumpy road. The difference lies in whether the group treats these bumps as springboards for learning or fatal flaws.

Here's a simple example from a mentor journal:

*The JLC (Japanese Language Club) meeting hadn't gone as smoothly as we had wanted, so Oscar and I analyzed it and planned the next meeting. We decided to have snacks last, provide more structure, share more responsibility with our bilingual members, and to start preparing for the meetings earlier. My hope was that our mistakes would be a springboard for future successes, and that getting "right back in the saddle" would focus us on the positive rather than dwell on the negative.*

## ***Are All Members Mentors?***

*"Knowledge is the only kind of wealth that multiplies when you give it away..."*

Peter Schwartz

Having looked at a general definition of mentoring we understand that the term must adapt and morph into something wholly different. As when fusing two elements together, each becomes a part of something entirely new and only remnants of what they were remain. Within a CoP, mentoring shifts from a one-on-one relationship of one-way knowledge flow to a multi-relational multi-directional flow of ideas. We return to our initial question: Are all members of the CoP mentors? We can with positive affirmation say, "potentially."

Each individual brings something unique to the community whether they realize it or not. This "something" doesn't necessarily reveal itself as information-specific expertise or even specialized ability. It could simply be a tangential thought offered to the group. One crucial aspect of mentoring is aiding in the creation of knowledge in a very personal and interactive way. As each member brings his or her unique perspective to the group, they share the benefit of their experience and in that sense mentor the other community members. Thus, in a well functioning CoP, all members are mentors.

When looking at the larger concept under consideration by the CoP (whether it be the CoP of a social studies department in a high school or a knitting partnership in a chat room), some members will emerge as mentors as seen in a traditional sense. These are the people whose unique understanding of the concept as a whole is shared by few within the group. These are the individuals to whom members will turn for broad-based questions related to the larger concept. But even these individuals create their own learning through

their participation in lateral mentoring. They have not learned everything they know through personal experience, but have swapped stories with their colleagues, attended conferences, read journals, etc., and they continue to learn through interactions with newer members of the CoP within a mentoring relationship. Newbies bring innovation to challenge the “experts” experience, old-timers bring experience to temper and refine innovation - the combination of these two forces increases expertise in both parties. Just as all members are mentors in a well functioning CoP, all members are also mentees.

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Activity

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*List the various Communities of Practice of which you are a member. On a continuum of experience, place yourself within each community.*

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

# Alternate to Top Down Staff Development

*“[People] do best by finding for themselves the specific knowledge they need; organized or informal education can help most by making sure they are supported morally, psychologically, materially, and intellectually in their efforts.”*

Seymour Papert

## ***The no-flow: Traditional Professional Development***

*I talk. you listen. I use overheads. You look. I ask you questions. You answer them with the correct answers. If you get the right answers, I praise you. The wrong answers, I correct you.. I conclude. You leave. It's finally over. Maybe you never see me again.*

## ***The flow: Lateral Mentoring***

*I get us started. You present your ideas. Someone else adds to your ideas. Another asks for clarification. Yet another re-directs. Your idea is enhanced by the discussion and you adapt or adjust your idea. Others listen because they may have something to add. They share. The conversation continues. I write ideas on the board to organize them. We share. It's time to go home. Tomorrow we'll continue the conversation in smaller groups, in the halls, the lunch room.... It's on-going, it's ours, it's meaningful.*

Good teachers know that students who are not engaged - active in their own learning - are susceptible to boredom and the employment of techniques to feign listening. What's the best way to engage someone or make them active in their own learning? Give them ownership of it. And that's done by involving them in the process.

It's ironic how ineffective even our best schools can be at staff development, generally resorting to the poor habits of teaching that make industrial age classrooms fail. We've seen the ugly scene too many times. We sit while someone with self-professed expertise talks at us. It doesn't matter if it is a consultant, our principal, or our fellow teachers.

A CoP is formed around a larger issue of interest approached over an extended period of time. The difference in using the Lateral Mentoring model for professional development is that it often takes focus on a narrower issue in a specific amount of time. Lateral Mentoring in a professional development setting allows everyone to participate and guide the issue. By doing so, the issue takes on its own life born of the ideas, concerns and suggestions of the group rather than a linear progression from point to point. Traditional (linear) professional development caters to one style of learning (that of the presenters) rather than embracing the many styles as well as the many ideas held by those present. There is no fixed template of discussion within Lateral Mentoring. Guidelines can be agreed to in order to keep to the topic or task and can allow for facilitation but without assuming a "sage on the stage" mentality. By allowing for free flow of discussion and group guided progress, the topic becomes the interest of the group rather than that of the presenter.

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Activity

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*Recall a recent staff development session that you attended. List the things you learned and put a check in the correct column to indicate “who” you learned each item from.*

What did you Learn?	Who did you learn it from?		
	presenter	peer	yourself

# Are You Ready To Mentor?

*“The person has been correspondingly transformed into a practitioner, a newcomer becoming an old-timer, whose changing knowledge, skill, and discourse are part of a developing identity—in short, a member of a community of practice.”*

*Lave & Wenger*

*Tina had been a mentee within a program at the elementary school where she had taught. She was learning the value of technology and how to use it within her classroom. The school district where she worked had implemented a program at the beginning of the school year, requiring teachers to pass basic technology competencies. When the program first began Tina was intimidated by the thought of having not only to use computers but to be proficient within certain areas. Faithfully, she attended every training session and also worked with the campus Technology Lead Teacher during her spare time to build up her comfort level. By the time she completed the requirements, Tina felt comfortable enough with what she was doing through technology that she offered her services and skills to assist other teachers still working on their requirements. She has, of her own will, evolved into the position of mentor.*

What did it take for Tina to be ready to mentor? Could you already be mentoring without realizing it? In this chapter, we focus on the possibility that you could already be a lateral mentor and what that may involve. There are thousands of working CoPs around us everyday. Mentoring occurs in social organizations, business, hobbies, and wherever people want to learn. Our roles within these varied communities determine whether we mentor or not. Think of your position within your CoP: are you the new kid on the block or have you been involved with a group for an extended length of time? For example: you may have started a new job within a company or recently taken up a new hobby or you may be ready for retirement from a position or due to education may be considered an “expert” to others. There is also the possibility that you may have even had some experience in certain situations but for one reason or another have changed roles within your CoP. Parenting is a CoP of it’s own: say you have a teenager or high school student and find yourself expecting a new bundle of joy. In many ways, you are back to becoming a “newbie” again because things change rapidly in regards to children and every child provides a unique set of challenges.

