

### **What is Mentoring?**

After several days of honest reflection, I believe that along with my classmates I have considered the aspects of mentoring in enough depth to work out my own definition. I know that first and foremost, mentoring implies relationship. There can be no conveyance of knowledge or wisdom where there is no one to receive it. This introduces the idea that mentorship includes some passage of knowledge, wisdom or skill from a person of experience to one who desires growth and maturity.

There are plenty of forums where this kind of relationship occurs in American culture. As we worked out in class, the relationship between a coach and a sports team member or a teacher and a student offers potential for mentoring. It is when the team member becomes close to his coach, or the student connects with her teacher, that the roles are redefined. What often begins as a “formal” relationship in the sense that it is well-defined, changes into a relationship with softer boundaries.

The changes that occur include reciprocity and familiarity between people involved in the mentorship. Each must be interested in the other and willing to make a commitment to foster the growth of the relationship. Out of this commitment grows a trust that the relationship is genuine. Neither person takes advantage of the other; in fact, both parties value the affirmation and acceptance they experience through communion.

One of the most important ways the mentor and his mentee gain each others’ trust and honor their commitment is through conversation. It is in knowing one another that the relationship is established and has significance for both people. The child who is able to share his concerns with his father allows the father to understand the situations in which he will be

called on to advise his son. He is able to fulfill his role as mentor because of the insight gained through conversation.

Finally, a mentoring relationship has some benefit, whether it is new perspective or experience, a skill gained, or the maturity that results from self-examination. Happily, this benefit often extends beyond the people involved into the community at large, improving not only the lives of the mentor and his mentee, but in turn, the lives of the people in contact with these two. One of the most exciting aspects of mentoring is that the wisdom that results is not contained to the relationship, but because it is incorporated in the lives of those in the relationship, is passed indirectly to others.

This legacy of mentorship is not uncommon, even in today's packaged, condensed, fast-paced culture. It is wonderful to track the course of knowledge as it is passed from generation to generation, person to person. Many American families have deeply rooted faith traditions that bear the fingerprints of years devoted to encouraging the maturity of their loved ones. Others value the wise advice of mentors in their efforts as tradesmen, farmers, and business professionals. They find worth in the experiences of those who have been in similar situations and have handled them with dignity and grace.

For myself, I hope that I can experience and enjoy both sides of the mentoring relationship. I know that I have much to learn, but I trust that I also have much to offer. Especially in the future, I know that I will be in a position to see younger people through the same situations I have recently faced: navigating college and mapping out my future goals and plans. In my own life, the people who have offered advice and counsel in the midst of these experiences have been an invaluable resource.