A Study of Exceptional Mentoring Insights for Adult Education and emerging mentors

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A Study of Exceptional Mentoring

*Insights for Adult Education and emerging mentors*

A Critical Engagement Project

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

For the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Laura Lee Larson

April 17, 2009
Dedication

The interviews conducted in this study contain lessons from exceptional mentors, who shared how mentoring and transformative leadership can change lives. This work is dedicated to them and all those who accept the challenge to be or become difference makers or caring catalysts in the lives of others. Regardless of their approach, gifts, or style, the mentors interviewed and their efforts are truly exceptional. By positively impacting one life at a time, they have helped and continue to help make society more loving and inclusive.

A special dedication goes to Dr. Elizabeth Ann Peterson. She was my professor, primary advisor, friend – and throughout, an exceptional mentor to me. She will not see this project to its completion, having passed away unexpectedly on January 27, 2009 – just a few days after my last visit to her home. I hold in thought the image of that visit with her smiling face and kind, wise words, as we discussed project specifics and life in general. She truly impacted my life for the better, and I will cherish all of our times together. I will forever be grateful for how lovingly she included me in her life and demonstrated exceptional mentoring.
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mentoring me through the CEP process. Jennifer Norris and Mary Tweedie, two of my best friends, continually checked in with me and expressed interest during every step of my doctoral program. Their many hours of listening, providing feedback and offering encouragement were invaluable. I am thankful that they are in my life. Ildi Revi, A cohort from my Adult Education Masters program, provided encouragement, friendship, and helpful suggestions along the way for which I am grateful. I would also like to thank a more recently found friend, Kristin Monkman. Kristin expressed enthusiastic interest in my study, and offered to read and critique my final CEP draft. I would like to thank my friend Scott Norris for helping me design and build the Exceptional Mentoring website. His knowledge and support made it possible for my research to be accessible to a broader audience.
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Abstract

The purpose of this critical engagement project was to focus on how mentoring relationships positively impact personal and professional lives -- what I call *exceptional mentoring*. This was a qualitative study using a narrative inquiry methodology and the theoretical framework of transformational leadership. There were five participants in the study who are known in the industry to be exceptional mentors because of their dedication and passion for caring about others. The research method included one-on-one interviews lasting between two and five hours. The study explored the life stories of these individuals with the intent to learn how people become mentors, motivations for mentoring and their beliefs about exceptional mentoring. The findings revealed the following themes: *influencers* on how the participants became exceptional mentors; *outcomes or benefits* that the participants experienced from mentoring others; and *exceptional mentoring best practices or elements*. Each of these themes included related subthemes. I, the researcher, already having realized the power of mentoring in corporate America, expanded my conviction to the field of Adult Education. Adult Educators, being in a leadership role by virtue of their position, and their students, needing guidance as they learn new perspectives as well as new aspects of themselves, can benefit from what mentoring offers. The concluding chapter provides the reader with additional information on this topic in the form of an exceptional mentoring website which provides key takeaways from this research, as well as additional resources. Questions for future study could include how to identify specific mentoring needs among adult educators, and how to uncover key attributes of effective programs that foster mentoring relationships.
A Study of Exceptional Mentoring

*Insights for Adult Education and Emerging Mentors – Introduction*

This is a study of exceptional mentoring that provides insights for Adult Education and to emerging mentors. Five individuals, who are known to be exceptional in many ways, including mentoring, were interviewed to discover how and why one becomes an exceptional mentor. Imagine a world devoid of people such as Jesus, Gandhi, Buddha, your favorite teacher, coach, or mentor. Or try to imagine Dante’s *Divine Comedy* without Virgil. The world desperately needs more adults to be positive leaders and mentors of the future, for individuals and organizations. How does someone begin the process towards becoming one of these individuals? While there are thousands of books and articles about various types of leadership and mentoring, most focus on skill transfer or achieving business results. Although apprentice/protégé mentoring is a very important type of mentoring, it may not reach beyond just achieving business goals to meeting additional needs of the recipient. Every adult has strengths and knowledge gained through experience; however, many lack the confidence or encouragement to find the leader or mentor within. In order to achieve the goal of becoming an exceptional mentor, one must be willing to stretch beyond his/her comfort zone in order to discover new insights about him/herself and others. It is a never-ending journey, both holistic and flexible in nature with no magic formula or perfect approach for reaching the goal of becoming an exceptional mentor. Yet through the lessons shared by five exceptional mentors, coupled with personal effort to discover more about oneself and others, the path toward becoming an exceptional mentor begins. And once this process begins, the world-
changing chemical reactions brought about by exceptional mentors occur, making the world a better place in both personal and professional ways.

Life’s journey can be scary with its many challenges, and unexpected obstacles along the way. By God’s grace, I have had angels -- wonderful people with whom I had chemistry -- appear during pivotal periods of my life. Their love and care helped me gain wisdom, as well as the confidence and courage to move beyond what I thought was possible. Their actions and impact on my life motivated me to research and discover more about leadership and mentoring, both personally and professionally. In my research, I have been privileged to hear stories and thought-provoking insights from five of these exceptional mentors. Please join me in learning from their wisdom, and in the effort to help sustain and expand exceptional mentoring.

Why study mentoring?

I believe that in order to positively change society, one should hold true to broad, long-term, utopian-like goals, such as equality and inclusion for all people. But it is also important to have short-term, practical goals. As a member of corporate America for 22 years, I have developed critical skills in the realm of business and politics that help me negotiate the system to sell fresh ideas. These skills, coupled with my belief that every day is a gift, motivate me to take immediate advantage of opportunities to positively impact my organization. My goal is to ensure that every room I leave is better than it was when I entered it. I see inclusive community-building through acceptance and appreciation as the biggest opportunity before me. I realize that in order to make a difference in any organization, I must be invited to the table and be respected. Paulo Freire (1986) describes this when he speaks of deviant points required to be invited to
participate in government decision-making. Freire stayed connected to his people outside of government, but remained influential by participating inside the government. Similarly, I plan to make a difference inside my organization by gaining respect and influence, while at the same time staying connected and learning from positive role models outside of corporate America.

Klein and Izzo (1999) encourage leaders to bring their whole, authentic selves, including soul, to work. They describe soul as signifying “the basic vital life energy that underlies and animates all human activity. When it is awake, work flourishes, overflows, and manifests as productivity, creativity, innovation, and inspiration” (p. 10). They write that this looks different in each organization, but that “the degree of Corporate Soul ‘wakefulness’ will be reflected in the quality of commitment and excitement (or lack of it) that is present in the workforce, and ultimately in the competitiveness of the business” (p. 11). I have recently experienced firsthand how an environment of trust, safety, encouragement, and soul, as they describe, leads to deep commitment, higher productivity, and greater fulfillment.

An organization must be profitable to keep people working. As our population continues to grow and change, it will become increasingly important for an organization’s employee base to reflect its diverse consumer base if the company is to satisfy consumer demand and succeed in the marketplace. However, organizations struggle to recruit and retain leaders who are the best of the best. Michael Derby (2007) from Quantum Leap, a talent management/recruiting company, defines the market as one that is candidate driven. He says that the key to the success of any organization lies in
attracting and retaining top talent. Yet in today’s market this is becoming more and more difficult.

What are top employees demanding from companies? American Management Association (AMA) published a study in 2000 where employees ranked the top ten things people want at work are 1.) Challenge; 2.) Appreciation; 3.) Camaraderie; 4.) Growth; 5.) Security; 6.) Loyalty; 7.) Money; 8.) Sympathy; 9.) Fair discipline; and 10.) Positive atmosphere/conditions. When it comes to providing employees with these top attributes, many companies fall short. As an employee myself -- and based on years of interaction with co-workers at various organizational levels, I am convinced that employees want to be respected and appreciated for their unique selves and diverse contributions. The word diversity has many definitions and connotations. While it is critically important to recognize and respect cultural, sexual orientation, and gender differences, numerous other individual attributes such as experience, age, personality preferences, styles, strengths, and weaknesses help define an individual. Klein and Izzo (1999) write that companies are struggling to foster loyalty and commitment. The new generation of workers is looking for more from work than money. “With personal balance becoming a major issue, and with growing burn-out at all levels, the modern organization is struggling with how to attract and keep top people let alone motivate them” (p. 8). Workers of all ages, and diverse backgrounds are seeking environments that challenge and support their minds, bodies, hearts, and spirits.

How can I help my organization and society facilitate the diverse knowledge and talents of its people? I want to use my gifts, and experience to make a positive difference. What has helped me develop my soul and grow to where I am today? Mentoring has
provided me with the guidance, wisdom, and support to be my best. Each mentoring relationship I have experienced has been unique. At the same time, they share two common and mysterious elements: chemistry and love.

Based on the challenge of defining these two elements, I embarked on a journey to discover more about mentoring. I started my quest by reading what some of the experts had to say, beginning with the definition of mentoring from Kay and Jordan-Evans (2005):

Mentorship refers to a developmental relationship between a more experienced mentor and a less experienced partner referred to as a protégé, mentee, or (person) being mentored—a person guided and protected by a more prominent person. There are two types of mentoring relationships: formal and informal. Informal relationships develop on their own between partners. Formal mentoring, on the other hand, refers to assigned relationships, often associated with organizational mentoring programs designed to promote employee development or at-risk children and youth. In well-designed formal mentoring programs, there are program goals, schedules, training (for mentors and mentees), and evaluation. Mentors inspire their mentee to follow their dreams. There are many kinds of mentoring relationships—from school- or community-based relationships to e-mentoring relationships (p.117).

While I found this definition helpful, I knew that I would gain much more insight by capturing stories from those who are known for being exceptional mentors.
Who am I?

As I reflect on my journey, and on who, and what, have influenced my sense of reality along the way, key transformative events and people come to mind. During my very early years, my focus was on understanding the basics about myself, the world, God, and discovering the special qualities of people in my life. My childhood mission was to help make the world a better place - especially for those whom I felt were not treated fairly. At every stage of life, the realization that not everyone cared about helping other people surprised and saddened me. As a result of having met a few individuals, whom I refer to as difference makers in my life and in the lives of others, I remained optimistic. So as I endeavor to live out my childhood mission, I desire to learn from role models in order to better help others.

My Philosophy:

Though my philosophy of practice as an adult educator has evolved, my motivation to guide peoples’ viewpoints, opinions, insights, and brilliance as a way to promote a more loving society has remained. Adult education enables positive change through the sharing of one’s knowledge and skills; the appreciation of diversity; and the giving of a voice to minority causes. Effective adult education inspires individuals, including students and teachers (both as learners) to critically reflect and develop more inclusive thoughts and actions.

As an adult educator, nothing is more motivating to me than witnessing a change in perspective or expanded knowledge – not only in my students but especially in myself. I am optimistic that when one person decides to become less judgmental, more open-minded, a better listener, and more of whom he/she wants to be, behaviors change. The
ripple effects of these changes creates neighborhoods and organizations which are more inclusive, resulting in a better society overall.

There are many adult education authors whose theories and philosophies I both relate to and enjoy. Elias and Merriam (1980) write that “Philosophy raises questions about what we do and why we do it, and goes beyond individual cases and phenomena to treat questions of a general nature. When considering the interrelationship of philosophy and activity it is clear that philosophy inspires one’s activities and gives direction to practice” (p. 5). The Humanist theory or philosophy most closely aligns with my values. The emphasis of the humanistic educator is “upon the freedom and dignity of the individual person”. While concerned with every aspect of the adult learner, humanistic adult educators place emphasis “upon the emotional and affective dimensions of the personality” (p. 109). Emotions, preferences, and attitudes of the whole person should be taken into account when providing learning opportunities. The philosophical goal of humanistic education is ultimately to have a better society. Those who are particularly associated with Humanism are psychologists Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, and adult educators Malcolm Knowles, Jack Mezirow, and Paulo Freire.

While some of the early proponents of Humanism professed to be agnostic or atheist, and though some current humanist leaders downplay the existence of God, still others believe in a God who allows freedom of choice. My own personal belief is that each human being is beautifully and uniquely designed by God. I also believe that God allows each of us not only the freedom to decide our path in life, but also the freedom to decide what kind of relationship we will have with Him along our journey. Merriam and Elias write, “A group of religious existentialists that includes Marcel, Jaspers, Buber, and
Tillich have attempted to develop a concept of God that is consonant with, and not
contradictory to, full human autonomy and integrity. Their religious philosophies
downplay the traditional emphasis on human depravity and put stress on the basic
goodness and power of man as God’s creature to cooperate with God in fashioning a
more perfect human society” (p. 118). For me, there is no greater joy than being helpful
in the lives of others and thus, useful in God’s plan. My intent is to become more intimate
in my relationship with God and listen more closely to His guiding voice – especially in
my role as an adult educator and my role as a mentor.

Who am I as a researcher?

As a research scholar, it is essential to be self-aware and to continuously engage
in critical reflection in order to challenge deep-seated paradigms and filters. Marshall and
Rossman (2006) encourage researchers to be sensitive to how our life histories influence
our approach to research. There are many aspects of my life that influence the way in
which I see the world. I have learned a great deal about how my personality preferences
and emotions affect my attitudes and reactions to life and the people around me. I know
that I am greatly influenced by my partner and by other close relationships. My Christian
upbringing has had a significant impact on how I view current events, politics, work,
relationships - actually, everything. I also know that my current reality has been greatly
influenced by my past struggles as a woman in the business world, as a lesbian who is a
Christian, and as someone with a conservative family and background. It has been
particularly painful to reflect and remember stages or chapters in my life where I
experienced rejection for what I believed. The years of realizing that my sexual
orientation was not that which had been expected of me, and the struggle that ensued as I
endeavored to sort through and share my feelings or concerns about my new found identity are the most painful to reflect on. I acknowledge that I may still hold some disappointment, even anger, about how I was treated at times. Some Christians, including family members from whom I had expected full acceptance, initially extended harsh judgment instead. I found this both very confusing and disappointing. Besides these memories, there are, to be sure, many parts of my life history that have created filters through which I see the world, even some of which I may not yet be aware.

Throughout my journey of self-awareness through reflection, I have become increasingly drawn to literature that has opened me up to new ways of viewing society. Having experienced several life changes, I am drawn strongly to the work of Jack Mezirow. Mezirow’s (2000) definition and discussions of perspective transformation and transformative learning follows:

Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. Transformative learning involves participation in constructive discourse to use the experience of others to assess reasons justifying these assumptions and making an action based on the resulting insight (p.8).

This resonates with me as I have become significantly more open-minded, and less judgmental of others and myself. At the same time, through discourse with people from
different ethnicities and backgrounds from mine, I have formed new opinions about several topics, including power and privilege.

Mezirow states that “disorienting dilemma(s), which can include such experiences as divorce, death of a loved one, change in job status, may become the impetus for perspective transformation” (1990, p.14). It is during times like these, those time in which preconceived notions do not fit current events, when one may feel uncertain, confused, lonely, or that there are missing pieces to life that must be found and put together to form what matches the new experience(s). Typically one grows through this process, optimally with the help of an exceptional mentor, to become more open-minded to new possibilities or definitions of how life should progress. According to Mezirow, an integral component of transformative learning, critical reflection “refer(s) to challenging the validity of presuppositions in prior learning and addresses the question of the justification for the very premises on which problems are posed…” (1990, p.12). He goes on to explain that “…the most significant experiences in adulthood involve critical self-reflection – reassessing the way we have posed problems and reassessing our own orientation to perceiving, knowing, believing, feeling and acting” (1990, p. 13). His words described my own significant life experiences, which required critical self-reflection and mentoring to help me transition and transform. There is a bond that forms between reader and author when a lived experience is found articulated in the author’s writings years after the experience. It was exciting to see myself from a new perspective.

As I strive to become a more skillful teacher by learning from various experts in adult education as well as my own students, it is increasingly clear to me that each type of expert offers new opportunities for growth. I am interested in developing my skills in
training, education, and organizational development; therefore, I seek adult education literature that is applicable to my career. I want to learn how mentors lead, encourage, and inspire others to find their passions and to bring out their personal and professional best. With these new insights, I hope to become an adult educator who is able to facilitate personal and professional growth by better understanding the needs of diverse adult learners. Freire and Horton (1990) share stories and experiences in which they, as adult educators, have been involved in social change. They are two exceptional leaders in the field of social democracy who have inspired my desire to positively impact society. The incredible bravery they demonstrated throughout their lives in challenging the status quo and the powerful is amazing. As I read and am inspired by various adult education philosophies and experts, I gain confidence and hope that positive change, no matter how small it may seem, will occur from my own efforts as well. Their example encourages me to become ever more sensitive and aware of minority causes and helps me develop further as a caring person, skillful educator, and mentor.

What are the commitments embedded in my Practice?

The motivation behind obtaining my doctorate in adult education is to expand and develop my abilities to witness and help cultivate the untapped potential of others. Every adult can be a leader and positively impact the world. I am committed to learning more about transformative leadership and mentoring so that I may help others find their own power and answers that exist inside each of them. One of the primary opportunities of adult education is to inform and model for others ways to positively impact the world. This goal falls into the definition of mentoring. Adult educators, whether in corporate America or in academia, need to become more aware of how their own approaches to
mentoring impact others, so that competencies in exceptional mentoring might be gained. Adult educators have great influence over what and how adult learners share ideas and model behavior to others. I am committed to helping fellow adult educators elevate their understanding and foster awareness about the professional, personal, and societal benefits of mentoring. To this end, I am my primary student as I continue to take full advantage of this opportunity to research and discover.

_Motivation for study_

My journey through life led me to a crossroads in my mid-thirties that was both painful and transformative. I realized that I was living a life that did not suit me – personally, professionally, or spiritually. I felt as though I had lived most of my twenties and early thirties with _two tires on the shoulder of the road_. Though I was making forward progress, I was being pulled first to one side, then the other – steering off the road, my path.

This awareness brought with it an admission to myself that serious changes needed to occur. I realized that I had never truly let others into my dark and lonely places. Miraculously, I encountered a few special people who led me toward a truer path and encouraged me to engage in healthy discourse which opened my eyes to my filters, paradigms, and honest feelings. Since then, I have increasingly become critically reflective – a practice that continues to reveal my strengths, fears, and passions. As a result I have become more centered, authentic, and fascinated by other people’s stories. These changes, as well as new experiences in both the academic and professional areas of my life, have taught me about my own and others’ creative talent, unique selves, and innate power. I, myself, have experienced some of the power that comes from my own
unique and creative talents being unleashed by learning from spiritual, educational, and corporate leaders, all... *exceptional mentors* along my path.

We do not become whole by ourselves. Parker Palmer (1998) writes about how mentors have impacted him as a teacher. “Their power is in their capacity to awaken the truth within us...” (p. 21). Palmer also writes that in order for mentors to be effective, the student must be ready (or at least, think he/she is ready). This resonated with me as I remember how important it was for me to have reached a point of readiness to discover truths about myself through others.

Since receiving the help offered by my mentors, I now live with a greater sense of purpose and dare to take more chances. Life continues to get better with *four tires on the road* – with a sense that I am truly in my driver’s seat and steering steadily on my true path. I have tasted the joy of being mentored and am now ready to learn more about how to mentor others – to help them discover, develop, and direct their unique creativity, potential, and possibilities, to live every precious day fully.