We normally think of the traditional mentor/mentee relationship as one in which one person teaches a newer person the ropes. The mentor will guide the mentee throughout the relationship by sharing ideas, giving advice, and providing resources. In order to have a positive mentor/mentee relationship such sharing should be reciprocal and each person should also feel free to express concerns. In addition, each should feel like they are trying to make a difference in something either within the organization or personally. Inside a community of practice, this could be occurring in many different ways. One thing to bear in mind is that within a CoP, people enter as members of other cultures or communities as well and they bring that knowledge and experience with them. Everyone is relevant because no one is a member of just one CoP. With this in mind, think again of your role within a certain CoP. To help embed the ideas of Lateral Mentoring, try thinking of it this way: Within a school district, campus, business, etc., there is probably someone whom you might consider an “expert.” However, that “expert” will probably also rely on you as well to bring new information and to share new technologies, perspectives and/or procedures. When this occurs,

you become someone who not only mentors within a CoP but is also a mentee. The mentor/mentee roles are shared with others within the group.

Now think back to a CoP in which you are involved and try to determine your role. Are you currently assisting others in some manner or are you receiving any support from another person within the group? If you are involved in either way, -you could already be in a lateral mentoring relationship.

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Activity

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*List the ways you are assisting others, or others are assisting you.*

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

# Setting Goals

## ***Section 1: On A Personal Level***

So, you've come to the conclusion that you want to pursue a lateral mentoring relationship. But, understanding the dynamic of a CoP and the nature of its perpetually changing roles is only the beginning. You will want to look at what direction you will take as you begin the mentoring process. What is your purpose as a mentor?. The entire community will benefit from people who work on improving their own practice. Through mentoring, you are looking to improve the community as a whole by helping another member redefine their role within it. Additionally, your perspective should include an understanding about the development of your own role within the community from the onset.

As a lateral mentor, it is equally important to consider what you intend to contribute to the relationship and identify what you expect to receive from it. Establishing these details up front will help eliminate potential disappointments and/or inappropriate partnerships. Moreover, expressing a clear sense of direction will help build a solid foundation for open lines of communication throughout the relationship. Here are some questions to ask yourself before making your investment:

- What do I have to share with others?
- Am I suited to meet the needs of others within this CoP?
- Do I have a clear-cut understanding of what the prospective mentee expects from the relationship?
- What efforts will be required on my part?
- Are these pursuits realistic and viable? Have I made my personal intentions and rationale clear to others?

You will want to look at the CoP in which you are intending to mentor. Does it match you own beliefs and ideas?.

## ***Section 2: The Other Side Of The Equation***

No less critical to an effective Lateral Mentoring relationship is understanding what contributions your mentee intends to make and what he or she anticipates to gain from being mentored. In an effective CoP, a mentee understands that he/she is being mentored. However, they are also aware that they have something to offer the group. As opposed to what a mentee might experience within a traditional mentoring relationship, here they share the responsibility of expertise as well. Thus, a willing participant in the role of mentee must also be willing to act as the mentor in certain circumstances.

A prospective mentee might want to consider the following prior to seeking out a mentor:

- What am I looking for in terms of guidance?
- What do I presume to gain from the relationship?
- Have I clearly explained my needs and expectations to others?
- Do I have a firm sense of what others expect from this relationship?
- Are these goals reasonable for both myself and my mentor to meet?

# The Interaction in a COP

Or, Creating an Effective Lateral Mentoring Environment

*Karen started a new job several weeks ago. Today, her co-worker, Jim, promised to help her with some problems. Jim wasn't in his office, so Karen sat down and waited. She began to feel nervous as if she had been sent to the principal's office and was now awaiting her punishment. She knew she needed this job, but wasn't sure if she was capable of learning so many new duties. She sat rigid in the chair as the palms of her hands began to sweat. Finally, Jim entered the room.*

Imagine walking into an office and sitting down to have a chat about your needs, concerns and problems. Would you feel comfortable? Would you be able to communicate your feelings? Is an office the best place for your conversation or would you feel more at ease in a different setting? Lateral mentoring does not usually require a specific location for the mentoring to take place. The goal is to facilitate discussion by providing a relaxed atmosphere for all.

In a lateral mentoring situation, the interaction is influenced by many variables. The atmosphere, physical space, emotional environment, and communication style are important considerations when interacting in a mutual mentoring relationship with your peers.

There are many places lateral mentoring can take place. In order for everyone to feel comfortable, it is best to find some neutral ground. If you don't need a computer or other materials while mentoring, leave the work area. Take a stroll around the block to discuss issues or chat on the grass or patio; these kinds of places are ideal for encouraging a shared sense of community. "Virtual" places can also be appropriate for mentoring, especially if you and your peers have difficulty getting together due to time or geographical limitations. Email, "chat", and other types of online communication are useful tools for interacting with your mentoring group when you can't talk to each other face to face. Finally, if you know the other person well, their home may be an ideal place for you to get together.

Lateral mentoring is not really about a mentor/mentee relationship, but about developing another kind of interaction.

## ***When Will We Meet?***

*Hi Karen,*

*You mentioned last week that you needed to learn how to create a web page. I'm available any day before work or in the afternoon. Do you want to meet in your office or downstairs in the lab?*

*Don't worry, I'm here to help.*

Susan

When will you meet? Be aware of the other person's priorities and time constraints. Putting strict limits on your time and not being flexible can cause problems. Whether you meet early in the morning, during lunch, afternoon or late evening isn't important, as long as you both agree on the time.

A week after Susan had a meeting with Karen, she greeted Karen in the hall. She asked Karen about her web pages. Karen explained she was having trouble linking the pages together. Susan gave her several suggestions to try. Karen smiled and felt confident. She thanked Susan and continued on her way.

In this situation, a meeting doesn't need to be formal or scheduled. Look for sharable moments in everyday interactions. Be open for an exchange when opportunities arise. Don't assume that others need formal weekly meetings. In lateral mentoring, you may find that moment while eating in the lunchroom, during your break, in the parking lot or online. Be aware that any moment could be a moment for sharing.

## ***The Physical Environment***

Our physical surroundings can have a very significant impact on the way we interact with others. A physical space carries with it not only issues of comfort, but also issues of culture and power. When we are trying to foster the healthy development of a lateral mentoring community, we should be constantly aware of how the physical environment might be affecting the people involved.

Although it might seem obvious, considering the physical comfort of the participants is often overlooked. How often have you attended meetings in rooms that were so cold that you had to focus your mental energy on trying not to let your teeth chatter? Or rooms so hot that you felt either extremely sleepy, or possibly even irritable? An uncomfortable temperature is not conducive to productive discussion.

Also, access to a clean restroom is an important factor. Even more important than the quality of the facilities themselves, is the freedom to use them whenever the need arises. A casual atmosphere of collaboration creates a solid foundation for a functional mentoring community.

The furniture in the meeting space should also be considered. A hard, straight-backed chair conveys a different message to the seated than an easy chair, couch, or sofa. This message dictates the kinds of interactions that occur. Hard "business" or "school" furniture is appropriate for short formal meetings, but you want to facilitate longer more casual gatherings, the furniture should be softer and more comfortable.

Even the shape of the table can influence the roles that people will assume. A round table encourages each participant to view themselves and others as equal partners. At a rectangular table, certain people may tend to gravitate toward the end or "head" seats. This can set up a situation in which those at the heads may appear—and may assume—to have more power within the group than the rest of the members.

Most people are used to eating at the same time everyday. Even if it's not mealtime, people may need a snack to boost their mental activity and tide them over until later. It's always a good idea have food or snacks available. In addition, food and drink play a very important part in every culture. Eating and drinking together is especially effective for encouraging the development of a sense of community.

Here is an example that illustrates the importance of comfort and physical space:

*...Next time we met in the library. I chose this space because it is neutral ground for everyone on the team. It has tables and chairs that seem more conducive to a collaborative exchange. In addition, I brought an array of breakfast foods and beverages that morning. I wanted to get across the idea that we were meeting to relax, enjoy each other's company, and converse about the project. This meeting went outstandingly well. There was much more input from those who had previously been more reserved. Also, those who dominated the discussion in the staff room did not exhibit the same sense of authority that they had before...*

This brings us to another issue, the concept that a physical place actually retains the old culture of the interactions that have taken place there. People will fall into old routines and habits when they enter a familiar place. If you want to create a new kind of relationship between people, then you need to be aware of the history of the space where you hold your meetings.

In fact, if you are trying to forge a new kind of interaction, it is often best to place yourselves in an entirely new location. For instance, leaving the building and continuing a meeting over lunch at the local grill, can lead to an increased sense of camaraderie and collaboration. Here's another example that illustrates how a "neutral" physical location can help break down old interaction habits.

*"When we went to the conference in Las Vegas, we had a "cocktail party" afterward at one of the local resorts. I was struck by how differently people interacted compared to how we relate to each other at school. We were much more informal and relaxed. Some of us were drinking, but not all. We weren't really concerned with discussing technology or the project, but the subject came up anyway. Administrators and teachers were eating, drinking, and talking together in a way that just does not happen during our regularly scheduled workday."*

To review, physical environment plays a subtle but very important role when people gather to interact with each other. The environment can impede the development of a mentoring community, or its influence can be positive. There are many factors to consider:

- Temperature
- Restroom access
- Furniture comfort
- Shape of tables
- Hunger and thirst
- Cultural or historical "baggage"

Using what you've learned in this section, analyze the physical meeting space at your current workplace. What changes could be made to make the space more conducive to collaboration?

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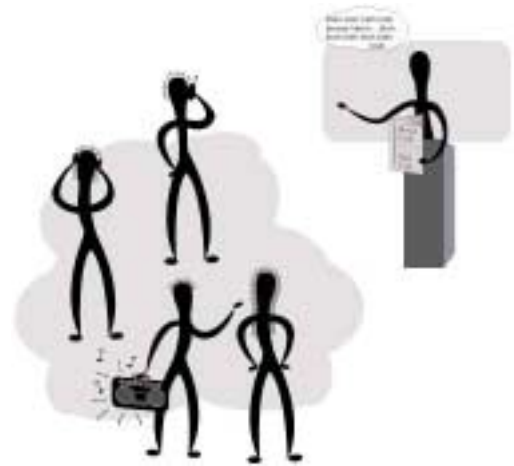
### **Communication: Verbal And Nonverbal**

There are many ways to communicate with each other. In the past, we corresponded through letters and conversed face to face. Now communication takes on many new forms. We are able to instantly express ourselves through phone calls, conference calls, email, and chat rooms on the Internet. With these luxuries, we can assist or collaborate with the members of our mentoring group instantly all over the world. In lateral mentoring, communication should allow participants the freedom and the security to express their questions and ideas, as well as their feelings and concerns. There will be moments when a member of the group will need to communicate their frustration and negative feelings. It is important to remember that active listening, without interrupting, will benefit the frustrated person the most. Many times listeners feel the need to “cheer up” the person who is frustrated. However, meaningless encouragement is not an effective approach. Many people will be able to lead themselves to their own solution when given the chance to speak their mind.