*Motivation to improve mentoring programs*

Mentoring programs have various intents and purposes – again, there seems to be no one *right way* to facilitate mentoring. After interviewing 70 organizational leaders and evaluating numerous mentoring programs, Ensher and Murphy (2005) concluded that most formal mentoring programs leave participants feeling disappointed. They write that possible reasons for this include:

...a shoddy formal mentoring program structure, a matchmaking system that mimics blind dates from hell, or simply inadequate resources or rewards to support these programs... these programs are less effective than spontaneously
developed relationships, yet organizational decision makers continue to invest more resources in the formal programs… perhaps they should be expending those resources on creating an infrastructure that enables mentoring relationships to grow and thrive organically.

Having experienced formal mentoring relationships, I too have been disappointed, and agree with the need to invest time, energy, and money in creating a culture that allows organic or natural mentoring to occur. Ensher and Murphy (2005) believe that the mentee can benefit most when they exude their power – power to choose how many mentors they will seek, the types of relationships they will foster, and the outcomes they desire. They describe many different types of mentoring: traditional mentor, boss mentor, reverse mentoring, e-mentor, group mentoring, mentors for hire, inspirational mentors, family-member mentors, barrier-busting mentors, peer and step-ahead mentors, and mentors of the moment. Each of these types of mentoring can benefit mentees professionally and personally or emotionally.

I am blessed to be a part of a small community within my organization that believes in inclusion; embracing diversity; and, leveraging unique talents through mentoring/coaching one another. One of my mentors recently designed a program for our senior executives called Mentoring Circles. The objective of the program is: Participants, with the support of their mentor, will develop relationships by increasing familiarity and comfort, while deepening trust; will establish and strengthen key relationships through access to key decision makers and leaders; increase emotional intelligence within the organization; enhance personal understanding of our corporate values; expand personal understanding of our culture and learn how to succeed within it; develop a formal
network of support; and, increase knowledge sharing and transfer within the organization through rich dialogue. For over one year, starting in 2007, six groups of ten to twelve leaders have participated in bi-monthly meetings, with a member of the Executive Leadership Team mentoring/leading each circle. The feedback and results from the program were very positive, and the goals were met. Later in 2009, seventy participants will begin leading a mentoring circle. I am looking forward to participating and capturing some additional research and insights about mentoring as the program continues to move forward.

In the near future, I will participate in the development of cross-cultural, and cross-generational, and other types of mentoring programs. Each program will begin with education about mentoring, and opportunities for participants to connect prior to mentoring matches. Familiarity breeds trust (Covey, 2007) which often leads to chemistry between two people. I believe that chemistry between mentor and mentee is necessary for exceptional mentoring to take place. Once the mentoring relationship is initiated, training and resources must be available to support participants and help them understand what is possible.

*Purpose of this study:*

The purpose of this CEP was to discover the common threads or characteristics demonstrated by people who are known to mentor and effectively develop the people around them. My intention was to learn, through their stories, what has motivated them to help others strive for their full potential, and then to look to them as role models of exceptional mentoring.
Research Questions:

I conducted research to learn:

- How one becomes a mentor
- Why one mentors and deeply invests in others
- What are the common characteristics of successful mentoring

Problem Statement:

Many people feel lonely, dissatisfied, under-utilized, and/or de-motivated (Covey, 2004). There are a variety of variables that contribute to this, but most of the paralyzing issues that people face come from one main cause: living or working in unsupportive environments. How depressing it is that so many adults are stuck. They are not excited to get out of bed each day because they are not living out their passions, and/or not feeling the needed support to unleash their best unique, whole self!

Unfortunately, throughout my 22-year career, I have encountered very few managers whom I have wanted to emulate or have as a mentor. Although most of my former managers were nice people, had some solid skills, and performed well enough to maintain their position of authority, most of them let their insecurities get in the way and resorted to what I call management by fear. This type of management style contributed to making the people who worked for them feel unmotivated, unhappy, unsatisfied, and insecure about exploring and/or expressing their unique qualities.

Why does it seem that there are so few people who effectively mentor or support others with whom they work, or with whom they are involved in other organizations? Why do people seem to have to struggle to be their best? What is getting in their way? The key to the success of any organization lies in attracting and retaining top talent,
especially diverse candidates. Yet in today’s market this is becoming more and more difficult. Why are organizations struggling to maintain strong talent? Many argue that the best choose not to stay in an environment where they do not feel appreciated or where their strengths are not acknowledged, developed, or maximized. Joni Lampl (2006), leader in Management Recruiters, Incorporated (MRI), listed top reasons that people leave companies:

- Cultural abrasiveness (*rigidity of rules, negative atmosphere, leadership unyielding to change*);
- Inconsistent leadership (“*Do as I say, not as I do,*” forgot mission/vision);
- Cloudy mission/vision (*lack of dream, lack of action plan*)
- Values issues (*how people are treated, people’s character*);
- Wages and benefits (*performance evaluations, career advancement opportunities*);
- Issues with co-workers (*people who feel unappreciated, unproductive teammates*);
- Lack of trust (*trusting leadership/co-workers, honesty*); and
- Lack of personal/individual caring (*lack of support as an individual, lack of understanding of wants and needs for professional/personal life, I am just a number, they only think they know me*)

Most of the areas mentioned on this list are related to the treatment of people. It appears that today’s organizations lack understanding of how to keep employees minimally satisfied, let alone how to satisfy unique needs. Not only is there a shortage of people who are confident in their abilities and willing to accept the challenge of mentoring
others, there are organizational development issues (i.e. unsupportive working environments) that need to be addressed as well.

Among other things, my plan is to expand my teaching repertoire and understanding of these issues in order to develop vehicles (programs, writings, etc) that allow future mentors access to this knowledge, as well as stories and words of wisdom from exceptional mentors. My hope is that many adult educators will choose expand their skill set and knowledge to gain the confidence they need to experience mentoring in new ways.

Rationale for CEP Focus

Emerging mentors, or those of us who are interested in helping others through mentoring, can learn from exceptional mentors about many things, including how to identify the connection that exists with potential mentees, how to open doors, provide opportunities for, support, and develop or instill confidence in others. The exceptional mentors’ stories in this study share words of wisdom that can help motivate us to continue on the journey of awareness so that we might become stronger mentors. If more of us, while acting as mentors, are able to stay true to who we are and our values, we can help our organizations and communities become more profitable and safer by supporting the growth and development of the people within them.

Parameters and Definitions:

As mentioned earlier, there are various goals and definitions of mentoring. Some mentoring relationships are formal, some focus on succession planning, and some are focused on skill transfer. Although those types of mentoring relationships can be very
beneficial, my research focused on mentoring relationships that have both personal and professional attributes in them. I call this type of mentoring *exceptional mentoring*.

Foundational to forming any kind of mentoring relationship is the understanding of basic contextual boundaries and guidelines that are appropriate in an organization. However, step-by-step processes without the *spirit* of mentorship, no matter how skillfully designed, cannot teach people how to care, be trustworthy or transparent with others. Therefore, my study did not attempt to develop a new formal system, but to reflect and identify the experiences, themes, and other influences that have most profoundly impacted and helped those I interviewed. The focus of my study has been about the core elements necessary to exceptional mentoring relationships.

In the next chapter I captured some of the highlights discovered from literature in the field of adult education as well as corporate America. In Chapter 3, I described the methodology used in gathering my research. Following that are my research findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future study. The last sections include an epilogue exploring *who am I becoming?*, references, and an appendix section containing a glossary of terms, and a list of my CEP project team.
Chapter 2

Learning from literary mentors, a literature review

A review of the literature including previous research conducted on mentoring, indicates how powerful mentoring relationships can be, and reveals what various adult education and business experts believe about key components of: mentoring, transformative leadership, and self/other awareness. I chose these particular areas because I believe they are the most influential on adults who become mentors.

Mentoring

Much of the research and literature on mentoring describes programs that are designed to help professions in corporate or academic environments share their knowledge and skills or support new employees or teachers. Some literature, such as Ensher and Murphy’s *Power Mentoring* (2005), focuses on organizational/cultural readiness for mentoring, while other literature focuses on the benefits of mentoring. A few adult education mentoring authors, such as Catherine Hansman (2002a), debate the effectiveness of programs designed to support ethnicity, gender, and race needs. What can be a struggle, however, is finding stories from mentors that capture some of their beliefs and wisdom. Laurent Daloz (1999) writes that “relatively little work has been done on the deeper, metaphorical and archetypal context of the word mentor” (p. 18). In hopes of learning how and why people become mentors, and what successful mentoring relationships include, I read dozens of books, research articles, and dissertations about mentoring. Some of the readings included helpful information about mentoring in general, but most focused narrowly on specific groups or topics. For example, for over
two decades, the Puente Project has helped more than 200,000 students succeed in college through mentoring (Laden, 2000). Although I respect the accomplishments of those involved in the Puente project, the study focuses on mentors who are assigned to work with college students. Ramani, Gruppen and Kachur (2006) develop “twelve tips for developing effective mentors”, but their study focuses specifically on the world of medicine. There are many other studies on mentoring in academia, such as Bullough and Draper (2004) which studied the emotional aspects of mentoring by studying 9 mentors involved in an academic internships program. Although I learned from these and other research studies, few provided the far reaching, cross-profession, holistic insights that I sought to learn about. Realizing the void actually reinforced my commitment to this study.

As mentioned, I am skeptical of formal mentoring programs that pre assign participants. Allen, Eby and Lentz in their study titled “The relationship between formal mentoring program characteristics and perceived program effectiveness” studied several factors present in formal mentoring programs. One aspect of their study included the amount of input that participants had in the mentoring process: Was their participation voluntary? Did they have input on who they were matched with? Another aspect of their study was around training: Did participants receive training about mentoring? How many hours did participants receive? What was the quality of the training? They then studied how these factors related to mentor commitment and understanding of the program. All of these characteristics were measured to determine the perceived program effectiveness of the formal mentoring programs.
Although I admire Allen, Eby and Lentz’s efforts evaluating nine mentoring programs in four different organizations, and questioning a sample of 175 protégés and 110 mentors, I did not find that their quantitative study really proved anything substantial. While I agree that the program characteristics they studied are important considerations in developing a mentoring program, their conclusions about the perceived program effectiveness was lacking evidence. No matter what type of formal mentoring program is evaluated, because mentoring relationships have their own unique attributes and goals, it would be almost impossible to conclude effectiveness solely based on quantitative analysis. To their credit, they recommend additional future research, including more study of the affective aspects of formal mentoring programs (e.g., match input may predict interpersonal attraction, and training quality may enhance protégé commitment). They also recognize that organizational factors such as climate for employee development and immediate supervisor support for the mentoring program may impact the extent that even the best designed programs will perceived as effective. Likewise, individual differences on the part of the mentor (e.g., conscientiousness, altruism) or protégé characteristics (e.g., learning orientation, emotional stability) may moderate the relationship between program design and program effectiveness. Regardless of their stated limitations, I believe qualitative vs. quantitative research provides more insight into the effectiveness of mentoring relationships, and how these relationships impact the participants professionally and personally.

Hansman has written several articles related to mentoring and adult learning. Hansman (2002a) looks back on how the term mentor has been defined over the years.
and captures trends of mentoring practices. In the article *Mentoring: From Athena to the 21st Century*, she writes:

However mentors, protégés, and mentoring relationships are defined or explained, in the latter half of the 20th century, research and prescriptive practice ideas concerning mentoring and formal mentoring programs were frequently published. In the 1990s, more than 500 articles concerning mentoring were published in popular and academic journals (Allan and Johnston 1997). The ERIC database contains references to thousands of articles concerning mentoring.

She goes on to explain that there are many diverse articles written about various kinds of mentoring relationships, such as adult learning and development, workplace learning, service learning, peer mentoring, formal and informal mentoring programs, technology in mentoring relationships, changing workplace and societal roles and expectations, and diversity and power issues in mentoring. There is not a “one-size-fits-all approach, no matter what the intended outcome of such mentoring relationships. Hansman says:

Until the past 15 years or so, however, few empirical studies existed concerning mentoring; most studies and articles were anecdotal in nature and uncritical, making the assumption that mentoring was a universally positive phenomena for mentors and protégés, no matter the gender, race, socioeconomic class, or ethnicity of either mentor or protégé (p. 2).

Hansman (2002b) also wrote an article that focuses on the important role that mentoring plays in the lives of women and members of racial and ethnic minorities. She writes:
In the real world of organizations and educational institutions, persons who serve as mentors may primarily be members of dominant and/or hegemonic groups within organizations or institutions. Because of this, potential protégés, particularly those considered “other” by virtue of the intersection of gender, race, class, ethnicity, ability, or sexual orientation, may experience difficulties initiating and participating in informal mentoring relationships. In addition, issues of power and interests within organizations or institutions might hamper the mutual attraction that is required to participate in an informal mentoring relationship (p. 39).

Hansman (2003a) acknowledges that many studies show that mentoring enhances the growth and development of both mentors and protégés, and that some mentoring programs may indeed be praiseworthy. However, those marginalized because of race, gender, class, or sexual orientation may not benefit equally due to issues of power. In fact, Hansman (2003b) shares a personal example of what it was like for her to have had a non-enthusiastic male assigned to her as a mentor. Unfortunately, her negative experience revealed that not everyone finds chemistry with an “assigned mentor”, not everyone wants to be a mentor, and not everyone wants to be a mentee. She writes, “The nature of mentoring relationships is that protégés have less power and may be vulnerable to the whims of their mentors and of the dominant culture within the sponsoring organization” (p. 15). If mentoring programs and relationships are to be successful, these issues of unequal power and cultural differences must be acknowledged and addressed through open and honest discussions and training.
Although not impossible to overcome, racial and gender differences in mentoring relationships add various complexities and challenges. Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2002) write of the struggles and benefits that come from cross-cultural mentoring relationships. In their research, they illuminate how power dynamics and positionalities are inherent in mentoring relationships. They write that the hierarchical nature and power dynamic in mentoring relationships is “further magnified in cross-cultural mentoring, where the people are in differing locations in societal hierarchies of race and gender” (p. 22). It is their experience that gender plays a less significant role, than does race, as a site of struggle for learning and power. Because of the discrimination and suffering that black Americans experienced for hundreds of years at the hands of some white Americans, a black mentee may find it difficult to trust a white mentor. In these relationships, it is critical to be open to the cultural communication patterns, cultural-racial-ethnic heritages, and styles of each racial member. In order to move beyond these racial differences, it is important to recognize them, and to seek understanding. When both persons involved in a cross-cultural mentoring relationship accept these challenges, they can move beyond race to appreciate one another as individuals, and gain insights about another culture.

By the very nature of their positions in relation to their students, adult educators would do well to be conscious of this type of situation and exercise their power with caution. As Cranton (2006a) writes, “Given that power is exercised in all human interactions, educators need not only to become aware of where and how power relations exist, but also to exercise power responsibly” (p. 133). Emerging mentors should not be afraid of entering into relationships with those from different backgrounds or lifestyles, but should be aware of how these types of historically-based struggles might cause
conflict in mentoring relationships. When we accept these challenges that come from differences and power issues, endless benefits can occur. As Kysilka writes, “So much of what is right about education lies within the area of mentoring” (p. 83). She goes on to say that, “If mentoring is done appropriately, the student will take with him or her, the desire to mentor others as they have been mentored” (p. 84). When attention, open-mindedness, humility, and care are given, mentoring relationships can have far-reaching benefits regardless of whether they take place in an academic setting, a corporation, or outside of an organization. Zachary (2005) writes, “Each mentoring relationship is unique. This uniqueness – all the experience, history, diversity, and individuality that the learner brings to the relationship – must be honored and appreciated. It is the context within which the relationship lives and grows” (p. xxiii). Mutually beneficial contributions can offer a rich dynamic to the mentoring relationship.

People in different fields likely have different images of what a mentor is and does. There are mentors in the business world or academia who help a protégé navigate through the system, move up the ladder, or learn new skills. Daloz (1999) writes about a “teaching mentor, for whom the goal is less clearly defined”. Mentors of adult learners are not so much interested in fixing the road as in helping the protégé become a competent traveler. Throughout his book, Daloz provides rich definitions that paint a picture of how and why mentors are so special. One of my favorite descriptions is the mentor as a guide:

They lead us on the journey of our lives. We trust them because they have been there before. They embody our hopes, cast light on the way ahead, interpret
arcane insights, warn us of lurking dangers, and point out unexpected delights along the way.

This quote in particular demonstrates a critical aspect of mentoring that this dissertation hopes to discover in greater depth. As mentioned earlier, I generally agree with the Humanists who believe that teachers/facilitators are partners in the learning process. As partners, we benefit as mentors and co-learners with our protégés, or as I prefer to call them, mentees.

Daloz’s writings about mentors provide insights from historical mentor figures, such as the old, trusted friend of Odysseus in Homer’s *The Odyssey*. Athena, goddess of wisdom describes Mentor as Wisdom personified as he helps look after Odysseus’s son, Telemakhos. Perhaps the most powerful mentor figure who guides his mentee through a transformational journey is Virgil in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. Daloz weaves this tale throughout his book as he describes how mentors like Virgil can provide crucial help to mentees like Dante through times of Hell and Purgatory on our way toward Heaven. Daloz reminds us that “Virgil begins by engendering trust, issuing a challenge, providing encouragement, and offering a vision for the journey. By way of engendering trust, Virgil reminds Dante that Beatrice sent him. He is thus an emissary of the light.” Similar to Mentor, a vehicle for Athena’s wisdom, Virgil is a channel for truth. Although gender roles are complicated, Daloz points out that in both of these epics, “a female figure is closer to the source than men are” and that both Dante and Odysseus are “journeying toward the feminine, as though unification with the female constitutes wholeness for them” (p. 31). Regardless of gender, mentors offer mentees opportunities to be stretched
and more balanced -- more whole. The student must be ready and the timing must be right, but the mentor must also be ready.

Daloz shares other key takeaways from studies, such as Levinson’s (1978) research, which captures how forty men were mentored through their early adult years. Although Levinson’s research in 1996 seemed to indicate that women’s development showed a less pronounced influence from mentors, Hughes and Wolf (1997) detail the role mentors play in the healing and growth of young women. Daloz lists the many experts in the business world who write of the importance of mentors in both men’s and women’s advancement in organizations. There are other lists of those who agree that mentoring is important in the worlds of academia, sports, religion, and life in general.

In her study on the “Multiple Roles of the Mentor Supporting Women’s Adult Development”, Mayra Bloom (1995) finds mentoring to be instrumental in women’s growth and development. As adult learners, women seek caring influences to help support, guide, and simply listen. Mentors who are humble, and act as a companion, and an ally can be particularly helpful. As Bloom says,

The mentor remains in place so that, as the student becomes surer of her own educational direction and gains fuller possession of her own voice, the two can meet as sister learners. In order to provide such a model, the mentor must be willing to learn, publicly, alongside the learner. She must be willing to continually explore her own zone of proximal development; develop to capacity to listen, question, and connect; and continuously engage in the reclamation of her own intelligence (p. 71).
It is no surprise that these mentors also help these students find some of the “pleasures of
learning” (Bloom). Mentors who willingly accept these roles also enjoy the pleasures that
come from caring about another.