Knowing when to communicate:

*Most of the group of twenty teachers stared listlessly at the presentation on the overhead. At the left-hand rear of the room, one woman was paging through a magazine, in the second row from the front a frowning, intense looking man glared at the screen with folded arms. In row one, two women and a man were focused on a list of student names which indicated which set of tests they would administer to determine which final test they should take. In the back right-hand corner three men sat discussing their plans for Spring Break which began that afternoon at 2:30pm. The principal stood at the front of the room introducing the new 3LLT1s2 or Level Locator Tests that the teachers would be administering to students following Spring Break. This presentation had already taken thirty minutes of their curriculum day. Finally, the frowning cross armed man in the second row said, 3So, these are tests to determine where we will actually place students in standardized tests? It sounds like the three new levels are dumb, dumber, and dumbest.2 With that the three men in the back broke into laughter, the three discussing the new levels began protesting the statement while the principal watched his well planned presentation disintegrate into another shouting match. The magazine reader continued flipping through pages.*

When our time comes to act as the knowledgeable person in the mentoring group, we need to be aware of how we communicate. The relationships we are establishing depend heavily on our verbal and nonverbal communication. Our actions and speech should be an example for others to follow. There will be times when we will feel compelled to extend “constructive criticism” to another member. This should be avoided whenever possible. Generally, the intent of the message is positive but it reduces the other person’s self-esteem and their contributions to the group suffer, therefore the group as a whole suffers in the long run. “Constructive criticism” also points out that person was wrong; this is our acknowledgement, not theirs.



Our body posture, facial expressions and body movements all contribute to how we communicate with others. Are our arms crossed? Are we standing over people instead of sitting at their eye level? Do we frown when we are not understood? These negative nonverbal cues may contribute to others feeling uneasy and inadequate. Positive body language includes turning toward those we are talking to, smiling, making eye contact (no glaring) and leaning slightly forward with an attentive expression. We also need to be aware of others’ body language. Are they wringing their hands? Do their facial expressions show confusion? These may be signs for us to stop and talk to them about how they feel. Knowing when to stop speaking and start listening can be very valuable when developing lateral mentoring relationships.

When we communicate we need to be sincere, honest, and non-judgmental in our speech. The easiest way to do this is to use “I” statements. As illustrated above, the frowning man could have chosen a better way to deliver his message. There will be times when we don’t want to make another member upset, but their actions, attitudes or plans may need realigning. To criticize would be counterproductive. To feed back to them the three tenets of an “I” statement would be most productive. First, synopsize with neutral statements, the other member’s plan, action or behavior. Next, tie in an overview statement of possible negative side effects of their plan, action or behavior. Finally, the listener should add their feelings concerning the other person’s intended or current direction. Here’s an example of how the frowning man could have given an effective “I” statement:

1. I understand that we are being asked to give these “Level Locator” tests to determine where we will actually place students in the standardized tests.
2. Placing students in lower levels for standardized testing could make results less useful to the teacher.
3. I feel that we are focusing too much on the testing and not enough on the learning.

Try one for yourself: Mary Popovich is a first year teacher in a small elementary school. She is a talented teacher and has won the hearts of her first graders due to the care and guidance she pays to their education and to each of them as individuals. She has been given two formal evaluations, both of which were very favorable. The district is losing money due to student transfers and the administration is planning on some reductions in staff. However, this is information you know that Mary does not. You are discussing your day when Mary turns to the subject of student testing for state standards. Mary tells you that she is very upset with the new testing criteria handed down by the state department of education. She goes on to say that the principal could avoid the teachers’ having to do these types of things if only he would show some backbone

and stand up to the superintendent and “Just say no.” She says she wants to go to the principal and give him a piece of her mind about this new criteria. Create an “I” statement to respond to Mary’s plan. Begin by first breaking it down into the three parts of an effective “I” statement: neutral synopsis, possible negative consequences of Mary’s action, then your feelings concerning her plans.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. *Give the whole “I” statement now...*

This strategy will help you avoid giving advice. By allowing the other person to arrive at conclusions you set up for them, they will construct their own remedy.

In conjunction with using “I” statements instead of giving advice, we also need to be open to new ideas. We may be knowledgeable in an area, but there is always more to learn. As lifelong learners, we should be willing to explore and learn along with those we are helping. Remember that everyone is knowledgeable in some area, so we should be careful how we present the information shared with other members of our mentoring community. We are not the end all or know all in the group. We are here to help each other. “We rise to greatness by lifting others.”

### ***Emotional Environment***

There are environments other than physical surroundings that need to be considered when thinking about lateral mentoring. Have you considered the emotional environment of your mentoring community? Let’s take a minute to discuss some things that affect the emotional climate of your group.

When thinking about mentoring within a community we should look at attitudes of the members. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but a few questions to think about before we begin the mentoring process. Some of the questions may have different answers for subgroups within your community than for the larger group. Take a few minutes to assess some of the emotional factors in your situation.

*Are the members generally open to discussion, willing to share ideas, or are they guarded in conversation? Think of an example to support your answer:*

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*Are decisions made and handed down through a hierarchy, or is there a mechanism for discussion and input from various points of view? Describe the decision making process in your lateral mentoring community:*

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*Do participants in the community feel safe approaching each other with questions, encouragements, and/or disagreements?*

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*Are personal relationships encouraged or discouraged within your community?*

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*Are there some obvious prejudices or presuppositions that are present within the community?*

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*What are the subtle, unspoken, or underlying prejudices that are present within the community?*

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*Are diverse perspectives honored, ridiculed, or treated in a patronizing manner?*

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If a healthy emotional environment already exists, then community mentoring is probably second nature. It is much easier to develop a lateral mentoring relationship within a previously established personal relationship. If the climate within the community does not include positive characteristics, it will be difficult to develop a lateral mentoring relationship. The negativity can make its members feel closed to the exchange of ideas.

*Before entering into any lateral mentoring relationship, it is helpful to take a step back and examine the feelings, prejudices, and influences present. How would you answer the previous questions for the following situation?*

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*I have a lateral mentoring relationship with a colleague of mine; I'll call her Juanita. We did not approach one another and say, "let's mentor each other and have a free flowing exchange of ideas." I am a relative newcomer to our building and to our school community. My colleague has been at this school for over 15 years. She is older than I am and a Hispanic female. I am a White male in my late 20s. She grew up in a neighboring community and has lived in the area all her life. I moved here to accept my current job. She was on the committee for my interview before I was hired.*

*Juanita would come in to my room on occasion during the first year that I was there, checking on me to see if everything was going O.K. I believe that she felt comfortable coming to me for conversation because I didn't have emotional baggage related to the school. We began to develop a personal as well as a professional relationship as many of our conversations turned to family, community, and our experiences growing up both in school and out. As we continued to have these informal conversations we realized that we had a lot of things in common as well as a lot to learn from each other.*

*We do not share a common background or heritage, but we use our differences to learn from each other. We are, however, in similar places in our learning journeys. We began pursuing our Masters Degrees at approximately the same time (hers in Education Administration, mine in Educational Technology) and soon saw that we could use each other for resources and support. When challenges come up either related to our jobs or our Masters programs, we seek each other out and spend some time over coffee. When I have a question related to protocol in our district or at our site (being a relative newcomer) I go to Juanita first. When she has a problem with technology, or wants to discuss current learning theories, she seeks me out.*

This interaction has expanded to sharing our ideas and epiphanies with other colleagues and drawing more people into our ongoing conversation. The relationship of two colleagues has transformed into more of a web of individuals sharing ideas.

If we had not had a personal relationship before, we could not be challenging, supporting, and assisting each other now. This could not happen in an environment exemplified by distrust, fear, and prejudice. This relationship also did not happen over night and without effort. If Juanita had not made an effort to stop by my room and see how the new teacher was doing, I wouldn't have learned to trust her as someone who cares about my welfare. If trust is not present, honest exchange is not possible.

When approaching mentoring within a community (whether you are having a one-on-one dialogue or a round table discussion), you should keep in mind how the attitudes and preconceptions that are held by the community at large and by the individuals within the community will affect their acceptance of you as a mentor. Spend some time taking stock of the assumptions held by your community. When you find some common ground upon which to build a relationship, you can begin to build some trust. Listen to what others are trying to share with you; when they feel valued as a participant who has something to offer, they will be more open to what you have to offer.

## ***Online Environment***

New technologies have brought an additional dimension to relationships between individuals and groups. It is now possible for people to exchange thoughts and feelings online without ever meeting in person. So how does this effect the mentoring relationship and its impact on the community?

Being able to communicate online eases many of the challenges of time and space. In a traditional mentoring relationship, time and space have to be made to bring people together. Online environments give people additional options to communicate.

Online communication can be placed in two categories: synchronous and asynchronous.

A telephone call is an example of synchronous communication between two people in different locations facilitated with technology. People sitting at their own computers communicate in real time with others who are also at their computers. This communication can be text-based, audio, or video with audio. Various chat programs, MUDs and MOOs, and conferencing software are used to bring people together. These modalities allow people in pairs or larger groups to communicate and to emote through their computers and other electronic systems. Synchronous communication systems build on the telephone, adding flexibility, cost effectiveness, and easy documentation of what has transpired.

Asynchronous communication is similar to people exchanging letters. The communication takes place over days or weeks using technologies such as email, newsgroups, or knowledge management software. Although not as timely or spontaneous as synchronous communication, asynchronous allows for longer, more thoughtful and reflective responses. It also makes it easier for larger groups of people to participate in a discussion since thoughtful dialog when online chatting often grinds to a halt when everyone tries to "speak" at once.

Asynchronous communication allows people to "time shift" their relationships. No longer do you need to meet at the same time. People in the same mentoring community can meet and carry on dialog at their own

schedule. Whether it's just before bedtime or just after you get home from work, adding dialog to an asynchronous relationship is timely whenever it takes place.

Regardless of the type of communication, online mentoring relationships can crosscity, state, and national boundaries. In addition to facilitating the actual communication between people, these technology tools allow people with mutual interests and needs to initially meet and come together online then to continue their relationship through technology. This further broadens the ability of people to seek out those who share common interests.

Bringing lateral mentoring into the online environment brings many more opportunities to communicate and can simultaneously make that communication both more thoughtful and more spontaneous. Because it bridges differences in meeting times and meeting spaces, it makes it easier to bring people together. And finally, it allows those who are not located close to one another to meet with people from anywhere in the world to participate in a mentoring relationship.

## **Conference Environment**

*Two conference experiences: The first, attended by my then-boss, myself and a coworker as a team. My boss was leaving the university, and I was about to take over her position, in which I would be working closely with this coworker, our tech support person. Pre-conference, we talked about our expectations, divided up the sessions we wanted to attend for maximum coverage, and my boss asked me to co-present with her on a panel. During- and post-conference we met and shared notes and experiences. When we arrived, she introduced me to her colleagues from around the country (and the world). It was obvious she had already told them much about me and they all welcomed me and offered their assistance as I took on this new role. I picked up my conference materials, and there was a "Speaker" ribbon on my badge. I felt like I belonged. During the session we presented, attendees asked me questions and took notes when I answered - what an incredible feeling, as if I was valued and had important things to say. They had no idea I was such a rookie!*

*The second conference (for a different organization), I attended on my own. This conference was of a group related to my field, but not of my peers and with a much broader focus (actually a joint conference of a dozen smaller associations). My conference badge had a ribbon on it that said "First Time Attendee." I felt alone, detached, overwhelmed. I did see a few people I recognized or knew from the other conference, and they were friendly. At the end of the day, however, I ate alone.*

What a difference a Community makes.

A professional conference is a mentoring community in action. It is a gathering of colleagues whose purpose is to share ideas, information and best practices. It does not, however, automatically lend itself to ideal lateral mentoring. Many of the presentations are more representative of old-style, vertical mentoring, with one person lecturing at the front of the room. Others are panels, yet not all panels yield to contributions from the audience.