Although each book and article about mentoring described different environments
or situations, they all pointed to some common attributes when describing successful
mentoring. One common theme, or quality of the relationship, is that it feels special.
Mentors support, challenge, share themselves, encourage, advocate, model, mirror, listen,
and in many cases, pray for their mentees or students. Mentors understand that with
growth as the goal, both challenging mentees to find the answers within and supporting
them through the process of discovery are key. Mentors must also share themselves,
being open and honest, in order to establish trust. Daloz found that men placed less value
on honesty, more on activities like providing guidance and fostering independence. He
summarized by saying that “this seems to bear out the speculation about the female need
for connection, the male’s for separation” (p. 216). More important than gender, mentees
need mentors who are truly caring and supportive.

Just as with gender, human connection is difficult to explain in different learning
styles and/or preferences. For example, it makes sense that some mentee’s mentors are
older than they. However, it is also important to be open to mentors of all ages and
differences. Daloz also writes, “Perhaps it would be more useful to let the quality and
power of particular relationships help us define mentor rather than this arbitrary (though
clearly helpful) age criterion” (p. 204). We each have various needs for mentors at
different stages of our lives – some mentors are helpful throughout many chapters or
stages, while others help us for a short time. Daloz shares that mentors “are more than
simply isolated individuals who enter our lives, intervene, and depart. Rather they are creations that emerge out of particular demands our lives make on us. When they do their work well, they help us see not only the tasks before us but also the broader context that gives those tasks meaning” (p. 205). No matter the quantity of time spent with mentors, it is the quality of what they offer that can facilitate positive change which may benefit a life forever. The type of exceptional mentor who accepts the risk of becoming both professionally and personally involved, no matter how complicated, is one I call a *caring catalyst*, an extraordinary difference maker.

Although there are qualities that are common in successful mentoring relationships and various guidelines offered, there are no rules or processes of mentoring. In fact, intuition and spirituality are both key in directing and determining whether or not and then how long the mentoring relationship is meant to last. Ensher and Murphy (2005) write that there are different theories as to how mentoring relationships come about. Recent studies they conducted suggest that the values, attitudes, and goals of the mentor and mentee are more important in producing attraction than demographic similarity. There are many things that the mentor and mentee are looking for in the relationship. Ensher and Murphy’s research shows that while similarities are important, mentors and mentees value differences. They suggest five main reasons mentors take an interest in their mentees:

1. Perceived similarity to themselves
2. Complementary skill or perspective
3. Compelling characteristic or skill
4. Demonstrated potential or performance
5. Willingness to learn
They cite Michael Zey, who interviewed 150 executives in 1984 to find the list of criteria for the ideal protégé. Ensher and Murphy compared his list to findings from the most recent 20 years. Three criteria remained similar: intelligence, ambition, and a willingness to take risks. Current attributes include: initiative, energy, trustworthiness, integrity, high emotional intelligence, optimism, and complimentary skills (p. 122).

Some professions may experience numerous challenges when developing mentoring programs. Ramani, Gruppen and Kachur (2006) study mentoring in the world of medicine. As they describe, not all medical trainees or educators recognize the value of a mentoring relationship. Further, because they rarely receive training on the mentoring process, they are often ill equipped to face challenges when taking on mentoring responsibilities. However, Ramani, Gruppen and Kachur addressed these challenges and developed “twelve tips for developing effective mentors”.

Mentoring relationships can take place in various settings, can be of different durations, and can lead to many different outcomes. Daloz writes that there are times that a mentoring relationship turns to friendship and there are times when the relationship must end. Daloz captures a student’s view of her mentor: “Yes, we’re friends now, but there’s still that respect; I’ll always respect her. You know, I feel that we are now much more like colleagues than we were.” He goes on to share another example from a student who almost wanted to be her mentor, but grew to become a new person… She recognized that she needed to be her own author and could therefore redefine the relationship from mentoring to friendship (p. 35). But not all relationships grow to that level of maturity or are meant to last. As in many mentoring relationships, the mentor, like Virgil to Dante, departs before the journey is over.
Van Eck Peluchette and Jeanquart (2000) studied the impact of mentoring on 430 professors at two state universities with an average of 11.7 years at the current university. They asked the professors whether they had a mentor within their university, outside of the university (outside of academia and/or from another academic institution). From their results, they found a distinct difference in both objective and subjective career success for professionals at early, middle, and late career stages. They found the mentoring particularly impacted those participants who were in their early and later career stages. In their study, there was a direct relationship between productivity and feelings of success and mental well-being. Participants without mentors were likely to be at a disadvantage with regard to their career success (p. 560). They recommend that all organizations provide the necessary resources to aid in the development of mentoring relationships, particularly for professionals in the early stage of their career. For professionals in the middle career stage, they recommend opportunities for the development of mentoring relationships outside of the work place to expand participants’ networks. Those in the late career stage need mentoring opportunities to help with career advancement.

When evaluating several studies about academic mentoring programs, Bullough and Draper (2004) were struck by the absence of the emotional aspects of mentoring. Colley (2002) also recognized the need to get beneath “the happy ‘appearance’ of mentoring to reveal its ‘essence’”. Bullough and Draper, studying 9 mentors involved in an academic internships program, evaluated the mentors as people who faced challenges in their own work and personal lives. Mentoring can be very stressful, and sacrificial for the mentor. In describing the interns, Bullough and Draper recognized that many of them expected the impossible from their mentors. They write:
Generally speaking, the interns wanted to be supported emotionally and uncritically but, paradoxically, they also wanted critical feedback, just not too much of it. They wanted mentors to keep in touch and be aware of classroom events, but not overstay their welcome. Some wanted them to be involved in their classrooms but only by invitation. The wanted access to the mentor’s resources but wanted to use them as they wished and when they wished. They wanted mentor advice, but some felt no obligation to accept it. Some interns wanted to be treated as equals, but they were not equals. The interns wanted friendship for their mentors which brought with it deep obligations but the obligations were decidedly one-sided (p. 278).

The emotional drain on mentors can be daunting. A mentor in the study remarked, “You have to be a listener, you have to be a mother, you have to be a friend”. Mentors also act as protector, coach, therapist, as well as many other roles. Fairbanks et al. (2000) describe mentoring as dancing:

the music changes frequently and with each change a new step is required and one never knows if a stumble and an unintended injury or a graceful lift and two joyous smiles will result (p. 278).

There is, however, good news for mentors – evidence shows that both mentors and those mentored develop professionally as a result of their shared experience (Zeek et al. 2001). Bullough and Draper’s research also found that mentors learned new approaches from their interns, and strengthened their teaching abilities. There were several additional benefits to the mentors, including the fact that mentors found pleasure in their relationship with their interns.
Teaching and mentoring are similar when it comes to investing in people. Those who allow themselves to be vulnerable, and invest emotionally, will reap the benefits that come from caring. Bullough and Draper (2004) found an unanticipated benefit from their study when participants formed a support group for mentors. They saw that when mentors received the support they needed they found friendship as well as new energy to continue mentoring. Over time, “mentoring became increasingly interesting, emotionally more satisfying and, we believe, the mentors’ knowledge of teaching deepened significantly” (p. 287). Adult educators who accept the challenge of mentoring can greatly benefit by supporting and encouraging each other.

Among the numerous opportunities to apply mentoring skills, adult educators provide conditions, information, and care, while allowing the student to decide how to apply the learning, which is an example of the aforementioned, “not fixing the road, but instead preparing the traveler.” In planning learning instruction of any kind, we as educators must be sensitive to the needs of our adult learners. Freire and Horton (1990) share their views about effective adult education. Freire, in sharing his hope for future generations, says “I think it is absolutely indispensable that educators be secure, capable, and have a capacity for loving and for curiosity” (p. 191). Demonstrating his humility, Horton continuously expressed the mutual benefits gained through sharing ideas with students.

The exceptional mentor learns and then endeavors to understand the student or mentee’s needs by observing, asking questions, and actively listening to ensure that what is said. Both Freire and Horton agreed that asking open-ended questions and listening helps people become themselves. Freire said, “The less people are asked about what they
want, about their expectations, the less democracy we have.” Horton followed with “I use questions more than I do anything else… instead of giving a lecture…” (p. 146). Once you take the responsibility to share the insight you have, the student or mentee must then take the initiative to learn, and the responsibility to grow and change. Horton then shares, “It later becomes their idea because they’re the ones who come to that idea, not because I said it or because of some authority; it just makes sense. It makes sense because it’s related to the process and the thinking they’re going through” (p. 147). It takes care to listen, and self confidence to let go of ideas that are developed in mentoring relationships. Once one can shed insecurities and find authenticity, the door is open to becoming an exceptional mentor who truly cares about a mentee.

One other common element in exceptional mentoring relationships is mutual trust. Ensher and Murphy quote T.S. Elliot, who said, “Those who trust us, educate us” (p. 142). Both attitude and behavior are necessary to establish trust. They write “It is about attitude in terms of shared values and a deep understanding of the other. It is about behavior in terms of giving and receiving difficult feedback, sharing secrets and proving loyalty in word and deed” (p. 142). Trust leads to the type of bonding necessary in exceptional mentoring relationships. Not everyone goes into relationships with the same desire for intimacy, but can work to establish familiarity, and eventually trust. Sharing what Ensher and Murphy call a defining moment can facilitate a more trusting relationship. Defining moments are different for each potential mentee, but typically occur during times of transition, heartache, or a new desire for growth. As they say, “However it happens, a defining moment can be a true test of an individual’s character and of the strength of a relationship” (p. 191). For me, as mentioned earlier, a defining
moment followed by my own disorienting dilemma, was when I decided to claim authenticity by acknowledging and accepting my sexual orientation even as, and after, I realized I would not have the unconditional love and support I had expected. It was during this time in my life that I felt alone, confused, and yet open to new and exciting chapters ahead. I knew that I needed support and wisdom from someone whom I felt I could trust; miraculously I found an exceptional mentor, a caring catalyst to help me transform through the transition.

It is difficult for some to turn to others for help. During times of desperate need and/or fear, it becomes clear that a mentor is needed. Mentors offer help and guidance during scary times and allow students/mentees opportunities to safely challenge their opinions, worldviews, and to critically reflect. It is true that “we seek (a) Mentor just as we need him” (Daloz 1999). As Dante found his Virgil, many others who experience fear eventually recognize mentors who help them through difficulties (p. 94). Like Virgil in Hell, mentors “seem to be able to move undaunted among the inhabitants of a frightening world.” (p. 96). It is when we learn to let go of past paradigms and trust that there is much to gain and discover, that we journey toward richer pathways. Similar to what Ensher and Murphy call defining moments, or what Mezirow (1990) writes about how a disorienting dilemma can lead to new perspectives, Daloz writes, “The old world is not abandoned, but is seen in a new way.” The journey does not take away our old experiences, as we often fear before we embark. It simply gives them new meaning.

Nothing is different, yet all is transformed (p. 27). Daloz reminds us that “Buddhists refer to the sensation of enlightenment as being akin to what happens when the bottom falls out of a bucket of water. For some time it seems that more has been lost than gained, yet
beneath that lays knowledge that the exchange was immeasurably for the better.” (p. 136). It is clear that fear is often the impetus of ones desire to seek out mentoring. During these times of need we hope to encounter an exceptional mentor, the kind of individual who will care about us and help us find answers along the journey. If, during a personal growth or transformational stage of life, the mentee is receptive to the guidance given by the mentor, then the exceptional mentor has now become an extraordinary difference maker or what I have labeled, a caring catalyst on this journey.

Transformative Leadership

In corporate America, the realities of capitalism are such that difficult decisions and actions must be made in order for the organization to survive. Goals must be met, profits must be made, and people must develop for themselves, as employees, to keep their jobs. How leaders carry out the what, or tasks, speaks to their character. It takes an extraordinary leader, especially in this type of work environment, to become an exceptional mentor. Because of this, I looked through the theoretical lens of transformative leadership which is described by Koestenbaum (2000) in his course, Awakening the Dragon Within, as involving four interdependent leadership imperatives or orientations that lead to greatness. They are: 1.) Reality is a no nonsense approach to facing life without illusions, while relying on data that is factual rather than emotional; 2.) Ethics means caring about people, being sensitive and providing service to them, and behaving in accordance with moral principles; 3.) Vision means applying analytical skills, thinking big, looking at situations in new ways, and being inspirational; 4.) Courage means taking charge, using power wisely, acting with sustained initiative, managing anxiety, and being free and responsible. In the course, Koestenbaum teaches a
process that helps participants create a transformational approach to leadership that builds abilities in each of the four areas mentioned:

By transformation we mean that you must gain control over the patterns that govern your mind: your worldview, your beliefs about what you deserve and about what's possible. That's the zone of fundamental change, strength, and energy -- and the true meaning of courage.

Koestenbaum clearly draws distinctions between a leader and a manager. A manager is required to review performance, and guide corporate processes; whereas a leader, especially a transformative leader, must have personal as well as professional accountability and ownership that transcend corporate norms and expectations. Both character and competence are necessary, and every attempt should be made to deliver what is promised.

It takes a special, caring leader to become an exceptional mentor. Koestenbaum has an impressive background in philosophy and spent most of his life in academia; yet he spent ten years observing, gathering insights, and recording conversations spent with business leaders to write Leadership: The Inner Side of Greatness (A Philosophy for Leaders). Because Koestenbaum is a trusted mentor to many business leaders, he was able to ask them deep questions about their experiences, struggles, and stories to discover what successful transformative leadership means to them. Koestenbaum demonstrates that leaders can be transformative and mentor others when they are committed to developing themselves.

A leader understands the difference between arrogance and humility; power and authority. Palmer (1999) writes “Power comes to anyone who controls the tools of
coercion, which range from grades to guns. But authority comes only to those who are granted it by others. We grant authority to people we perceive as ‘authoring’ their own words and actions, people who do not speak from a script or behave in preprogrammed ways” (p. 77). This type of transformative leadership does not come without effort – it requires a commitment to lifelong learning about oneself and others.

Izzo and Klein (1999) believe that successful leaders listen to, and nourish their soul with acts of service. “We can begin to inspire others after our daily efforts become a clear expression of service and contribution. In this way a most personal task becomes a first step to corporate renewal” (p. 102). A soulful leader does not wait for someone else to take initiative, and creates the conditions that awaken soul (p. 46). Transformative leaders are in touch with what others need, and are truly happy to help – people know that they care.

Leaders who strive to be more aware of themselves and others, who show humility and openness to change and growth, are both refreshing and attractive in a world where so many are insecure and fear change. Palmer (1998) writes of the damaging effects of fear. He writes, “Fear is everywhere – in our culture, in our institutions, in our students, in ourselves – and it cuts us off from everything” (p. 56). In order to be successful at anything, one must vulnerably recognize and admit fears, and with the help of God and others, face them. Transformative leaders, especially those who strive to become exceptional mentors, move beyond fears, take risks in relationships, and understand the importance of the affective level in human interactions. Affectiveness leads to effectiveness.
Self/other awareness

Throughout much of the literature I have read in the fields of psychology, organizational development, and leadership effectiveness, the experts seem to agree that in order to be truly successful, a person must start with self-awareness before he/she is able to make a difference by mentoring others (Covey, 2004). When we are aware of ourselves, have a positive self-concept, manage our emotions, and know what our own passions are, we are open to an endless journey of fulfillment and the ability to help in the journeys of others. DeMello (1990) encourages us to let go of the trappings that absorb both our time and energy so that we may increase awareness and more fully engage with nature and our fellow man. Regardless of whether the trappings consist of all-consuming professional ambition, addictions, habits, or routines, they keep us from confronting our true selves. The more awareness we have of who we are and how to live with purpose, the more we will experience true joy and love. When we have those gifts, exceptional mentoring can begin.

Izzo and Klein (1999) suggest that it takes courage to face who we are – to connect with our soul. They argue:

If the energies of the soul do not open out into the world, they turn poisonous and inwardly destructive. When we hold our gifts, talents, and values hostage to fear or doubt these very life giving resources begin to eat away at the foundations of our sense of self. One can see this in many organizations where there are people who have forsaken themselves while remaining on the job. They become
unhelpful team members, often releasing their own bitter form of ‘realism’ in meetings and conversations (p. 78).

Self awareness, the process of discovering our hidden fears and passions, is necessary to living a healthy life, and on the road to becoming an exceptional mentor.

Successful relationships require time, investment, and awareness of what the other person is going through. Ensher and Murphy (2005) write “At the heart of all relationships are listening skills…it involves understanding what they are really saying” (p. 199). In order to truly listen, one must care about the whole person. Izzo and Klein (1999) remind us that in order for one to understand the needs of others, listening, and soulful connection are required. They write, “In the Zen tradition, it is said, ‘Wherever you are, you are the master.’ The master is one who realizes the only way to influence the future is to become the ‘right person’ in the present moment. From this awareness comes soulful leadership action” (p. 46).

For decades Dr. Stephen Covey has been writing about how self/other awareness, leadership, and mentoring can result in success. The over-arching theme of his best seller *The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People* (1989) is that one must achieve self awareness or *private victory* before one can understand others and achieve *public greatness*. Covey (2004) starts his most recent book discussing some of the painful truths that most organizations are facing today. “People face a new and increasing expectation to produce more for less in a terribly complex world, yet they are simply not allowed to use a significant portion of their talents and intelligence” (p. 2). He goes on to summarize some of the key findings from what was then a current Harris Poll (23,000 U.S. residents employed full time within key industries including education, retail trade, banking,
telecommunications, etc). Some of the unfortunate findings were that only 1 in 5 was
ever enthusiastic about his/her team’s and organization’s goals, only 15% felt that his/her
organization fully enables them to execute key goals, only 15% felt they worked in a
high-trust environment, only 22% said workers are motivated or feel valued, and only
17% felt their organization fosters open communication that is respectful of differing
opinions and that results in new and better ideas.

Covey provides his thoughts on this sobering reality by saying, “Most people are
not thriving in the organizations they work for. They are neither fulfilled nor excited.
They are frustrated. Can you imagine the personal and organizational cost of failing to
fully engage the passion, talent, and intelligence of the workforce? It is far greater than
all taxes, interest charges and labor costs put together!” (p. 3). Covey’s books are
bestsellers, which is an indication that many people believe his insights about a person’s
capacity and the essence of successful leadership have merit. Covey writes, “… every
human being is precious in his or her own right, endowed with enormous, almost infinite
potential and capacity. We’ve learned that the pathway to enlarging that capacity is
magnifying our present gifts and talents…” (p. 313). Another of Covey’s insights that
resonates with me is, “Leadership is communicating to people their worth and potential
so clearly that they come to see it in themselves” (p. 98). In order to discover the kind of
confidence necessary to lead or mentor others in this way, one must begin with self-
awareness.

Adult educators are role models and mentors to many, and have a responsibility to
invest in an awareness of self and others while continuously gaining wisdom. As Elias
and Merriam write, “Ideally, the humanistic teacher is a self-actualized or fully-
functioning individual” (p. 125). I am not sure that the ideal they refer to is completely achievable, but I do agree, and sincerely believe, that by gaining self-awareness we can become wiser, more mature, more confident, and more accepting of others.

In programs on emotional intelligence, The Institute of Health and Human Potential (ihhp) spends a considerable amount of time on self-awareness, leadership and mentoring. One of the many profound lessons they teach is the distinction between one’s intention and one’s impact. Although a leader may mean well, or has positive intentions, the recipient of his/her actions may not benefit as intended. Leaders who understand this, and work hard to expand their awareness; and subsequently improve their good intention/favorable impact ratio, will be more effective. Also as they become more emotionally intelligent, they can help others understand emotional health and how to apply it in situations. It helps those who take the course understand situations that trigger negative responses within them, and how to positively manage their emotions. These practices allow individuals to listen more deeply and to be more open to other perspectives.