With awareness and a sense of purpose, however, a conference can be the ideal embodiment of a lateral mentoring community: access to resources, networking/making connections, many smaller relationships contributing to the larger community, members at all levels along the continuum from newbie to oldtimer/

expert, rejuvenation of the community in action, and reinforcement of the perspective of thinking globally while acting locally.

Another opportunity provided by attendance at conferences is the change of physical environment, and the chance for less formal interaction, as discussed in the earlier section of this chapter. This allows the members of a mentoring community to see each other as who they are, rather than as what they do.

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Activity

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*Reflect on a conference experience that you have had. What happened to make you feel isolated from your peers? What made you feel more connected to the community? Think of at least one thing that you can do at the next conference you attend to make other members feel more connected?*

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# Challenges and Avoiding Problems

*Denise is a veteran teacher with many years of seniority in the district. When she was given her first classroom computer this year, she quickly realized that she would need some training before she could use the technology effectively with her students. She was the first teacher at her site to enroll in the classes being offered by the district technology mentor. Although the technology mentor was very skilled in the use of computers, she had only been teaching for four years.*

*Denise expected that the mentor would take care of the technology problem for her by teaching her students about computers so that she wouldn't need to be concerned or involved. When the actual training began, Denise struggled through the idea of taking control of the technology herself and found it very hard to follow the lead of a "less" experienced teacher. As a result, Denise and her young mentor experienced some of the challenges that many face when they become part of a mentoring relationship"*

In the recently published text, *How People Learn*, the authors describe the results of a similar encounter. They stated

*"In a study of researchers and veteran teachers, a common assumption was that "an expert is someone who knows all the answers" (Cognition and Technology Group at Vanderbilt, 1997) This assumption had been implicit rather than explicit and had never been questioned and discussed. But when the researchers and teachers discussed this concept, they discovered that it placed severe constraints on new learning because the tendency was to worry about looking competent rather than publicly acknowledging the need for help in certain areas." (Bransford, 1999)*

Working with individuals or groups of individuals can be a complex endeavor. Many factors affect the outcomes of interactions between a mentor and mentee or mentees. Some of the influences can be beneficial and others can be disconcerting—or even destructive. Being aware of the challenges and pitfalls of mentoring can help you avoid problems or at least help you to anticipate problems and prepare to deal with them as they arise.

One of the most important aspects of mentoring, and the one that can cause the most problems, is verbal and non-verbal communication. Mentors and mentees come to the community with a variety of previous experiences. These past encounters influence the way that we see relationships and effect the way that we deal with events. For example, as noted in the story of Denise and her mentor, age and experience can determine how one responds to and gives advice. Since men and women often view the process of problem-solving from different perspectives, this can also cause difficulties. Cultural differences, which affect the way that we see the relationship between leaders and followers, can add additional complications to the mentoring process.

Within a lateral mentoring relationship, communication can be enhanced if all members make an effort to listen with an open mind. Members of the community also need to have a willingness to share knowledge without being competitive or critical. You may think that you are helping when you point out others' flaws, but when you criticize, especially in front of the group, it damages self-esteem and actually breaks down the bonds between you, the person you are criticizing and the community.

Members need to communicate expectations clearly and give others an opportunity to share their opinions. Each member's contribution to the group should be encouraged and valued. In addition, since each member of the community brings something unique and special to the process, the mentor and mentee will frequently switch roles.

In order for the mentoring community to flourish, members must commit to participating within the community and its many individual relationships. Members should aim for constant improvement rather than stress meeting an imaginary goal. If all members are flexible and make adjustments as needed, interaction within the community will be more comfortable for everyone.

This section has described some of the challenges that can be experienced by members of mentoring communities. Use the Online Survey (update this link, provide the URL) on the next page to take a personal look into your own mentoring situation:-

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Activity

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*Please mark your opinion on the next seven statements by putting a X in the box that most applies to you.*

	Strongly Agree 5	Agree 4	Not Sure 3	Disagree 2	Strongly Disagree 1
1. I have learned technology with relatively little outside support and I am eager to get my hands on more equipment so I can teach myself more.					
2. Most of the technology that has been shown to me would do little to improve my ability to teach or my student's ability to learn and think.					
3. I fear being embarrassed in front of my peers.					
4. I prefer to learn in a group setting.					
5. I prefer to learn individually.					
6. Administration/Management cannot expect us to learn all these new technologies unless they give us training and extra pay.					
7. I don't see the use in using technology.					
8. I am able to support and help members without smothering.					
9. I like to work with others in my professional area.					

# Identifying Types of CoP Behavior or “Good CoP, Bad CoP”

*“Judge your results and other people’s intentions. This prevents you from judging people too harshly because they ‘don’t get it’. Most people judge their own intentions and other people’s results—which usually means they accept their own failings (because they had good intentions) but not the failings of others (because their results were lousy).”*

Guy Kawasaki

## **Bad CoP**

At the other end of the spectrum is the Bad CoP. As in real life, bad CoPs come with a variety of offenses. One common characteristic is an imbalance of power and control, with individuals or subgroups hoarding and/or manipulating information and leadership.

Some times this manipulation is overt and other times it is subtle. Examples of subtle (and not so subtle) undermining behavior within a CoP include criticizing, giving advice, and rescuing. These behaviors polarize members and create dominant and subordinate positions.

Other bad CoP behavior includes holding a grudge. When members of a CoP take conflict personally, it makes it harder to get back on track. Cliques can form, and common goals get lost in the shuffle.

Dependent behavior also limits the growth of newer members. If the dependent behavior continues for prolonged periods, “newbies” may lose interest and may leave, frustrated and demoralized. Their contributions of bringing freshness to the group needs to be acknowledged.

Complacency is another ill of bad CoP. If members insist on keeping the status quo and refuse to recognize new ideas brought in by new members, they begin to rot. Nothing ever stays the same; things either grow or decay.

Let’s take a more proactive view of CoP in a subsequent chapter, “Challenges and Avoiding Pitfalls”.

The bottom line to Positive CoP Behavior is that all members must want to participate. Participation will come in different degrees and forms, but participation should be voluntary. A good CoP accepts these differences. Some member participate wholeheartedly, others participate part time. Some members profess to want to be part of the group, but don’t show up. Some talk too much. Some talk too little (or not at all). Some members have goals that are mutually exclusive, which is counter-productive to a CoP. Some don’t have enough in common. This ebb and flow of participating and drawing members in is a healthy part of CoP growth. Think of the prodigal son, McArthur’s return, making up after a fight, and the freshness after a storm. People who don’t understand this ebb and flow get frustrated with fellow members they think aren’t “pulling their weight”.

Take a few moments to reflect on the functioning of your CoP. Where do you fit in this rubric?

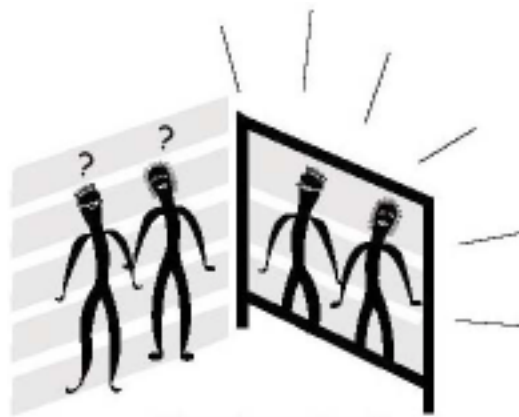
Area of Functionality	Dysfunctional CoP	Moderately Functional CoP	Smoothly Functioning CoP
Roles within the CoP	Power struggles are frequent. There is not an evident protocol within the community leading to much political maneuver-	Most members understand and adhere to the accepted protocols within the CoP. There is some jostling for position.	Most members understand and adhere to the accepted protocols within the CoP. There is some jostling for position.
Interaction within the CoP	Individual agendas are promoted. Differing viewpoints are met with derision. Gossip and “parking lot talk” are common	Individual agendas rarely are pushed. Multiple perspectives are taken into account. There is little subversive talk.	Information flows relatively freely. Newer members are empowered to grow by more experienced members. Open lines of communication are evident.
Conflict within the CoP	Individuals take conflict personally. Negotiating often breaks down into arguments. Conflicts are often polarizing events in which the strongest faction gets their way.	When conflicts arise, participants maintain civility. Growth and new understanding are products of most conflicts.	Conflicts are marked by exploring multiple perspectives and are resolved with input from involved stakeholders. These events are seen as productive times of growth.
Participation within the community.	Members of the community are markedly apathetic. Participation usually has to be coerced or forced.	There is some intrinsic motivation to be an active citizen. Most members are willing to fulfill their responsibilities in the community.	Good citizenship is valued. Participants look for ways to be active and to interact with other members to the benefit of the community.

# Redefining the Relationship

*“Participation [in a community] is always based on situated negotiation and renegotiation of meaning in the world.”*

Lave & Wenger

*Martha has worked with us for about one year. When she first joined our team, she had a tough time adjusting to the technology skills and the culture of our team. She would get very nervous before presenting at every new workshop and actually broke down into tears one time when she was pushed to do a more advanced workshop. Although I wasn't her designated mentor, I was a member of her CoP and have consistently made small suggestions to help her.*



*We recently talked about how she was at the beginning of her time here and the reasons she was like this (She came from a very difficult situation in her district). I chose to be very honest with her. I told her that some people were concerned about her lack of growth at the beginning. I then went on to discuss her current role. I expressed how she has now gained the confidence she needed and was beginning to really bring important pieces to our team. I told her that one of her workshops was being used as a model for a whole new set of workshops.*

*She told me how she felt about herself right now. A comment that seemed to have a lot of emotion behind it was that she felt that after her time here she could go out and get a teaching job very easily (she had been stuck in an aide position for years and, though she had tried, was unsuccessful in finding a full time teaching job).*

*We were interrupted and so I initiated the following email correspondence:*

*“After our conversation the other day, I did some interesting thinking. I was wondering...when you are up for tenure, what do you want our boss to say about you? What projects, personality traits, additives to the team, etc.? As I thought through this, I saw areas that I wanted to grow in and helped me to focus on these. Its just something for you to think about, but if you don't mind I'd be interested in reading what your response to this would be.*

*Well, just something I wanted to throw your way for thought.”*

*“Hi,*

*That is a very good idea and I will definitely sit down and write what my goals are and what I hope to accomplish as trainer. I feel that you have gone above and beyond what it takes to be successful. I see you as knowing so much and one of my personal goals was to someday be as accomplished as you or Kay for example. I still don't feel as if I have done enough to be a valuable asset to EduTech although it seems that I am rounding that corner. As far as integrating you are wonderful with coming up with creative ideas all the time. Thanks for sharing!”*

In this situation, our conversation was part of the renegotiating process for her. She no longer needed lots of help, she was an important part of our CoP and though she could imagine areas to grow, she has moved into a new place. Her comment on the fact that now she could get a teaching job most places if she wanted, showed me that she had reached her original goal of a new role. She now is renegotiating her next role.

Sometimes it's obvious, but sometimes it is more subtle. When does one move from a mentor to a co-learner? As discussed earlier, even as a mentor you should view yourself and your mentee as co-learners in the same CoP. Yet, there does come a time when you will notice a shift in the relationship. Your mentee no longer comes to you all the time with basic questions. When you suggest an idea they will discuss it with you rather than simply accepting it. This is the time when you are renegotiating your relationship. The mentee is reevaluating his or her role. They may not see themselves to be on the same level as the mentor but they do see that they have moved into a new arena. They have "turned a corner" as Martha said. This is a valuable time.