Attempting to capture the link between traditional mentor relationships, intimacy and emotional intelligence, Christine Bennetts (2002) studied the impact of mentoring in the lives of creative people. She selected of creative workers (poets, painters, actors, sculptors, writers, musicians, and dancers) because they are used to accessing emotions in every work. Her 35 participant sample consisted of 19 men and 16 women aged between 20 and 77 years old.

Utilizing a heuristic framework, via conversational interviews, Bennetts addresses the intimacy that is felt in her participants’ mentoring relationships as going beyond that
of other relationships, and was described in terms of reverence and awe. “Participants identified the deep personal closeness, heightened communication, intuition, and creative energy within the mentor relationship in emotional, spiritual, sexual, and physical terms, sometimes separating these, sometimes not” (p. 161).

There are the many things that I appreciate and agree with in Bennetts’ research, and findings. She found that the mentors in her study validated the learners’ creativity, provided an environment of understanding, supported and provided opportunities for creative endeavour, acted as respected critics, and enabled learners’ development in four aspects of self: self-image (how learners perceived themselves); self-esteem (how they evaluated that perception); self-confidence (how they acted as a result of such evaluation); and, self-worth (the value they placed on their own creative output). Regardless of one’s so called creative skills, every mentee can benefit from development in these areas.

Exceptional mentoring relationships, whether labeled as such, have some level of emotional intimacy. Bennetts distinguishes between what she calls traditional mentoring relationships (TMRs) and formal mentors:

TMRs are those intimate learning alliances that happen naturally, and which may occur at any age. They are usually retrospectively named as mentor relationships when individuals are appreciated and honoured by learners for what they have done. This is in direct contrast with formally organized mentoring, where individuals are named as mentors by others, in anticipation of what they might do. Bennett’s participants described mentors displaying the personality characteristics of what can be defined as emotional intelligence. The emotional intelligent person is one
with the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional meanings, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote both better emotion and thought (Salovey & Sluyter, 1997). The participants were deeply touched by their mentors, and many of them “paid it forward” by becoming mentors themselves. They knew the value of someone engaging their intellect as well as emotion. As Bennetts says of the mentoring relationship, “…it provides just the stimulus necessary to support cherished dreams and promote new ideas. The mentors acted as catalysts for creativity, but they did much more than that. They also achieved the ultimate creative act, ‘the miracle of integration’” (Read, 1960, p. 104).

If gaining awareness about others and ourselves can lead to life changing insights, a richer life, and an improvement in our ability to lead/mentor others, why doesn’t everyone decide to accept the challenges that come from reflection and self growth? Why is it so difficult to be honest with ourselves and vulnerable with others? Palmer (1998) writes “Fear is what distances us from our colleagues, our students, our subjects, ourselves” (p. 36). Teachers can hide behind their podiums, and each of us can find ways to hide behind whatever has worked to keep us from the discomfort of growth and change. Live encounters with conflict from diverse opinions can be very threatening to our standpoints and strong opinions. Palmer writes:

If we embrace the promise of diversity, of creative conflict, and of “losing” in order to “win”, we still face one final fear – the fear that a live encounter with otherness will challenge or even compel us to change our lives. This is not paranoia: the world really is out to get us! Otherness, taken seriously, always invites transformation, calling us not only to new facts and theories and values but
also to new ways of living our lives – and that is the most daunting threat of all (p. 38).

A successful mentor tries to understand or relate to others. DeMello (1990) writes, “Do you want to change the world? How about beginning with you? How about being transformed yourself first? But how do you achieve that? Through observation. Through understanding. With no interference or judgment on your part” (p. 37). We all experience life differently, but can benefit equally by finding the stories of others informative and/or inspiring.

The mentee must be engaged in the mentoring process and relationship. When the mentee is receptive and responsive to self-reflection, new perspectives and tremendous growth opportunities become available. Daloz writes that we learn as we close gaps and as gaps are opened (p. 216-217). He cites Festinger (1957) who invented the term cognitive dissonance, a gap between one’s perceptions and expectations. Festinger maintains that learning takes place when a human being strives to close the gap between where one is now and where one believes he/she should be. It is very exciting when mentees strive for this new learning, insight, and wisdom. Mentors and teachers offer “cow plops on the road to truth that raise questions about their students’ current worldviews and invite them to entertain alternatives to close the dissonance, accommodate their structures, think afresh”.

In my experience working with others, success depends on truly understanding ourselves and how we interact with others. I believe that people need to be respected for who they are, and must feel safe when sharing their opinions and ideas. Mezirow (2000) argues that there is much to gain through discourse. He encourages adult educators to
seek a wide range of views and allow dissension in what he calls reflective discourse (p. 12). All too often we selfishly scream out our own opinions and shut out those of others. Mezirow encourages us to talk and listen to each other in ways that suspend judgment, allowing us to use our imagination so that we may break out of our paradigms and see things from another’s perspective (p. 20). When we open ourselves up to the transformative power of learning from those with different viewpoints, missions and philosophies, endless opportunities to grow become available.

Buckingham and Clifton (2001) encourage us to understand ourselves and leverage our own strengths and then those of others. “The real tragedy of life is not that each of us doesn’t have enough strengths, it’s that we fail to use the ones we have” (p. 12). They add that “building a strong life will always be a challenging assignment involving a myriad of different variables: your self-awareness, your maturity, your opportunities, the people with whom you surround yourself, the people from whom you can’t seem to escape” (p. 28). Additionally, they define strengths as a combination of talents (our natural recurring patterns of thought, feeling, or behavior), knowledge (facts and lessons learned), and skills (the steps of an activity). Understanding and leveraging these strengths is the key to strong living. In the world of sports, the difference between someone whose performance is acceptable e.g. a batter in baseball who hit the ball successfully 270 times out of 1000 plate appearances and someone whose performance is excellent with 320 hits is slight (p. 131). In the world of work, the difference between the exemplary mentor and the run-of-the-mill boss might simply be a few more questions asked and a few more moments spent listening” (p.132). Unfortunately, when sharing the results of Gallup’s study of 198,000 employees in the USA working in 7,939
organizations’ effectiveness in recognizing and leveraging employees’ strengths, the answer to the question “At work do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day?” resulted in only 20 percent saying “strongly agree” (p. 6). Once one gains self-awareness, one can truly be aware of others and see more of what is possible. Clearly there is a huge opportunity for exceptional mentors to help others find and leverage their unique talents!

It is not always easy to stretch to others’ styles and/or levels of maturity, or to be tolerant, even respectful of those who have very different preferences or attitudes. Self/other awareness challenges us to action -- hopefully that action results in individual growth, and/or healthier relationships.

Informed by the literature, my research into some of the important aspects of mentoring, transformative leadership, and self/other awareness has validated some of my preconceptions as well as expanded my awareness. The academic and business leaders whose works I read, some of which were cited, have inspired me to continue my journey to grow in my knowledge and application of these topics. The next chapter describes the methodology used, the theoretical framework or lens through which I conducted my research, information about my research participants, as well as how my research data was collected and analyzed.
Chapter 3

The wisdom of mentoring – a process of ongoing discovery

Qualitative research was a requirement for the Critical Engagement Project component of this Doctoral program. As I considered the differences between qualitative and quantitative research, it became clear that qualitative would be more conducive to revealing the deeper, more affective nature of mentoring, whereas quantitative would not. Marshal and Rossman (2006) write that when conducting qualitative research, the researcher is “intrigued by the complexity of social interactions expressed in daily life and by the meanings that the participants themselves attribute to these interactions” (p. 2). Throughout my research, I became increasingly intrigued by the meanings my participants associated with mentoring. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) write that qualitative researchers “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). I am grateful that my participants allowed me to learn how mentoring touched their lives.

Why use narrative inquiry as my methodology?

Narrative inquiry, a form of qualitative research, is concerned with the lived experiences, the stories of others via in-depth interviews. Stories contain a wealth of wisdom… and it was the thought of hearing and gaining wisdom through my research that drew me in. Narrative inquiry matched well with my interest in capturing stories and transformative moments of exceptional mentors. Chase, (2005) describes the diverse approaches in this qualitative research methodology. She writes that studies that are based on in-depth interviews “aim specifically at transforming the interviewer –
interviewee relationship into one of narrator and listener” (p. 660). I chose Narrative Inquiry because its focus is the facilitating and transferring of wisdom through storytelling. I knew this method would best expand my understanding of how leaders can become exceptional mentors.

Present day society is exceedingly time driven. I, myself, often find it difficult to prioritize and make time to engage in true or deep listening to the stories of others. When my participants and I took the time, and were outside of our office mode, we opened up in ways that led to mutual discovery – discovery about both ourselves and each other. Even though I have known, and spent time with each participant for more than three years, we learned many lessons through reflecting together and storytelling during the interviews. These stories have energy and facilitate incredible insight and wisdom.

In my quest to discover nuggets of wisdom from my participants’ stories, it was very important for me to listen with my ears, my eyes, and my heart as participants shared their insights in order to capture as much of the whole story as possible. Leslie Rebecca Bloom (2002) describes the task of the narrative researcher “to make sense of the telling rather than the tale”. That statement really intrigued me and so I decided to understand for myself what Bloom meant. Intentionally, I paid closer attention that I might have otherwise, to the telling and found that each one of the participants expressed how nice it was to be asked questions, and listened to. As they revealed their deep personal philosophies through the sharing of their stories, I noticed and actually felt their gratitude for the opportunity my research offered for them to reflect on their life lessons. I was touched by the ways they shared – as they recounted the experiences in their lives
that offered opportunities to grow. I began to truly appreciate that my life would be impacted forever not only by what they shared but also how they shared their stories.

The research participants of this study came alive with emotion as they reminisced about their favorite memories and stories of mentoring. As they trusted me with their stories, they revealed their emotions through their smiles, tears, squints, and various tones of voice. The raw honesty, enthusiasm, vulnerability, and willingness to share special parts of themselves affirmed for me that I had chosen the right participants. They each told me that they had gained new insights and meaning for themselves as they shared important reflections with me. Connelly and Clandinin (2000) write, “there is a reflective relationship between living a life story, telling a life story, retelling a life story, and reliving a life story” (p. 71). During interviews and/or follow-up discussions, participants admitted that their stories had in fact changed over time. As the participants had evolved, so had their stories. It seemed to me that for them to restory was inevitable, authentic, and showed the integrity of the storyteller.

Each person is uniquely whole. Storytellers, or those who allow others to share in their wisdom, experience or visualize their story through their own filters or lens. When describing personal narratives as social critique, Bloom writes “When we examine society through the lens of the individual, we can better understand society and resist its hegemonic tendencies” (Merriam, 2002, p. 311). It is powerful to observe what transpires with the retelling of stories – especially stories in which participants overcame societal barriers, and chartered their own course.

As I engaged with each of the participants and heard their stories come alive, our relationship evolved. Marshall and Rossman (2006) write that the inquiry:
…should be a mutual and sincere collaboration, a caring relationship akin to friendship that is established over a time for full participation in the storytelling, retelling, and reliving of personal experiences. It demands intense active listening and giving the narrator full voice. Because it is a collaboration, both voices are heard (p. 118).

Upon completion of the interviews, I experienced a new chemistry with my participants. Hearing their stories allowed me to in some way intimately experience a part of their lives. I will forever be touched that they shared the laughter, tears, and thanksgiving with me as they told their stories. I am privileged to have interviewed and learned from these exceptional mentors who allowed me to enter their journey of deeper discovery through storytelling.

_Theoretical Framework: Transformative Leadership_

Mentoring requires taking initiative to bring out the leader within. Leaders, whether officially titled as such, can help their organization or community succeed by caring about people. Because of this, transformative leadership was used as the lens through which I conducted my research on exceptional mentoring.

Leaders must be cautious when working to transform the business and transform people’s lives. Such individuals must have and exhibit high ethics, character, and competence. Koestenbaum (2002) writes that leaders who are transformative form the culture, set the tone, and appreciate diversity. Koestenbaum encourages leaders to break out of the management paradigm - to be courageous, take risks, and develop long-term vision. He states that leaders can mentor and bring out the best in others when they are committed to their own excellence. Throughout my career, I have been touched by
leaders who have many of the qualities that Koestenbaum describes. I have learned from
the stories of leaders who are truly exceptional… transformative.

Participant Selection

When considering which leaders to interview as research subjects, it became clear
to me that great mentors do not have to have fancy professional titles, or be formally
known as mentors. A purposeful sample is one in which a set of specific criteria is used. I
realized that the criterion necessary was that my participants have a reputation and
history of proven success acting as leaders, who help and care about others in the
workplace.

I initially met each of my participants in different work settings and times, but
each relationship had one thing in common: chemistry. When I began my doctoral
program in 2006, Michelle, and LM were already mentors to me. In fact, I chose to study
mentoring largely because of the impact they had in my life. Upon deciding to research
mentoring, I sought to find additional research participants by asking several colleagues
in the areas of training, organizational development, and human resources at various
companies and within different network organizations for recommendations.

From that list, I was particularly excited to meet Carol, Bill and Mark. Carol,
Director of Leadership Development for a large Consumer Products company, had a
fantastic reputation in the industry for her work as a mentor. After meeting Carol and
learning more about her, I asked her to participate, and she accepted. I heard about both
Mark and Bill from at least a half dozen other people who described them as wonderful
consultants, trainers, and mentors. I knew that each would add valuable insights to my research.

As the time I spent with them increased, and as my relationship with each one of them grew, I became more aware of the special characteristics and reputation each one of my participants had. Each is known and respected for their abilities to inspire, guide, teach, motivate, and bring out the best in others. Sharon Merriam in *Qualitative Research in Practice* (2002) emphasizes the importance of the relationship between the researcher and researched in that it provides the frame in which the stories are told, retold and interpreted. As I spent time with each of them, my research participants increasingly demonstrated exceptional mentoring to me, and I became the mentee.

Although I value diversity and would have welcomed a broader span of demographic differences (race, age, geography, etc) among my participants, I did not find that to be critical for my study. Malcolm Gladwell, in his books *Blink*, *Outliers*, and *The Tipping Point*, describes the power that comes from one’s years of experience, and from intuition. In that vein, it was as though my participants found me, or I was guided toward them – I just knew they were the right people.

**Participant Profiles**

LM is a Caucasian female in her early forties. She has worked for leading Consumer Products companies – mostly in Sales. Her current leadership position is Region V.P. Sales for a $22 Billion company with 200 associates on her team. LM and I connected immediately. She became a mentor, and a dear friend. When I worked for her, she provided opportunities to help me grow, and always took time to teach me. She
listens to me, and remembers the smallest detail of our conversations. My partner and I are frequently invited to the home she shares with her husband, and we enjoy having fun with them. LM is vulnerable with me, and makes me feel equality in our relationship. We trust and love each other.

Michelle is a Caucasian female in her mid forties. After working as a nurse in the military, she worked for a leading health care company for 14 years, and recently has held the role of Director of Global Diversity for a leading Consumer Products company. As a mentor of mine, Michelle inspires me, encourages me, and challenges me to be my best. Through working with and observing her on a regular basis, she has helped me understand what successful mentoring and diversity programs look like. She has a strong sense of mission, and is always listening for God’s call. She shares great stories with me, and is very philosophical. Our relationship is very special to me, and I am blessed to have her as a mentor.

Carol is a Caucasian female in her late thirties. She has held various Organizational Development and Human Resource roles, and has most recently held the role of Director of Leadership Development for a leading Consumer Products company. I have only known Carol for three years, but feel a special connection with her. During our interview in her home, which lasted over four hours, we each opened up and shared intimate memories. There were tears, and lots of laughter! I am especially impressed with her humility, and her wisdom. I am grateful that Carol has volunteered to be my life coach, and my friend.

Mark is a Caucasian male in his late forties. He worked in banking for over twenty years, and then followed his passion for teaching and training. He has been a
leader in sales and training for a world-renowned training and consulting company for over five years. Mark and I became friends the first minute we met. We consider each other to be kindred spirits in many ways. When I asked him to participate, he was very excited, and expressed how honored he was to be a part of this study. After our almost five hour interview, he asked if he could have a copy of the tape to put in a time capsule for his kids. Mark is a wonderful man, and I am proud to have him as one of my mentors!

Bill is a Caucasian male in his early forties. After experiencing extraordinary success in the technology industry, Bill had what he calls a “wake up call” to take better care of his mind, body and spirit. He is CEO of a company that focuses on health and human potential. I first met Bill at my company’s national meeting. I was introducing the evening’s keynote speaker from his company. I began my introduction telling a story (given to me by the speaker) about someone who turned his life around. When I finished, Bill told me that the fictitious person in my story was him! The more I spent time with Bill, the more I admired and respected him. He is humble, caring, funny, wise, and is passionate about helping people become their best. When I interviewed him in his lovely home, and met his daughter, our relationship immediately grew. One of the highlights of the interview was that Bill expressed how he grew and gained new ideas by telling his stories. He developed new approaches, calling them action points with which to move forward in mentoring his cousin. I look up to Bill, and truly enjoy our friendship.

Data Collection

Interviews

The data for my research was derived from one-on-one interviews, lasting anywhere from two to five hours. In order to ensure that participants were comfortable, I
asked each of them to select where and when the interview would take place. Three took place in the participant’s home, one in a participant’s office, and one in a restaurant.

During the interviews with these five mentors, I asked broad, open-ended questions, such as “What key experiences do you think shaped who you are today?” “Who are some of your mentors and/or role models, and why?” “Why do you think I chose you as a mentor and research participant?” These types of questions evolved into more in-depth questioning in order to understand their stories. For the purposes of this study, and to satisfy my own curiosity, I was seeking to discover how they became the incredible people and mentors they are, and what characteristics they value in themselves and others. Chase (2005) writes that when researchers view their participants as narrators, “they not only attend to the stories that people happen to tell during the interviews but also work at inviting stories” (p. 661). I invited participants to tell many stories, actively listened, but where appropriate or requested, I shared relevant information or stories about myself. This created an atmosphere of openness and comfort, and produced a deeper mutual understanding.

Before each interview began, I explained more detail about my study, and generally what I was hoping to gather. Each interview had a life of its own, and was very free flowing. I had prepared additional questions in case they were needed, but only used a few of them on one or two occasions to guide the conversation or bring it back to the subject of mentoring.

As researcher, I felt several different emotions about interviewing my mentors. In a strange way, I felt a sort of confidence I had not experienced before in my relationships with each of them. I requested their time, and was responsible to initiate and lead the
discussions. On the other hand, I looked up to each participant as a mentor, so the dynamic of that shifting positionality was interesting. Those tensions between being the leader of and being led helped the interviews become extremely rich, as we each shared in a type of newfound vulnerability and openness.

Field Notes

As mentioned earlier, it was a privilege to witness and feel the various ways in which my research participants came alive when they told their stories. Experiencing these emotions provided me with deep insights, and helped me realize the importance of the various aspects of each narrative. I took/recorded some general field notes during, and then added notes after, the interviews to capture some of the non-verbal cues and feelings that took place during our time together. I incorporated the field notes into the five transcripts, the vast majority of which I typed myself while listening to the taped recordings.