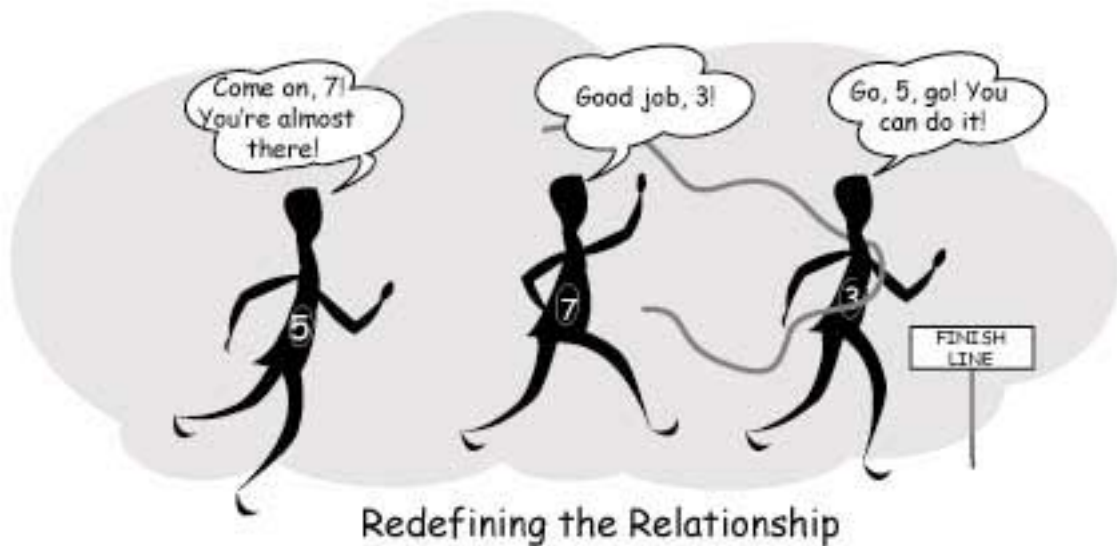
You can encourage your mentee to consider where they want to go, what their beliefs are. It will seem similar to what you did when you began the relationship. Take some time to focus on your mentee's beliefs. Discuss with them what has changed and what is the same. Do they still have the same goals? Is the ideal role they hold for themselves still the same or has that changed? In this process you will find yourself once again having to reassess your own beliefs and ideas. As you do this, share your internal struggles with your mentee. See if they can "shed some light"-on the subject. After having spent some time looking at these issues with your CoP's guidance, they are most likely ready to provide some insightful feedback.

The relationship moves in cycles. You will find that you are not only redefining beliefs but also redefining roles and goals. As you do this, the relationship itself will either be re-established with new roles or you may find that the mentee is ready to develop a mentoring relationship with some one else. Even more phenomenal is that you can now use your former mentee as a resource as you establish new mentoring relationships. They will be able to add valuable new points of view as you connect and discuss with other members in the CoP. Unlike traditional mentoring, in lateral mentoring you will find that you have helped your CoP add or improve another valuable member and thus you will not be losing a mentee but gaining a co-mentor.

## ***Top 10 Things to Consider when Renegotiating the Relationship***

10. Don't get upset if your mentee reaches his goal . . . after all, that's what you were trying to do in the first place.
9. Take it one day at a time. Do not expect noticeable changes to happen over night.
8. Try to keep in mind that personal lives have a lot of impact. You may not always know if there are factors present in your mentee's life that could be preventing their performance.
7. Remember the moral of the lion and the mouse. Look to the other when life ties you up.
6. As Uncle Jim used to say, "Life is always better when everyone shares what's in their pockets . . . unless they just came from fishing." Both you and your mentee will be more successful if you share your resources.
5. It is time to renegotiate the relationship when the mentee becomes resentful when you offer suggestions. After you have built up your relationship, there will be a time when your mentee wants to be considered as an equal. You need to let them figure things out on their own.

4. It is time to renegotiate the relationship when you find that although you are both offering very different ideas, both are completely valid and are taking all issues into account.
3. It is time to renegotiate the relationship when you find yourself saying, “Could you explain that to me?” or “Hey, how’d you do that?” much more often than before.
2. It is time to renegotiate the relationship when the mentee buys you an apron . . . and then cuts the strings off it. Your mentee may look to you for guidance and about the time you are used to helping them, they no longer need you but have gained the confidence to go out on their own.
1. It is time to renegotiate the relationship when the mentee begins to mentor others.



# Epilogue

This book was technically started in February of 2000 on a very warm and tired day in Austin, Texas. But it really began in July of 1999 when the community known as the @ Group was formed at Pepperdine University's Virt Camp in Culver City, California. Between July and February every member fully experienced the highs and lows of an intense Online Graduate Program. This book is a true artifact of a community of people coming together for a common purpose.

As a group of 20 people, we sat in a banquet room in Austin wondering where our mentoring class was going to take us. Our instructor told us of her frustration that there was no book written on mentoring from a Community of Practice perspective. In fact, there was no word to describe such a mentoring process. Thus "Lateral Mentoring" was born. We chose as our class project to create such a book. Some were cautious towards the project while others were elated. The usual roles were assumed within the CoP and the work began. Right away we went to work and started brainstorming. Chart paper was flying and ideas were spewing. The tired day took on exuberance and rejuvenation overcame us. Control was put completely into our hands, an important element to the book's success. Although we were uncertain where this would lead, it came at a critically intense time of growth by testing who we were and what we could do as a community.

We all left Austin feeling positive. The Austin high was met by the reality of our jobs, family, and other course work associated with the program. Now the community would start its biggest challenge. We needed to write a book on mentoring in a community while all members lived at a great distance from one another. All work would be completed using newsgroup threads, Tapped In, ICQ, AIM and E-mails. We broke into groups, dividing up sections of the book. Finally, it all came together when the drafts were due and the long editing process began. Leadership and work assignments were fluid. Finally, after several different editing cycles, it was finished.

In the writing of this book the @ group went down a path that was not unlike the entire Pepperdine Online Program. There were the highs and lows, but the Community pulled everyone through. It was an incredible test of the Community and it was a testament of the possibilities that can be achieved when we all work together.