Data Analysis

After listening and transcribing approximately twenty hours of interviews, I had a deep feeling of connection to my data. I read and re-read the transcripts, and used my field notes to help me to reflect on each interview to capture more than what words were said by each participant.

One of the first things I learned about narrative inquiry is that there is no linear, step-by-step process but rather a step-by-side-step series of loops, the relationships of which begin to become clearer. In the beginning of my research, as I attempted to organize all of my data and start writing, I was overwhelmed. I found several dozen themes or nodes, and struggled to prioritize and capture the important elements of them
all. I spent weeks using flip charts, and poster-boards, and various software programs trying to organize and/or illustrate the key themes. I re-read all of the transcripts several times, and compared them to one another. Finally, the major themes became clear, and then the sub-themes and components started piecing together. Merriam (2002) describes the constant comparative method of data analysis: “units of data deemed meaningful by the researcher are compared with each other in order to generate tentative categories and properties” (p. 143). Using this method, I developed many different versions or drafts of my research findings.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) write, “A narrative inquirer spends many hours reading and rereading field texts in order to construct a chronicled or summarized account of what is contained within different sets of field texts” (p. 131). Eventually, some creative ideas and images helped me to code and organize these field texts into a narrative text that best told the story.

The experience of transitioning these field texts to overall narrative text was complicated to say the least. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe narrative inquiry research texts as “grand contraptions built on multiple, fluid foundations and formed into ambiguous shapes…” (p. 154). They also use the metaphor of soup to describe how the narrative finally comes together. There are several metaphors used to describe the qualitative researcher. As I transcribed, read and re-read, and ultimately discovered and put together patterns and themes, I felt in some ways like a fine wine maker. As a former employee of a large liquor company, I have become somewhat educated on the many steps involved in wine making. The wine maker takes the choice grapes from the well-cultivated vineyard, and carefully, at the right time, blends them to produce the optimal
result of which he/she is capable, fine wine. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) share that the process we engage in, and that for me seemed to be a series of side-steps and loops, is “a kind of back and forth writing, receiving response, revising, setting it aside, writing another section… finally there is a sense of a whole, a piece that feels like it could stand, at least for this moment, alone” (p.167). As shared earlier, I was provided a rare opportunity to spend time with five uniquely exceptional participants, cultivate what they shared, use various methods to interpret and, ultimately blend my data together to form new insights about exceptional mentoring. Throughout this process, I also contemplated literature that illuminated key issues, and guided my process of discovery. And so, I am able to offer my fine wine.

Dependability of the Data

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) write that “qualitative research is inherently multi-method in focus”. They go on to say that the use of multiple methods is a form of triangulation, and that triangulation “reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question” (p. 5). I triangulated my data by using multiple sources, such as interviews, field notes, observations, my own reflections, and impressions, and use of various literature in an effort to ensure dependability.

Member Checking

Upon completion of each interview, I provided the transcripts to the participants for member checking to ensure that I captured their message accurately. Once I gathered final transcripts, I identified themes and insights, which were incorporated into my CEP as my main data source.
Awareness and acknowledgement of researcher bias

As mentioned earlier, I know that I am greatly influenced by my close relationships, including and especially my relationship with God. Every day I view the world through the lens of a woman in the business world, as a Christian who is gay, and as someone who is a member of a conservative family and background. These aspects of my life all affect me and how I interpret each interaction I face. Critical reflection and awareness of some of these filters and biases has helped me as a researcher to keep them in check.

When describing how data is evaluated, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) write that qualitative research is “endlessly creative and interpretive” (p. 26). However, to establish a standard and maintain the integrity of this study, it was important to accurately reflect the participants in my study. To fulfill this commitment, I remained, as Marshall and Rossman (2006) write, “vigilant about the dynamics of ethics and politics” through the process (p. 5). Additionally, because I found myself relating to participants and stories, I resisted the temptation of drawing my own conclusions when searching for themes. There was an objective nature to the research that kept challenging me to accurately represent what my research participants were sharing.

Themes not causality

During the research, several themes appeared about how one can become an exceptional mentor. I also captured what my participants believe are successful mentoring practices or best practices, as well as outcomes of mutually beneficial mentoring relationships. My objective was to make meaning from the voices of my participants. As Chase (2005) writes, “in addition to describing what happened, narratives
also express emotions, thoughts, and interpretations” (p. 656). I believe that my objective was met, but because my research sample was small, future studies and exploration might be necessary to establish more definitive conclusions and/or causality.

Summary/Conclusions

In listening to the stories of my participants, and how they became exceptional mentors and transformative leaders, it became apparent that the framework of transformative leadership fit well with narrative inquiry. After experiencing the interconnectedness of this methodology with the theoretical frame of transformative leadership, I am quite certain that other qualitative or quantitative research methods could not have brought out the depth of feelings, or insights that I discovered.

This research experience has impacted my mind, heart and soul. The next chapter addresses the key insights and themes from my research. My hope is that I do justice to the countless hours of support that the late Dr. Peterson and my project team provided, and to the stories that my research participants took the time to share with me.
Key insights from the participants’ stories

Throughout my research, in response to my research questions: “How have you become mentors?” “Why do you want to be mentors and deeply invest in others?” “What are your beliefs about exceptional mentoring?” the participants each mentioned common images, themes, and words. Most readers might find it easy to relate to the answers given to the first question by the participants. Specifically they will be able to identify people who have been supportive and influential, as well as events that have been transformative in their own lives. In regards to the second question, readers may, after learning about the benefits of mentoring, be themselves motivated to either mentor or seek out a mentor. If this is the case, the third question should spark within those readers a desire to compare and contrast their own life experiences to those of the participants. Those readers might then ultimately come to the realization that they have many of the skills, experiences and attributes possessed by the exceptional mentor participants.

Key Themes:

Throughout my CEP process two words consistently appeared: chemistry and energy. Each of the exceptional mentoring relationships discussed by my participants contained a common thread, that of feeling a connection or chemistry between the mentor and the mentee. Therefore, with respect to the spark of chemistry that occurs in these mentoring relationships, I utilized the periodic table metaphor to organize the elements of exceptional mentoring influencers, practices, qualities, and outcomes identified in my research. The sum of these elements produces positive, society changing energy with
ripple effects. What I have learned is that when people step out of their comfort zone, and work to be more deliberate difference makers in society, infinite positive energy is created. One of the goals in adult education is to help fuel positive change in society, and one way that will happen is by more of us mentoring one another.

As I worked to illustrate my research results, what I continued to draw was a dynamic circle. Artist I am not, but I tried to capture a circular motion that swirled around without stopping. The central idea being that as more and more people enter into mentoring, they learn more and more about how to continue growing and demonstrating best practices. As those are implemented, increasingly powerful outcomes and positive benefits abound, to fuel the continuation! True to its nature, a circle doesn’t end. True to the nature of mentoring relationships, those who receive then want to give back. This pay-it-forward ripple effect causes continuous chemical reactions of care, which is all started by exceptional mentors.
The first theme that resulted from the research is: *influencers* on how the participants became exceptional mentors. This theme broke out into two distinct sub-themes pertaining to influences: 1) *relationship* and 2) *environmental*. Within relationship influences, those to which the participants referred: God; managers/career leaders; family; mentors/other role models; and self. In terms of environmental factors or key events that influenced participants, those that were mentioned are: organizational culture; difficult events; and opportunities for mentoring that presented themselves.

Those influences, whether perceived to have been positive or negative, helped the participants become the exceptional people they are, and built the foundation for them to mentor others.
The second theme describes the outcomes or benefits that the participants experienced from mentoring others: connection to others; gratification; learning from mentees; as well as having emotional needs met. These positive experiences have further motivated these exceptional mentors to continue their efforts as difference makers.

The third and final theme contains the characteristics that are evident in exceptional mentoring relationships. This theme broke out into two distinct sub-themes: 1) best practices and 2) mentor qualities. Within best practices, those to which the participants referred: build upon the chemistry; build teamwork and community; appreciate and leverage unique strengths; give freedom; approach holistically; listen – be interested; teach and encourage; and finally, guide without judgment. In terms of mentor qualities, those that were mentioned are: unselfishness; vulnerability/humility; trustworthiness; honesty and openness; emotional intelligence; and care. Each exceptional mentor demonstrates these practices or qualities differently, but they each appreciate the value that these elements offer mentees.

Terminology struggle

Before describing each of these themes in detail, it is important to begin by describing the struggle that each participant had with regard to terminology. During my interviews, each of my participants asked whether I was making a distinction between the words “mentoring” and “coaching”. Zachary (2005) describes coaching as “focusing more on boosting performance and skill enhancement; mentoring, on achievement of personal or professional development goals” (p. 3). But rather than provide an academic definition or one of my own, I chose to hear how they themselves distinguished the two.
Before sharing the *how, why, and what* about exceptional mentors, it is important to recognize that mentoring does not have a single definition.

For example, in the beginning of my interview with Bill, he said:

I think you can ‘buy’ coaching programs that teach people how to coach better – how to connect. But I sort of agree, like I think that mentoring, it's something beyond that. And I was thinking about the definition of mentoring - and I guess to me it is about, you know, helping a person get beyond where they are, helping them, you know, get better, helping them improve at something. And one of the really -- so as I was thinking about people that I -- and where that definition comes from, I was thinking about people that I mentored. One of the really common themes for me, and again I think this, again mentoring is different to everyone, is the people that, you know, have given me feedback that have said, God, you're like my mentor. You, you know, you're a great coach, whatever… are people where I saw more in them than they did, where my expectation of what they could achieve was greater than what they knew or saw.

Bill went on to say, “As a mentor, I want to help them identify these things that will help them get better…But also helping them see what is getting in the way – I think that is still coaching, but somewhere it can cross the line into mentoring. I like that “mentoring” should be fuzzy. I mean it's like if it isn't personal, I don't think you're mentoring. I think that you're coaching.” Overall I agree with Bill and would sum it up by saying that I think a coach generally helps with performance, while an exceptional mentor helps to grow the *whole person*. 
Carol agrees that the general intention of coaching is to focus on performance. She says, “I think the difference... the first thing that strikes me about the difference between mentoring, coaching, caring …all of those things… is semantics first of all. So, what do we mean by it? I think there are a lot of people out there who would say they “coach” – whether they hang out a shingle and say they coach, or not doesn’t really matter. They will have somewhere on their resume that they coached and developed people – and 9 times out of 10, I believe that what they are saying is that they “fixed someone”, or that they guided them to a “different level of performance”… But the key is that the coach was the solution. The person being ‘acted upon’ was the recipient.”

Several interesting comments were made about the title of mentor, leader and coach. Bill spent considerable time and energy contemplating the distinctions and intentions of different roles:

I think people may be confused between succession planning and true mentoring. A leader may have to choose a successor. They may even coach them to some degree, but it is not the deep mentoring we have been speaking of – that is bigger than skills. To get to that level required it takes building trust… You have to build that up over time.

When wrestling with the titles of mentor and coach, Bill says, “

There are people that I would not say I'm a mentor of who I would say I coach who would tell you, you know, that I've helped them a lot. They think I'm a great coach and they really value and appreciate my coaching. You know, so there's nothing wrong with that level of relationship. I just don't know that everyone would look at mentoring in the way that we're looking at it, you know. But maybe
that's part of what -- maybe that's part of the opportunity here is to, you know, help define that or help people see that or see that as one approach or one way of or one definition of mentoring…. 

Bill went on to say:

By the way, in all the relationships where I've mentored people, that's never been a term that's used... I don't think. I don't think anybody's ever formally said 'you're my mentor'. You know, that term doesn't necessarily get used all that often. But what if it did? I think it's based on the direction it goes in. Because if you're asking someone to be a mentor, I mean that's a position of honor. That's, you know, I mean. Now, there might also be a, 'well, what does that mean? What am I responsible for? What's the expectation of me?' So there could sort of be the two. I think it's the person asking. You would just want to be aware that if you were to ask someone that -- if you're having sort of that almost formal conversation that, you know, you sort of clarify what the expectation is because that could also be what the person's thinking. But overall to have someone ask you to be a mentor, you know, is a real honor. I think to turn around and tell someone I want to be your mentor can sound a little bit, you know, well, I'm, you know, I'm the all knowing, all wise. So I don't think I would necessarily use that language because I think it could almost derail the process because all of a sudden the person thinks, oh, well, gosh, they think they're so great, you know. And it's just language. I think advisor might sound better. You know, that might be -- they might be comfortable with the word advisor. I think it's just the language. And, you know, the attachment we place to certain words like mentor. Interesting.
He went on to describe a relative who has been going through challenging times. He shares:

And he tends to come over and I think he's unknowingly seeking that mentoring.

And now, through this conversation, I am recognizing that, maybe I can be a little more available, a little more in depth when we have our conversations. Because, you know, it isn't always -- it isn't a formal mentoring relationship but it's kind of turning into one…

Sub-theme: Relationships

We are all affected by relationships in which we are involved, some more deeply than others. During our discussions, each of my research participants addressed the impact that various types of relationships had had on them and how those experiences had shaped their growth as exceptional mentors. These impactful relationships, whether with people or with God, served as transformational to each participant and impacted how and why they are passionate about mentoring. The relationship influences mentioned by my participants are: God; managers or organizational leaders; family; mentors and other role models; and self.
God

Each of my participants shared part of their unique spirituality with me during the interviews. Among them all, however, I most closely related to Michelle when she described her relationship with Jesus. In her words, “The very purpose of my life is to serve -- to have a relationship with the Lord is my purpose and to bring more people to him through service to them. So that's my driver.” She went on to say, “I have a connection that came to me when you said about mentoring and God. So my connection to that is, remember, I said mentoring is about relationships. And the number one thing in my life is to have a relationship with God. And it's not just that I want one with him. He wants one with me. It's an equal thing. He's my friend and I'm his friend. Right? So for me, that relationship is just like a mentoring relationship.” As mentioned, chemistry or connection is the key to exceptional mentoring relationships. I also believe that this connection cannot be plotted or controlled - it is a mystery, or as I call it a God thing.

Managers or organizational leaders

Managers and leaders of an organization can have a great influence over those who report to them. In fact, every manager I have had has helped me to have a better understanding of either what I wanted to be more like, or what I wanted to be less like. As Carol said, “I was either lucky enough or fortunate to have a couple either wonderful managers or really crappy ones. You can learn from all of them. I think one of the things I knew early on that even if it was a crappy experience, I could learn something pretty powerful for myself, or at least learn what not to do.” She went on to describe good experiences:
So I think really being fortunate to be partnered with people early in my career who trusted me, valued me, guided me, challenged me…. and throughout the whole thing, I knew whatever I took on, I could not possibly fail, because they would be there to support me! They created an environment where truly there were no stupid questions. There was always support, always willingness to, not so much to tell you what to do, but draw out your ideas and brainstorm with you. It was always collaboration; it was always a partnership.

Every decision we make and every action we take impact others. In my opinion leaders should be accountable for their actions, and those who are not truly qualified should not be managers. Michelle described this when she said:

And behind this person, they leave a wake - and on one side are the results that they achieve, and the other side is the ‘how’ through the people. What do these people you impact look like as a result of the wake you leave? Are they almost drowning, gasping for air? Are they all bloody and beaten up and behind your wake? Or are they water skiing, high fiving, having fun, loving life, totally fulfilled, on fire for what they do? Are these people better off for having worked for you? Are they better off for knowing you? Is their life more enriched because you were in it? Or are they just ready to, you know, feed you to the fish or sharks? What's your wake look like?

Fortunately there are managers who mentor their employees, and have incredibly positive impact on their lives. As Carol shared about her favorite managers, “…it was the themes behind what they shared during my time with them: Values, integrity, honesty,
growing and developing people, caring about people, fun… everyone demonstrated that in their own, unique ways!”

Leaders set the tone in an organization. In my career, I have been fortunate to work in organizations where leaders encourage diversity, growth, trust, dignity, and respect. Mark was happy to share, “I have worked in caring environments for the most part – 75% of my working life. They were strong, established cultures where principles and care were valued.” Carol was also very appreciative of the leadership that set the tone for her work environment:

He (CEO/owner), as everyone knows, had very strong conviction to our values, and right and wrong as well. He had a genuine concern about our people. He was not flamboyant or in any way an extrovert by any stretch of the imagination… but if he went to visit a plant, and coming into the office saw that one of the receptionists didn’t look happy, he would go to the HR person (personnel back then) and say ‘Mary Lou at the front desk really doesn’t look like she is enjoying her job – I’d like to understand what the situation is. If there is something we need to do to support her – if it is something personal or professional or whatever – let’s figure that out, because I want our people to be happy.’ He got that happy people are more productive/successful!

Carol also recognized the influence of her surroundings:

For me, in some way, for me, at some point, not sure if it was ever really conscious…something clicked for me…Yeah, you will go whatever path you want, but the people you surround yourself with – that is a huge influence. If you
have resources available to you can completely alter the course of your life - If open to receiving and seeing them.

I am incredibly grateful for the amazing people who have surrounded me and influenced me during most of my life’s chapters. As Mark shares, “I care for people because I grew up with a very strong, modeled behavior with both parents – caring about people. I have been surrounded for the most part by caring people.”

Family

From the day we are born, until our last days, family members have an incredible amount of influence in/on our lives. For some of my participants, parents were the first people that came to mind when describing exceptional mentors. Mark shared, “My dad would be my hero if I named one. He is both humble, and brilliant in many different ways. He continues to be a very close friend.” Carol made the comment, “My Dad always said to us ‘there is absolutely nothing you cannot be in the world if you choose to be it’ – and I always believed in that.” She went on to say about her upbringing, “Our house was always filled with laughter (except sibling yuck leading to tears). It was like ‘goof around, have fun!’ My parents could be childish and silly, and it was ‘be real, be you!’ You can have all the seriousness and hard work, but at the end of the day, you had better enjoy what you are doing!” Michelle described the life lessons that her family gave her: …some of the good things that my mother gave us was helping others and serving others. So even when we had very little, we were so poor we rarely had food to eat, we would invite others to join us. So that selfless sacrifice, that selfless giving, believing that you will be taken care of, some of that started really early but has really become more meaningful throughout my life.
In listening as the participants shared many feelings and memories, I found that I was able to relate to many of them. For example, when Mark described his mother I was able to completely relate:

My Mom was one of the most communicative, spiritually whole (mind – body – spirit and heart) integrated people I have ever known. She is probably the best listener that I have ever known. She was the person that people would go to magnetically to seek counsel. She was like that… professionally as a teacher.

The way in which Carol described her father resonated within me, “Dad’s philosophy which is to treat everyone the same – whether it is the Pope, the President, or the Janitor that empties your waste bin. You treat everyone the same.” My parents’ impact on me has been and is tremendous, and I am so very thankful to them for all they have done for me. They are exceptional mentors to many people who enter their lives.

Mentors and other role models

Often we actively seek a connection, other times a mentor magically appears.

Mark realized early on in his life that he wanted to be surrounded by potential mentors or leaders. He shared, “I found myself through the church… I found myself through a very active youth group. I had a whole series of mentors that became important to me through that experience. That became my primary social group.” Later in life, Mark realized he needed specific support from others. “I wanted to connect with people in the training and development world and find mentors there – so I went to the American Society of Training and Development (ASTD) and met mentors through that.” Michelle reflected on the diverse set of mentors she has:
My sister is a great mentor to me. I have a friend, Joe, who is my spiritual mentor. There's a woman at ‘company A’ who was one of my bosses. And then I would say I have mentors informally all over the place. But those people are more formal in that I reach to them when I need them.

Carol acknowledged how fortunate she has been throughout her life when she said, “I was the beneficiary of so many people who were willing to guide me in a different direction.”

Self

Not every exceptional mentor has been blessed to have had their own mentor. LM learned how to mentor on her own:

Other people did learn from people who were influential in their lives that way/mentors, but I was a self taught mentor. I guess mine comes from wanting to treat others as I would want to be treated. I want to provide support, guidance, and assistance, whatever people wanted in their careers… You know if I was in this place, I would love to have that done for me.

Although Mark was fortunate to have encountered several mentors throughout his life, he recognized that he had qualities that contributed to his exceptional mentoring qualities. He said, “And maybe it is just my DNA… I mean, what IS in my DNA is to … I don’t like to see people hurting. So if someone is hurting, I have always wanted to go to them, and I want to care.” Similarly, Carol was told as a young professional:

They said to me, ‘How at your age can you relate to what the issues are and be such a blend of tough, factual/right for the business decision-making, and compassionate and understanding of people issues?’ No one had ever asked me
that before – I had never considered it. I had never been acknowledged as
someone who could do that…

As a child she felt in her heart that she was gifted in relationships and leadership. She
reflected, “I could just sense when there was someone who I could learn from / teach me
something. I have known that I am an old soul since I was a child.” She went on to say:

In fact as a kid, you know how some girls hold up their hair brush and sing like
they are a celebrity… Well I used to hold it up and pretend I was talking to the
masses in a factory! I’d lock myself in my room and I was delivering inspirational
speeches about what the company could do, or how we could change the world, or
whatever came to my 6 year old or 8 year old, 10 year old mind… I remember
doing it as late as 16, 17 years old thinking in my bedroom what would I tell
people if I wanted to inspire them to be greater than what we were as
individuals…

Sub-theme: Environmental factors

Environmental factors and events impact us each day, most over which we have
no control. What we can choose to do, and what we can control, is how we will respond
and grow from each encounter we face throughout life. The environmental factors
mentioned are: difficult events from which they chose to learn; and mentoring
opportunities that presented themselves. The choices they made helped them become the
exceptional mentors they are.

Difficult events

As stated earlier, according to Mezirow, transformative learning and/or
perspective transformation happens when life presents a disorienting dilemma, which, as
mentioned earlier, can include such experiences as divorce, death of a loved one, change in job status, and/or other life changing events. Those types of transformational events helped to shape me into the leader I have become. Carol expressed a similar belief when she said, “Whether it is a woman or a man… On the path to leadership – I really believe that some of the best leaders and mentors – they have had something that they have had to overcome or grapple with within themselves. Whether it was suicide and despair, whether it was sexuality, rape, shame…” She went on to share

People who assume leadership roles or have leadership traits… almost inevitably have had a ‘come to Jesus moment’ (whatever you want to call it), or a battle within themselves, or a public battle somewhere that really tested their strength. And it is not just that it tested their strength, but deepened or developed their capacity for empathy for others. So you can, from your experience, relate to someone else’s pain…

Carol went on to share how her own painful experiences helped shape her into the person that she has become. When reflecting on a period of deep despair during her early twenties, she recalled how opening up to her parents changed her life. It was after this that she was more receptive to the suffering of others, and she had a new motivation to help others.

Michelle shared how the pain of almost losing her baby changed her forever. When, the doctors came out to tell her and her husband that there was nothing else they could do to save her child, Michelle realized her limitations and need for help. She recognized that, for 34 years prior to this scary experience, she felt that she could conquer the world by herself. Thankfully, her one pound, six ounce child pulled through, and
Michelle had a whole new attitude about her need for God and others.

Mark described one of his most significant and painful times, and the impact it had on him and his career decisions. After experiencing the death of his mother, he had a very turbulent few years both professionally and personally. These difficult times led him to leave his banking profession to pursue his passion for teaching, connecting with people, and mentoring. Because of the pain he experienced, Mark found himself much better able to relate and sympathize with others.

I found Bill’s humility and his willingness to share stories or lessons he has learned endearing. In discussing hardships in his life, he said, “If those had not happened, what would have been my motivation to look deep inside myself? If you haven’t been yanked around or had something happen to you… Health problems, whatever… Yeah, pain wakes us up!” As Bill reflected on stages of his life, he shared:

I forget whose research it is, but there are three major transitions in life: when you get into a long term relationship, when you become a manager, and when you become a parent. And all three of those things related to your success depend on someone else. It's not just you. And so, you know, I wasn't having that great of success with the relationships… It was about driving people and having all the answers. And I was a smart guy, right, so knowing all the answers. You know, if something went wrong, you run over and you, you know, yelled at the person who had it wrong and you tell them to fix it. And for some people, they could sort of see through that part and were connected to my energy and my, you know, sort of passion but for most people, they didn't like working for me because I didn't really listen very well and it was always about me. And I was like stressed. I'd go home
at night and, you know, I was just worrying about work all the time. And there was a quote back then that really stuck with me, and the quote is, ‘I've had a lot of great moments in my life. I just wish I'd been there for more of them.’ During that period I didn't have any good mentors. I didn't have anybody who was connected with me, who I was sharing any of this stuff with, who was, you know, helping me…Emotions were driving my behaviors. You know, I was interrupting people. I was getting defensive when people gave me feedback. I mean just all the stuff, you know, that just puts you on that poor leader board. I just had no awareness. You know, over time I was becoming aware that people didn't really like working for me but really no awareness of why or, you know, that it had much to do with me…

In response to these tough life lessons Bill woke up, and became motivated to make significant changes in his life. With the help of mentors who came into his life, and his efforts to grow, he ultimately became the exceptional person and mentor he is today.

Opportunities for mentoring presented themselves

By deliberately seeking out events or activities where people have things in common, one is more likely to find mentoring relationships. All of my participants mentioned that throughout their lives, mentoring opportunities became present. Bill put it well when he said, “I can’t walk around saying ‘I am going to mentor everyone!’ and get to that level of depth with everybody. Certain opportunities to mentor people present themselves… it really is a mystery … Yeah. Well, I think that's the mystery of, you know, of humankind.” He went on to say, “you can't really choose exactly who it is or how it will happen.”
Mark shared that in many cases, he didn’t even know that mentoring was occurring until after the fact. He went on to say,

The older I get, the more I feel like mentoring comes from all angles. Mentoring should and can be from angles and from anybody! The true proactive mentor/mentee stance is open to that… and will always be looking for the opportunity to mentor and be mentored! I also think it is an honor and responsibility to take that, and make the time for when it is going to happen.

When opportunities to mentor present themselves, and one acts on those opportunities, much can be learned about who we are, the abilities we posses and the passions we harbor. LM shares, “These mentoring experiences helped me solidify my potential. It showed me what I could do and what was possible!”
When one finds passion or joy in what they do, it is easier to be successful, or even exceptional at something. There were several common outcomes or benefits that my participants enjoyed in their experiences mentoring experiences: connection to others; gratification; learning from mentees; as well as having emotional needs met.

Connection to others

Often the chemistry that comes from exceptional mentoring relationships can lead to special, enduring friendships. When reflecting on some of those relationships, LM shared:

I have always been fortunate in my life and in my career to have people who have, I will say chosen me to be a mentor because I believe that is how it works…
those have become very solid, great two way relationships. Because I think they bring as much as they get…. Use our relationship as an example – we became friends. So many of what I think are right mentor relationships are that way. I have never looked at those relationships as being one way.

When Michelle shared her feelings, she said, “So these relationships, so wanting to serve, wanting to give back and building relationships are the foundation and kind of the core of me and so mentoring is really a natural for that.”

Sometimes it is important to seek out people for skill advice or help. When comparing those types of relationships to exceptional mentoring relationships, Mark said, “The people I really look to mentor me now are ones who can help me in my friendship relationships … just like you are! You are – you would fit - your ideas and thoughts would fit into a variety of my roles, not just you’re going to teach me to be a better salesperson.”

Gratification

I was not surprised to learn that each of my five participants found joy in mentoring. You could see tears well up in her eyes when Michelle said, “You know, if someone else is wildly successful and I can help them be wildly successful, I am so fulfilled by that.” Similarly, LM said, “As I reflect back, one of the most gratifying things I have done in my career is help people… I am very glad that I have the opportunity to be there for others… And it was FUN! I had such a good time doing it - That for me was the most illuminating part of it! It just wasn’t work… They say that when you get in your groove, you’re doing something you really love… and for me that was all about the people.”
Because of his humility, it took Bill some time to finally admit, “It is because I care – I like helping people [I said to Bill, “Face it – you care - and you like changing the world!”]… At least helping individual people – it is true! It fills me up!” He went on to say, “Yeah, to have a purpose – That part is huge. Connected to the purpose – doing something meaningful is a strong driver.”

Learning from mentee

When two people connect, and their relationship deepens over time, endless sharing and growth opportunities present themselves. It seems over time that the mentor and mentee co-mentor one another, and friendship takes over. As LM shared:

So for me it has always been much more of that interactive two way street. Because people just have so much! And if they are coming into that relationship saying ‘I’d like to feel you out about opportunities and what do you think about these things… ’ - Invariably they are bringing something to that party – some insights, some knowledge, and some thought process that they have already been through to get there. Invariably I always get something out of it. And so I have always found those relationships to be two way… I think anyone who is smart/savvy enough to recognize the value in having a mentor has something to offer. And they may not understand what it is…

Carol described the kind of build on, or new ideas that can happen when people share on a deep level. When you trust someone in a mentoring relationship, you can learn together. As she said about a mentee of hers,

… and she is as brilliant as they come. And she is up for any challenge I give her. She challenges me constantly with the issues and her questions and her queries
and where she is at. So it makes me a better coach, better person, better business person. You know, but I think it is all about co creation...none of us have all the answers…. Do you know, I think everything meaningful is a co creation – I don’t think - the stuff that came out of my mouth – yeah ok maybe it is some of my perspective, but having the conversation about it with you helps me develop my perspective on it and get to wherever my conclusion is going to be [I say to Carol, ‘For now.’) - yes, for now! I don’t even think that I have arrived at my conclusion on some of this stuff yet. But it is that concept of co-creation, and the richness of our ideas that we get from talking with other people about their experiences.

Both Mark and Bill described the growth and insight they have gained through mentoring relationships. Mark commented to my question by saying, “You are asking ‘What do you find is the biggest gift to yourself/others in mentoring?’ The gift of learning! The gift of curiosity! Every mentoring relationship I have ever had has made me more intensely curious than I already am!” Bill, as he reflected said, “…we were friends and so we talk. And the nice thing was is there was a good mutual exchange...And I think as I was thinking about my mentoring relationships, that's one of the unique ones, especially now cause we mentor each other which is really cool.”

*Emotional needs met*

When I help others, among other things, I feel good about providing guidance and care. Bill, in his effort to encourage more people to mentor, said, “Why don’t more people spend more time coaching and mentoring? I think if you tried to convince people that it will help others you would have less success than if you help them better understand/ realize that it makes them feel better – it feeds a need that they have – in the
end that is what drives people.” He went on to say:

There's, you know, a couple people, one in particular that I have lunch with, you know, every couple months and there's no value to me from a business standpoint. It's purely intrinsic. I get that, I don't know whether it's an ego boost or whatever it is because I know that they get something out of it for themselves so there's the altruistic aspect of it. But to be honest, there is somewhat of a selfish aspect to it because they look up to me and I get positive affirmation. I'm respected, I'm loved, I'm, you know. I mean and we all have those emotional needs…I've come to know myself. You know, and I do get a lot out of seeing him be successful, of course. I mean that just makes me happy right there. But, you know, I don't know. I just -- I mean we're all driven by our emotional needs. So typically if we're doing something and it's not meeting some sort of emotional need, we're typically not doing it or it won't last…When you asked me I felt honored, respected by you! It feels good to have someone want to listen to you! You have chosen me among five exceptional mentors, so that is serving my emotional needs. If they sense that part of what I'm getting from their relationship is a personal sense of feeling respect, is a personal sense of, you know, feeling like I'm making a difference, that's okay. That doesn't feel so selfish -- you know, that doesn't feel selfish in the same way as, well, I'm just trying to get performance out of them. And then there's our ‘and’ which is ‘and’ they also get the sense of I just really want to help them. I care about them as a person so there's that ‘and’…
Theme III: Characteristics in Exceptional Mentoring relationships

What does exceptional mentoring consist of? As mentioned, this theme broke out into two distinct sub-themes: 1) best practices and 2) mentor qualities.

Sub-theme: Best practices

Each of the best practices discussed can be learned or further developed. As I try to put much of what I have learned into practice, what I am finding is that, although not difficult, the elements necessary to mentor successfully require focus and effort. Within best practices, those to which the participants referred: build upon the chemistry; build teamwork and community; appreciate and leverage unique strengths; give freedom; approach holistically; listen – be interested; teach and encourage; and finally, guide without judgment.
Build connection when chemistry exists

Overwhelmingly, all five participants mentioned that they had formed a bond with mentees early in their relationship. They all also agreed that building relationships takes time and effort. Mark shared, “What is the secret to a mentoring relationship? It is chemistry! I think you asked me because we have great chemistry. I think you asked me because we are both incessant idea woks – we love that!” He went on to say, “It is exciting when you get to the point in your relationship that someone where it doesn’t matter whether you go a couple of weeks and you haven’t seen them and you can connect back – so you have to build that foundation.”

There are various ways that mentors and mentees meet. Some have successfully met in mentoring programs, some have met in activities where there was a common interest, and still others have met in ways that can only be described as mysterious. I happen to agree with LM who said, “It is best to find a mentor by connecting, having chemistry, via a cause or interest - that is better than through manufactured programs where people feel obligated to participate.”

When it comes to the importance of connecting, Carol echoed my belief when she said, “We are all connected…If all you do is be there for one person at a time that is critical for them, then you might be representing God for that person in that moment.” Similarly, Michelle said, “Mentoring – it’s about people seeking out to be connected and have relationships, right. And which I believe is a fundamental need of human beings.” She went on to say, “You know, the matching matters, too, having the right chemistry. You know, there has to be the ability to build trust for the foundation of the relationship.” Bill put it this way, “So I guess my view on that level of mentoring would be that it
comes organically…If you're not really connected to that degree with that person I don't personally think you're truly mentoring them. And that's not to say you need to be their therapist or talk, but you need to get to the point where they are sharing with you when they're angry about something or when they feel not respected or when they're disappointed.”

Building a strong relationship takes trust and time. Bill put it this way, “Even in relationships like yours and mine where we connected immediately, I mean, you know, I'm not going to immediately share my whole story. You're not going to immediately share your whole story with me. So even then it takes -- you can have it quickly but even then it does take time.”

Exceptional mentoring is not the same as someone offering career advice or skill development. When Bill reflected on the important elements of mentoring he shared:

My very first mentor, a guy named Peter, he was a natural at it and what he did is he made you feel like you were really important. He wasn't the guy was like worrying about checking his messages and watching his watch. And he was really connected with you and he got to know you and you just really felt like you, even if you only got, you know, ten minutes at 5:30 in the afternoon, in that ten minutes you felt really important… it's also about sort of really getting to know that person, the whole person. And not that you have to be their friend, not that you have to, you know, go hunting with them or, you know, go bowling with them or whatever cause I don't hunt, but to really get to know them, what things are important to them, in our language, what are the things that trigger them. He really got to know you and what things you loved doing, what things you hated
doing, what things you were challenged by so that ten minutes of listening was really deep listening or deep -- you really felt like he gets you. You really felt like he understands you.

Bill described how he puts this into practice in this way:

My view of mentoring is that in order to get to a place where you see more in that person you need to really know that person. You know, beyond just, okay, well, I could see their next step in their career going from senior, you know, sales representative to, you know, whatever, senior *senior* sales rep. You know, like that basic, okay, in order to get there you need to be able to do these and these things. It's more, you know, where you believe in a person's ability to excel beyond their belief or you see some, you know, I've taken a couple people out of operations roles and put them into sales when they never thought they'd be a salesperson in their life because I see their ability to connect, I see their ability to deal with setbacks, you know, and just sort of help them grow in a place where they never thought they would grow. But it's hard to do that if you don't really know that person to the degree that we're talking about.

Once the chemistry exists, mentors and/or mentees need to be proactive, or take initiative when formulating a mentoring relationship. One of my favorite expressions is “be assertive with humility”. In other words, if you respectfully ask for what you desire, you are more likely to receive it than if you don't ask for it, or ask for it in a disrespectful way. People won’t know if you want a mentoring relationship unless you ask or share that you are willing. As Bill thought about a potential mentoring relationship, he said, “But I could have taken it farther, you know. That's interesting. So I like that. I mean I
think the idea of being deliberate and recognizing where the opportunity is and when it's maybe even happening anyways and then being deliberate about it.” He went on to talk about his mentor, “Jack”:

Jack talks about the idea of playing big and playing small. It takes energy to play big sometimes. And sometimes it's easier just to play small and not listen or not see that other person's point of view and not step in and do things you know you need to do to play big… Ask yourself, ‘Are you having a positive impact on the people that you're connecting with, whether it's in the place you're selling gum or the place you're selling computer software or at home?’ I thought that's a really good way of framing it because you could still be a personal leader. You could still have a positive impact on people and that can be part of, you know, your purpose and your mission.

To build upon this connection, the mentee and mentor both must take responsibility to ensure the health of the relationship. As Mark shared, “There has to be a very tangible lifeline of commitment set up where it doesn’t get infringed upon. And I am afraid in a lot of mentor/mentee relationships, other things get in the way.” He went on to say:

There also has to be accountability – why are we doing this? It must be win-win and there must be a culture of accountability for both people. ‘Cause if it is only a win for mentee, and the mentor thinks ‘this person is not going to teach me anything’ then it is probably dead or doomed to failure right from the beginning.
Build Teamwork/Community

The exceptional mentors in this study are care about several people, and about building their teams and their communities. LM reflected on her experience taking over a poorly managed team. She knew when she started that she had a lot of work ahead of her to build this team up, and hire new people. She said, “Coincidently outside of my new office there was a picture of birds and a bird’s nest. There was Mother Bird, nest and baby birds. My people that I hired from the West were my birds.” The picture represented to her and served as a visual reminder for the nurturing and care and mentoring that LM provided her team. She went on to share more about the dynamics of her team and her leadership style:

Team, you have a lot you can teach me! This is not about me getting ahead in my career… this is about you helping me, so that I can help make us a better team…. My hope is that people don’t feel like it is ‘me and them’… They feel like it is ‘us’… Have been told that many times in my career that ‘Yes, we work for you, and we recognize that we work for you, but we recognize every day that you were with us. We are all in it together and doing it together.’ I am very happy about that, because that was always my intention…

Because this team that LM inherited had been badly mismanaged by the previous leader, LM immediately, and successfully, changed the team dynamics. After a slight pause she said, “You know what, it was about the people! What a great opportunity to go out and do something that hadn’t been done which was show a whole group of people ‘Yeah, you do have value and you can be so much more than what they think you are or what you think about themselves’ - because they had been so beaten down and talked
down and not given the opportunity… and guess what, you are good! And show me -
You know, I’ll come out and work with you – show me what you got... And it was fun…
people loved it… and we had a great time! We had a great time!”

Exceptional mentors and leaders understand that when people are treated well and
are cared about, they respond by contributing their best effort. As Michelle put it,
“Mentoring is really about relationships and relationships have been important to me my
whole life. So the way that I get work accomplished is through relationships. Some
people are really task focused and they just want to get the task done and they go straight
to the work. I'll get the task done and I'll get it done probably as fast as them, but I'm
going to get it done through people and through relationships.” She went on to say:

To get the work done internally that we needed to do to be a successful company,
we needed to have relationships in place as well as to maximize the value and the
strengths that each individual in the company has as well…I think the power in
relationships is that you can fully bring yourself, the other person can bring
themselves but together you can get to a place where neither of you could have
gotten by yourself…And I absolutely believe with all my heart I don't have it all.
And so I need other people to give me what I don't have and what I'm not seeing.
And so if anything I probably seek more than less because I've seen the power of
synergy.

**Appreciate and leverage unique strengths**

Recognizing strengths in others goes a long way towards building successful
teams. One of the best practices of exceptional mentoring is being able to identify a
mentee’s potential. As Bill shared, “I guess to me in really like deep mentoring, I don't
know if that's a term but is where you are able to recognize in that person that they can be something greater, you know, either personally or professionally.” He went on to say:

And so I just think that's huge in mentoring is to recognize potential in someone where they maybe even don’t see or haven't developed it yet and then, yes, help them develop it but actually have that belief that they can be successful, that they can accomplish. And that's just so uplifting for people. And to be able to sort of again take the time and do the listening to actually recognize where that potential is and to make sure that's actually something that person's interested in and to have that conversation.

When we discussed her mentor, Michelle said, “She is the person that -- the best person that I've ever seen in recognizing someone's strengths and then even recognizing ones that they didn't know they had.” She went on to describe how mentoring is needed in the business world:

It happens to be the work that I do as well in corporate America… but every single human being is unique. And they want to be fully utilized and valued for that uniqueness. But sometimes, you know, and how that ties to mentoring is that sometimes people don't see their uniqueness. They haven't done the work to understand ‘who am I really? What makes me unique? What's my purpose? What's my unique purpose here on this earth? When I check out on that last day, what legacy, you know, am I going to leave?’

Michelle developed a training program called Appreciating and Leveraging Differences which focuses on self/other awareness and inclusion. When she described some of the programs focus areas, she said:
I call it the ‘I-You-We’ model. So in this relationship, and you can take it back to mentoring, it's really, really critical for the protégé to know ‘who am I?’ Who am I, the ‘I’ portion of that? What are my values? I mean I'm actually not amazed anymore, but I used to be amazed that people really don’t know their own values. They're not intentional about being really clear on their values and their purpose and then creating that life that they want around it. So maybe the best way to put the whole ribbon around this mentoring relationship is for me to help them figure out who they are, and to write this plan, this life plan about who they want to be. So we go through the ‘I’, and then in building our relationship then we go to the ‘you’ where we each share our ‘I’s’ with each other. So here's who I am and the other person listens. And then they share. And that happens all the time, getting to know ‘I’ on that deeper level. That creates the ‘you’. But then there's work that has to happen to create that ‘we’ space. Because just because I've shared my ‘I’ and the other person has shared their ‘I’, we haven't done any work to create the ‘we’. So who are ‘we’? So in any relationship if you really, really understand -- the strengths of each other, now you can do the work to create, well, who are ‘we’ then and who do ‘we’ want to be? And how can we leverage your strengths and my strengths to create something better than you and I could not have gotten to on our own? That's that synergy. How do we create that? And that's what diversity is. That's the power of diversity. We can really have our relationship to the level where we're both fully utilizing - on fire for who we are, contributing everything that we've got, and we've got this great relationship because neither of us could have gotten here without each other. And that translates to every relationship in
your life in every role of your life…When you get to that synergy, that's really when possibilities happen. That's when innovation happens. That's when the power of differences can be maximized. And one plus one is ten in synergy.

When Carol and I talked about the uniqueness and strengths of each person or employee, she said, “I think your topic is great… because when I come across people who want a sounding board or mentoring type relationship, you can tell them something by the style of the person…they are each different. Their thought process…” She went on to discuss the importance of recognizing strengths, and finding the right job fit for employees:

How could someone be high potential, high performer for three-four years in a row, and get promoted to the role we have said they would be a successor to, and six months in, they are fired cuz they are not performing? What is wrong with this? So, I just felt like, ‘so here is my niche – It is helping people get clear on what their strengths are, be able to deliver some feedback to them about where they need to grow in a way that would actually inspire them to actually grow’….

People make lists of obvious strengths of what they do, and then they look at the gaps of what they don’t have. They focus usually on the gaps, and they don’t focus on the strengths…

Almost all of my research participants mentioned a person from their past who had encouraged them to be their best. Mark described a teacher, Louise, who as he said “encouraged me like crazy to sing in seventh grade. Ms. Louise saw that I had talent in seventh grade – really encouraged me to be in a play – that was a great break out moment for me.” He went on to say, “That is another thing that mentors do is recognize passion
and talent and combine it into growth. If someone has talent and passion – one of those two is needed… “

Recently, I have gained significant wisdom and encouragement from my mentors. One of them in particular has been challenging me to stretch my imagination as to what my future could hold. Michelle summed up this exceptional mentoring practice when she said, “What it takes is openness or transparency, great listening skills, and courage – ‘cause you’re going to push -- going to push the mentee and you’re going to stretch them in their thoughts. And so, you know, you’ve got to have the courage to do that.” When mentors are assertive like this, it is important that the mentee also recognizes the underlying humility which makes it clear that the mentor feels, “I don’t know it all. I care about you. I want to listen to you.”

When mentoring others, Carol stretches them by saying, “Follow your heart – What is your passion? I really believe that the money, the success, all of that will follow… It will come!” She reflected about one of her mentors when she shared:

He really built my confidence in an area I never thought I could do/master… Whether or not they can articulate it, they know there is something there in you that is unique and valuable – that they have to have a part of ‘it’ in their organization. And people who have an eye for that are the people who I like to surround myself with…. Sometimes it is not even if you have the talent for it, but you have the passion… or you think a different way, or look through another lens… Like based on my experience where I have no history/expertise in x…But they have it in them to say, ‘this person has the capacity to figure it out or to
leverage the experience that they have and apply it in a new and different way’…that is what he saw in me.

Give freedom

It is often difficult to set parameters and boundaries with someone you love. What is equally, if not more difficult, is to stand back and allow someone you love to make mistakes. Mark, when describing his parents, said, “Both parents were not permissive mentors, but they were semi-permissive and let me make mistakes, and do those things that needed to get me to where I am… at least during the mid part of my life – to get to a kind of centered existence – which didn’t work out to be without bumps.”

Some mentors and mentees elect to expand their relationship to include discussions about transformative personal issues. These mentors however, in becoming caring catalysts, must ensure that clear boundaries are understood and maintained. When Bill discussed the necessity of healthy boundaries, he said:

That is exactly right – Especially in our one on one coaching… you can imagine if you go on for six or more sessions! I had a woman say to me once, ‘I think my husband is cheating on me…’ – I said, ‘Oh my Gosh, that must be so hard for you! If you think that is going on, my recommendation would be to go get some counseling’… - That’s the line, right? In our work, coaching hits that line of ‘where is the boundary?’ Again, I don’t mind discussions about their personal relationships (I am not getting along with my husband or partner…) – So we'll have those discussions because we know if someone's doing better at home they're going to do better at work. But when it goes below the line, you know. So, yeah, you're right. There's an interesting line there. And I've become, and you
probably are, too, just very aware of that, that there are people who won't change unless they get that level of help.

**Holistic approach**

As described previously, exceptional mentoring is not just about teaching someone a skill, or providing one-time career advice. Michelle expressed this when she said:

In all my years of mentoring what I've found is that I have never mentored only on a professional level. People are whole people. And so what's happening in the other areas, the other roles of their life may be holding them back from being successful in their professional career. So we may have to work in some areas in their personal life to get those more effective so we can be more effective at work. I have never, ever had anyone that I've mentored only at work…My goal is to have them be fulfilled in life. And it may be more important for me to help them be fulfilled in their personal life than their professional life cause that might be where they're lacking. And so by being more fulfilled there, so my goal is fulfillment in life. And because I know if they're more fulfilled they're going to be better at work. I mean that's my job to care about that, you know. So people I mentor from church or people I'm mentoring that don't work at the company that I work at, it's still about life. And work is a piece of their life if they work, right? It's only one piece of it though.

In looking back over the evolution of his mentoring, Mark said, “When I was a banker, the mentoring was more professional… there was a greater segregation between
my professional life and my personal life. It is still there here as much as I want it to be, but what we do is holistic in every sense of the word.” He went on to say:

You do have mentors who are generalist, and ones who are specifically good in one part of your person… I don’t think I need anymore, mentors that are focused strictly on my job – role mentors… I think my mentors are cross-role now. Mind, Body, Spirit, Heart – Great mentors probably have a hyper focus on one of those 4 and knowledge and acceptance and an understanding of the other 3.

When describing one of Carol’s favorite mentors she said, “I will never forget what he said, ‘life is a 3 legged stool, and the 3 legs are: Family & Friends, Your Career – that hopefully is something you feel passion for (your calling/purpose, how you spend your time), the third one is your spirituality. And if you don’t spend time nurturing all 3, you won’t stay standing.’”

Listen – Be interested

For me it has taken years to learn that I don’t need to have all of the answers, which is one more example of a healthy sense of humility acquired through experience. Listening to the question is often times more important than knowing the answer and I have learned, first hand, the positive results that come from becoming a better listener. As Carol shared:

You just never know where someone is at in their process. And what your five minutes of just listening…just quietly listening and being there for them… What does that offer someone? Wow. I really think that’s my motivation because I have been so fortunate to have had so many who would quietly listened to me, and guide me and support me.
Feeling safe to share anything can make an incredible difference. LM said one of the most important best practices for a mentor is, “… to really have people know that they were being listened to … that they could call and talk about whatever they needed to talk about.”

Leaders who take an interest in those around them can have an incredible impact. Bill reminisced about a story his mentor “Jack” had shared with him:

There’s a story - when Jack went to somewhere, I think it was MIT and he met with two professors. And one of the professors talked about himself…kind of interrupted Jack, but excited and passionate. The other guy asked Jack a lot of questions, you know, and got to know him. And it's sort of like he walked away from that first leader thinking, okay, that's a neat guy but I don't feel great versus with the other guy going, wow, I feel great.

He went on to talk about his relationship with “Jack”, and said: “We still disagree over things and have conflict, but where you can make that other person feel heard in a situation where you have something at stake…So I think that's one of the things that makes “Jack” such a great mentor is that ability to really listen and have you feel heard and have you feel acknowledged that what you're feeling or what you're experiencing is validated by him is great.”

Typically, because of the positive chemistry that exists within an exceptional mentoring relationship, mentees and mentors are often drawn to get to know each other better. Mark put it this way, “I think there has to be intense curiosity on both the part of the mentor and mentee – to figure out how the other works. Interested people are interesting!”
Teach and encourage

Mentoring relationships are filled with many opportunities to grow and gain wisdom for both mentor and mentee. Carol shared how she grew from one of her mentors:

He was a really, really good guy. I learned so much from him! He had a real passion for teaching – he taught community college on the side. He loved teaching people things that they thought they couldn’t accomplish, or that they couldn’t learn. And my biggest fear has always been around x…And he was great - he walked me through the first phase of it – gave me an example of how to do it, then, as soon as he knew I got it, he’d leave me alone and say call me when you are done with this piece, then we will move on to the next phase… So he really built my confidence in an area I never thought I could do/master.

Similarly, Mark shared, “I would not have had the inkling to even know about it or confidence to do it. He prepared me.” He went on to describe other mentors who helped him learn, “Those two were great because they were able to help transmit their experience and their judgment (which is very important in that business). They helped foster my strengths and helped me grow professionally.”

Because each mentee is different, each will possess unique styles and learning preferences. Mark prefers that a mentor be, “…more like a good psychologist than a great lecturer… and to do, as we are doing right now, to use experiences and stories – to teach through parable as opposed to through factual lecture.” He went on to describe one of his favorite mentors, his mother. “My mom valued more than anything else was to treat us/mentor us around balance, around learning (because of her value)… So I had at a very
early age – naturally a strong curiosity, and the desire to figure out puzzles and read, and she fostered that… “

We all need help from others. Some mentees seek mentors more for their skill or knowledge than anything else. Bill shared:

I had a couple mentors in the meantime who were more mentors around like more knowledge. You know, understood sales technique, understood, you know, certain, you know, of the product we were selling, and I got from them what I could but the relationship -- but it didn't go deeper than that. There wasn't that sort of -- I felt important to the degree that they were mentoring me because it would help them.

Exceptional mentors take that transfer of knowledge to another level. For example, LM shared, “So, by gleaning their expertise, and by working with them, and, to your point, making sure that they do things the best way that they can to build and contribute to the team.” Carol is passionate as to just how a mentor goes about imparting knowledge. She said:

The definition of ignorant: ‘detriment of knowledge, or education. Lacking knowledge or comprehension of the thing specified. Resulting from or showing a lack of knowledge or intelligence…Unaware, uninformed.’ So it doesn’t mean stupid – it doesn’t mean dumb. So many times people go “oh, you are so ignorant!” and they use it incorrectly! Ignorant simply means that you don’t have a depth of understanding about this topic! No fault of your own, you just don’t have it! So, it’s about getting educated. And that distinction has been SO fundamental to how I relate to people… Because sometimes, it is not a fault of
their own - they simply don’t have exposure to it! Or they have never met anyone who would give them context for the experience… or help them develop empathy around it.

Everyone wins when these types of exceptional mentoring practices are employed.

Yet another element of exceptional mentoring is encouragement. Sometimes all a person needs is a gentle push! Mark reflected on this element when discussing his mom, “She was able to take any of our interests (my Dad was that way too, but my Mom was particularly good because of her teaching)… to take an interest and turn it into something BIG and FUN! And would help us go in that direction.” Michelle described this when speaking about what she asks her mentors, “Here's what happened. Here's where I'm stuck. Show me something else. Help me get to another place.”

Sometimes by providing encouragement, a mentor may also provide tools to aid the mentee in their journey. Bill shared, “…in order to get better I want to help them identify these things that will help them get better…But also helping them see what is getting in the way – I think that is still coaching, but somewhere it can cross the line into mentoring.” When describing her mentoring circles program, Michelle said:

Once we had some trust built in the circles, we had to give them some more tools around empathetic listening; asking powerful questions so that they could take the conversations deeper, get them ready for the next session which session four then is authenticity from a company culture perspective. Then session five is individual authenticity – ‘Who am I?’ And then session six is taking all that learning, putting it together and creating a leadership blueprint of the leader that they want to be.
Carol reflected on a time when she was a sort of *mentor of the moment* for someone in need. She shared:

I can’t remember it all, but I had a coaching hat on – I asked if I could give him a couple of practices to take on – and reflections and journaling… And he was saying ‘Yeah that would be great!’ So I said ‘Here are just a couple things that come to mind to get you focused on what this year is going to be for you…’ and he said, ‘I can’t wait to get home and do this!’ (Crying) And that, that is what. That is what motivates me – I don’t care if it is a five minute conversation… or a lasting relationship. Just being kind can change someone’s day… it can change their life. I truly believe that – it probably sounds over done.

*Guide without judgment*

Whether providing guidance, teaching, or just offering support, it is important that a mentor do so without judgment. Mark put it this way, “You can counsel, but always accept! My mentor’s level of tolerance and acceptance would be off the charts. He practices those things.” He went on to talk about his mother, “She really recognized my talent and fostered it without judging (Lived the Marcus Buckingham’s *Now Discover Your Strengths*). That is what I think is the principle role of a teacher and a mentor… foster, not judge!” Bill learned from his mentor not to judge. He shared:

When I see someone acting in a really unskillful way, I just think to myself, wow, that person's suffering and, you know, they don't even know it. They don't even -- I mean and that's sort of the empathy piece that I've learned that Jack really taught me. Jack's great at that, that sort of non-judging, you know, empathy, just to realize that, you know, everyone has a story.
Ultimately mentees must decide for themselves what direction they will take. As Carol described, “Because I do think that whether it is genetics or the will of God, or one person’s own individual will – that person is going to go whatever path they are destined to go down unless they decide to change the path. All you can do is try to guide, challenge, reflect back the options to them, and who they are and what is possible and it is up to them!”

Sub-theme: Mentor Qualities

There is an inter-relationship between the qualities of a mentor and how they practice them. For example, when one is vulnerable, and demonstrates vulnerability, it is likely that the relationship will deepen. Through my research, I have identified the following qualities that exceptional mentors have: unselfishness; vulnerability/humility; trustworthiness; honesty and openness; emotional intelligence; and care.

Unselfishness

By the time people are ready to become an exceptional mentor, they have reached a point in their own lives where they are self aware and confident. Their cup is full, and they have enough to give to other people. As Bill described progress in his own development, he said, “I don't get as anxious and stressed as I used to. And my ability now to connect with people and see that it's not about me, although I may have an impact, I may have a contribution but that in order to mentor I think great mentors, it isn't about them.” He went on to say:

I really thought that being a great mentor/coach was about my energy and my ability to inspire through my knowledge. And there's absolutely a part of that. I mean people love acquiring knowledge. They love it, you know, but that only
takes it to a certain level. And really great mentoring/coaching - it's really about that other person. And it sounds, I mean I know it sounds so obvious but it wasn't to me and it isn't to a lot of people.

If one is going to be unselfish, and give to another individual, it is important that one stretch to the other’s style. As LM described, “And… not everyone is receptive to that (affective). As you say, from a style perspective… You really DO have to know the styles of people you are dealing with in order to reach them most effectively… If you have someone who is emotional, or analytical – you have to reach them where they are!”

**Vulnerability/Humility**

Three of the most beautiful and commonly accepted elements of successful relationships are trust, vulnerability, and humility. In fact, I am quite sure that the most successful relationships are inclusive of these qualities because these words are interdependent. Speaking of vulnerability, Carol showed it when she shared:

> Vulnerability is one of my biggest growth areas from this coaching program… It comes very easy to me to empathize for other people and to feel that emotion – and to be there and be supportive of them… to really share their experience. It is what I meant about the trials that EVERYONE goes through build character, but they also build empathy and compassion – And it has been very easy my whole life to access it for other people (and some of it is that old soul thing), but my challenge in my program, and that my coach helped bring to my attention was that I rarely broke down FOR other people…So it took me until about 35 - 36 to realize that having needs and being human does not make me a burden. That’s sad in a way, but, you know what? It IS part of my experience! Whether it is good,
bad or indifferent, it doesn’t matter, it just is! So the vulnerability thing for me is my constant stretch, and my constant growth...’Cause everyone’s got stuff... everyone has fear, failure, loss, doubt, and insecurity... And by you walking through life as the ‘I am fearless, I am protected, I am perfect, I am this/that…I have got it handled’... you are keeping people at arm’s length! And I really resisted that for a long time.

Relationships take time to develop. In the beginning stages it’s important to be patient and considerate of another’s readiness before sharing too many intimate secrets. But taking risks, and being vulnerable can yield big rewards. As Carol shared:

Too much of it becomes Jerry Springer like to me. But those truly life-changing moments – or those ‘Ah-has’ that help you go, ‘wow, here is who I really am!’ or ‘Shit, I don’t want to be THAT person - and that is who I have been being – and that sucks!’ Those are the moments to share! It’s not everything, but the moments that help other people see themselves in you. That makes them realize, ‘I am not a bad person! I am not deficient, I am not incompetent. I am not less than... – I am ok! Everything I did is ok... what do I want to learn from that? What do I want to be next?’...because what I have learned is that if other people would share more about life, it would normalize it for all of us!

One of the most attractive qualities in a leader, a mentor, or for that matter anyone, is humility. When I approached my exceptional mentors and asked them to be a part of my research, each responded with incredible humility. Mark said, “Why was I chosen? I am flattered and honored - it is a mystery...” Carol commented, “Seriously!
Your dissertation is a huge thing – it is so cool! I can’t wait to see your whole thing! I am honored that you even thought of me! What other perspectives can I learn from?”

I was immediately drawn to LM as a mentor because, although she was one of the highest ranking people in the company for which I worked, she treated me as an equal. Interestingly enough, when I asked her views on what qualities she thought made up an exceptional mentor, she said, “I would say it is humility, I would say one must be self effacing…” When I asked her to expound on this trait, she shared some of what her former employees had said to her, all the while remaining incredibly humble:

‘You come out and work with me, you are a regular person, and you ask questions, you really listen to the answers you want to know. You care about what people have to say, you care about how we do things, how we think about things. When you ask my opinion, you really do something with it. And you thank me – you appreciate the value, and insight and perspective’…For them, it was being in the trenches with them… it was, ‘you understand me people, you understand our issues, you had been there – you were one of us’. They knew I was not going to ask them to do something I wouldn’t do myself…

Although humility is manifest in many ways, it is a key characteristic of the exceptional mentor. Humility, being in direct opposition to the arrogance that might tempt one who has achieved great success, includes the ability to realize one’s limits. Bill summed it up thusly:

We have this quote that we use, and I don’t know whose quote it is but that in your twenties and thirties you worry about what other people think a lot. And you’ve heard this? In your forties and fifties you stop worrying about what other
people think about you. In your sixties and seventies, you realize they were never thinking about you in the first place.

*Trustworthiness*

Trust, among other things, requires both character and competence (Covey 2006). When emphasizing this point, Michelle said, “…the ‘how’ for a mentor? Everything relies on trust in that relationship. So this is a relationship of two people. Right? Between two people. And if in the beginning of the relationship they don't work to establish the trust, none of these other things will happen.” Arguably, trust cannot be achieved without both parties being open. She went on to say:

I think from the mentor’s perspective they have to be willing to lend trust before the protégé does. Because there is somewhat in most times some sort of power dynamic that's going to go on in the relationship because the person is more experienced or is higher in the organization or is something most of the time in corporate America. So there is a power dynamic that the mentor has to even out so that you become equal and that there can be a reciprocal value that happens between. So the mentor has to let go of that power and has to be the one to lend the trust first and to create that atmosphere of confidentiality, too… lots of people, you know, especially in the work setting, you get sorts of tasks. So they meet in their first mentoring session and they'll say, okay, so what is it you want to work on. That's a task but you haven't -- there is no relationship yet. There is no trust yet. So you can't get to that outcome of action without doing the work around building the trust and building the relationship. So there's a process to do that.
Mark put it this way, “And that is the key thing for the mentor/mentee relationships – both people lead each other by the moral authority that they establish through a relationship of trust, open communication, and value, and complete embracing of diversity in the sense that I am me – you are you, let’s really learn from each other.”

In his description of the mystery of mentoring relationships, and the trust that is required, Bill said, “I don’t know that you choose. You don’t interview and get someone’s life story! My gut is that those opportunities are presented, then you choose whether to take advantage of it… I think people may be confused between succession planning and true mentoring. A leader may have to choose a successor. They may even coach them to some degree, but it is not the deep mentoring we have been speaking of – bigger than skills. To get to that level required it takes building trust… You have to build that up over time.”

*Honesty and openness*

It is not always easy to be honest with someone – especially when you know that what you have to say may be painful to that individual. Ultimately, however, tremendous growth can occur when that kind of honest feedback is given. Mark put it this way, “…the way that I have matured is whether I am the mentor or mentee I am better at being candid. That has been a great learning change for me…Being honest is a value for me that has really come on strong – especially as a mentor…and then I think caring and consideration – that balance between consideration and candor. I liked when you said “people pleaser”…I am learning – I still struggle with that.”

Tough discussions are sometimes necessary and fruitful. LM said, “I have had to have the hard discussions. This is what needs to happen and this is what is not
happening…So we need to have a discussion about whether it can, and if it can in this timing…and there is something in how you do that.” She went on to say:

   So if you have done your research/make sure you know what you are talking about, and you go in and have a very upfront discussion about what needs to happen and have ideas about what is possible, because the engagement of them in helping to make the decision is one of the most important parts…Because if you bring them along with the knowledge…and they can see that this isn’t going well…and that there are other opportunities and that they may be happy doing other things…

*Emotional intelligence*

   It has been my experience that the most successful leaders are not complacent in the areas of personal and professional development. Rather, they maintain an openness to change and growth which allows them to continually strive to be their best. It is through openness to self awareness and growth that one can be open to collaboration. Michelle, an expert in training and organizational development put it this way:

   …when you're stuck on ‘I’, your power is so much limited…’Cause you never get to the ‘you’ or the ‘we’. And the ‘we’ is where the -- the ‘we’ is the most energy, the highest being that there is. So the people that you know that aren't mentors, that aren't of this mentality, they're only that level of ‘I’. When you're stuck at the ‘I’ level, you're stuck at the power of one. So the more relationships you have, the more connections you have. Exponentially, that's how much more solutions you have available to you. That's why in synergy, one plus one is ten.
Several years ago, Bill recognized he needed change and worked tirelessly toward achieving a better understanding of who he was through greater self development. When describing his journey, he said:

So, you know, that's the journey I've come on but that's taken a while. But, you know, so that's what's sort of happened for me is I've learned about emotional intelligence. And I still get stressed and triggered by stuff but even my wife would tell you over the last five years, definitely calmed down a lot. I don't get as triggered. I don't get as anxious and stressed as I used to. And my ability now to connect with people and see that it's not about me, although I may have an impact, I may have a contribution but that in order to mentor I think great mentors, it isn't about them.

Bill has certainly come a long way as he is currently one of the renowned experts in the field of emotional intelligence. When describing the need for emotional intelligence:

I mean we look at people in their Dilbert cubicle, you know, working their 12 hours a day and there's no one out there helping them. And that's a huge percentage of the population. And they are suffering. Not to the degree that a person with bipolar disorder, or, you know, who can't afford to eat is suffering, but those people in their Dilbert cubicle are still suffering.

Thousands of people have been touched by Bill’s work and training programs. When reflecting on what insights into emotional intelligence some of his training participants had gained he said, “Some people get to a certain level [of emotional intelligence] and that's all they need. But there are other people where we have created
that understanding, that awareness where they’ve gone and really gotten the help that they need or the help that we provided was enough.” He went on to say:

…there are some persons who are just learning to manage their hijacks, or emotionally challenging times, which helps them. But, you know, the people who write us and say, oh, my gosh, you know, you made a difference in my life, it's because they get to those deeper levels. But coming into the program they never thought that that’s where they were going to go.

Those of us who are involved in training and/or mentoring others are forced to continually look inside of ourselves. When speaking to this point, Bill said, “So, as far as doing this work, and I know some of the work you do is similar, I mean it forces you to look at yourself and say ‘am I doing this?’ You know, ‘am I trying to get better?’ ‘Am I living these?’ Especially at home…You can't stand up in front of people and talk about knowing yourself and being open to change and getting better all the time and not be doing it yourself. At least I can't.” He described how his efforts paid off when he said, “I was able to apply the concepts, you know, of emotional intelligence to get better, to learn to, you know, manage my responses when there was tension or when there was conflict.”

Mentors who remain committed to a continuous journey toward greater self-awareness and improved emotional intelligence have a great deal to offer their mentees.

Care

Mutual care is a key ingredient in exceptional mentoring. LM has been an exceptional mentor to many people. During our interview she reflected back on her work with a team of people with which she had experienced incredible success. She said, “They knew I was just really engaged in wanting everything to be the best for everybody.
It just turned out that the combination of caring about people and wanting to make a difference was the right combination.” If people are treated well, they will feel safe to be their authentic selves, and will thus strive to be their best. Carol shared:

For me, it's much more about creating the space for people to genuinely be who they are by demonstrating love, compassion, and care - minus judgment, reprisal, and condescension. If we approach our relationships (coaching, mentoring, or in general) from a place of love and kindness, we create the space for people to openly explore who they are without the limitations that fear produce. We create the space for people to discover who they are or who they intend to be.

I couldn’t agree more. In fact, an expression that I often use at work was recently quoted back to me by Carol, “More love, more anything!”

People are aware when they are being cared for and seek out that caring nature in their mentors. Bill, when describing one of his mentors said, “I felt like he was doing it because he cared about me because I was important and I was valued.”

Themes: Summary

As I consider the lessons I learned from each of the themes and sub-themes throughout my study, I am forever grateful to my research participants for taking the time to reflect on their lives and share intimate memories with me. The relationship influences (God; managers/career leaders; family; mentors/other role models; and self) and environmental factors (difficult events, opportunities for mentoring presented themselves) in their lives helped them become people who want to be difference makers. As each of them became aware of mentoring, they participated as mentors and mentees, and were touched and benefited in unique ways (connection to others, gratification,
learning from mentees, emotional needs met). They taught me best practices in mentoring and qualities of exceptional mentors. Within best practices, those to which the participants referred: build upon the chemistry; build teamwork and community; appreciate and leverage unique strengths; give freedom; approach holistically; listen – be interested; teach and encourage; and finally, guide without judgment. In terms of mentor qualities, those that were mentioned are: unselfishness; vulnerability/humility; trustworthiness; honesty and openness; emotional intelligence; and care. Their collective actions and practices as exceptional mentors have inspired me to seek further development in many of these areas. Their stories have strengthened my commitment to help generate positive energy and chemical reactions that are far reaching, and world changing.

The next chapter describes what I concluded from my research, and the implications for adult education, corporate America, and emerging mentors, in general. It also highlights some of the personal goals I have set to move forward with these exceptional mentoring insights.
Conclusions and recommended actions to foster exceptional mentoring

Conclusions

Throughout my CEP journey, I gained new insights about myself, my participants, transformative leadership, and most importantly, just how powerful exceptional mentoring can be. At the beginning of this research process, I set out to discover how one becomes a mentor, why one becomes a mentor, and the characteristics of a successful mentoring relationship. My expectations were exceeded, and I am confident that my findings will be useful to many. In fact, after testing some of my findings, I’ve received affirmation of their effectiveness.

My research indicates that most anyone can become an exceptional mentor if they are willing to work on themselves, by being open to new growth. In terms of how a person becomes an exceptional mentor, it is important that the individual first reflect on the foundation of who they are, and how they have become the person they are. Everyone’s life has been influenced by both people and events. Current and future influencers, can help us further tap into our endless potential of growth. We all have it within us to be on the journey towards becoming an exceptional mentor. Exceptional mentoring is not a passive activity, it requires action. When an individual makes the effort needed to improve in best practices, such as listening and being interested in others’ stories; and draw upon exceptional mentoring qualities, such as being honest & open, or we demonstrate vulnerability or humility, things change in our lives. Further, when one experiences and enjoys the outcomes which flow from mentoring relationships,
such as deeper connections, and the gratification of knowing you have helped and supported another, it can be so rewarding that you naturally want more! Before the individual is even aware of what is happening, they will be grabbed by the powerful cycle of exceptional mentoring.

In applying what I have learned from my research participants, I have purposefully allowed myself to be more vulnerable, I have improved my listening skills, and have been more deliberate in initiating and respectfully navigating tough and/or emotionally charged conversations. Through these conscious efforts, I have deepened several friendships, as well as acquaintances which may lead to exceptional mentoring relationships. The changes I have made have been noticeable to others. In fact, several co-workers have asked me for recommendations on how they themselves might expand their mentoring relationships.

This real-life correlation between the implementation of things that I have learned through this study and my experiencing and witnessing more trust and openness in my work environment strengthens my commitment even more. There is now a healthy teambuilding atmosphere being shared that I find exhilarating. I look forward to seeing this atmosphere continue to grow.

As I had stated earlier in this study, it has been my long-held conviction that if more of us were to accept the challenge to give and receive exceptional mentoring, many lives could be more satisfying, thus leading our society towards becoming more inclusive and fair.
What actions should be taken by those in the field of Adult Education?

In the field of adult education, research on the impact that mentoring or transformative leadership in business and academia have on society is limited. My hopes to address this void are twofold: First, that the insights derived from my research will help adult educators to gain better awareness of the importance of mentoring, and will thus encourage them to critically reflect in order to find the mentor within. Second, that my research motivates adult educators to foster awareness among their students as well as their colleagues, so that they too can understand the benefits of mentoring, and how to begin the process toward becoming an exceptional mentor.

Adult educators are in a unique position to both mentor their students, and to share in mutually beneficial outcomes in another’s life journey. The opportunities for uplifting human interactions, interactions not to be missed, should motivate adult educators to strive toward an increased awareness of their student’s cultural differences and real-life situations. Adult educators continually revise their roles, and the demands on those who truly want to be difference-makers or mentors are great. Adult educators who want to be the very best they can be must continuously search for deeper self-love and self-acceptance, as well as seek to define their own authentic voice. Cranton (2006 b) proposes that authenticity consists of five dimensions:

1. Self-awareness
2. Awareness of others
3. Relationships with students
4. Awareness of the educational context and its influence on practice
5. Critical self-reflection on practice as a way to distinguish oneself from the collective of educators

Cranton warns that each dimension takes time, and a willingness, to evolve (p. 1).
Teachers whose goal it is to facilitate optimal learning must be sincere, trustworthy, empathetic, and provide constructive feedback. When these variables come together, amazing things happen. Adult educators can play a key role as exceptional mentors in helping the adults under their tutelage become who they would hope to become. In that endeavor, the adult educator becomes who he/she might hope to become -- one worthy to be called, teacher.

In order to foster mentoring relationships, academic institutions would benefit by applying my research findings in the following ways:

- Provide education to adult educators about how they and their students can benefit from mentoring relationships and how they can improve/expand their mentoring abilities.
- Deans and other leaders should set the tone, and encourage a mentoring culture. They can also provide, develop and sponsor activities that foster mentoring relationships – both among faculty and administrators with each other, and for faculty and their students. These opportunities for adult educators to get to know each other and their students outside of the classroom allow for deeper connections and chemistry to occur.
- Once mentoring takes hold, it is important to have training and support available for mentors and mentees in the form of regularly conducted workshops.
- Provide mentors support groups for those faculty members and/or administrators who actively participate in mentoring relationships.
What actions should be taken by those in Corporate America?

In the United States, working adults spend a large percentage of their waking hours at their place of work. At the end of the day, employees go home and interact with their families, friends, and neighbors in either a positive or a negative way upon the experiences they may have had with co-workers. Thus, whether they intend to or not, business organizations have a huge impact on the overall health of society. Ultimately then, the health of our country depends on the attitudes and behaviors of our working population.

Working in corporate America, I encounter people who say they want to learn more about awareness, mentoring, and building a more diverse and inclusive community. I believe they mean well, but that once they realize how challenging this profound journey can be, fear of the unknown may cause them to back away from opportunities to grow and change. Facing our fears, flaws, differences, and wrestling with how to stretch to someone else’s style or background, are skills that are not easily learned or even desired.

When anyone moves out of a comfort zone, it is uncomfortable to some degree. As a teacher or facilitator, I endeavor to recognize the fear and difficulty people may have when facing the core of who they are. My hope is that I can help facilitate their awareness of what might be ahead, and to help inspire their courage in overcoming any barriers on their path. Once people choose to accept these challenges, many positive outcomes are possible – both internally regarding one’s own growth and development, and externally regarding one’s relationship with others.
Training and mentoring can help people in the business world understand more about themselves, others, and how to reach more of their potential. Similar to academic institutions, my research findings should be applied by corporations in the following ways:

- Provide education to employees about how they can benefit from mentoring relationships and how they can improve/expand their mentoring abilities.
- All leaders should set the tone, and encourage a mentoring culture. They can also provide develop and sponsor activities that foster mentoring relationships. These opportunities for employees to get to know each other outside of their typical job responsibilities allows for expanded cross-functional connections where chemistry can occur.
- Once mentoring takes hold, it is important to have training and support available for mentors and mentees in the form of regularly conducted workshops.

The top priority of any successful corporation is to achieve its business goals. Therefore, any programs or trainings should acknowledge the necessary balance between achieving business results and understanding how relationships impact business goals. As mentioned by one of my exceptional mentor participants, LM, this is an example of a healthy balance between affective and effective:

I believe there is a balance with effective and affective. An example of the effective is when you have to have a ‘nuts and bolts’ of discussion. You need to succinctly, clearly, honestly share… The affective part that balances the harshness, let’s say, of the delivery of that is that you really do care what happens to the individual…
One recommendation to corporate institutions is that they emphasize, encourage, and train mentors to balance professional/effective and personal/affective:

![Exceptional Mentors in Corporate America]

Because corporations tend to respect more “practical” or technology based/skill-building training versus “soft skills” training, it is important to offer programs within the circle that can serve several purposes. As one works on foundational areas in the outer
layer, such as self awareness, communication skills, and emotional intelligence, a readiness for deeper subjects develops.

Another recommendation to corporate institutions is that they provide training strategies to employees with the following programs offerings:

It is my hope that individuals in corporate America who consider themselves average with little or no influence and therefore not difference-makers, will recognize that they really do impact others every day. Research participant, Bill, sold computer software before becoming the CEO of a successful company. During the time Bill was selling software, his mentor, Jack left corporate America to devote his life and career to teaching about the importance of emotional intelligence. During that time, Bill told his
I agree with Jack. Making a difference is about every choice one makes. It seems to me that character is defined by how one decides to act upon the little things that happen in life. If more of we average employees in corporate America recognize this reality; strive to be difference-makers; and eventually grow into exceptional mentors, our organizations will flourish.

Recommendations to any organization: create a mentoring culture

It is my advice to leaders in both the academic and corporate arenas that if an investment is made in the organization’s culture mentoring relationships can flourish. When members of the culture feel encouraged and safe to establish and develop caring relationships with co-workers, they will partake in activities that foster caring relationships. Zachary (2005) writes that “Creating a mentoring culture begins with looking in the organizational mirror: reflecting on people and processes, culture, and the vision of what your organization might become” (p. 2). Programs such as mentoring circles, in which leaders “peer mentor” one another in a “user-friendly” atmosphere, with the help of a facilitator, have proved to be successful. However, if that is not possible, there are many ways to facilitate “connecting” people organically over time, such as: organizing voluntary events in the community, establishing a rotating advisory board; inviting guest lecturers around certain topics; and offering “lunch and learns” or “late afternoon workshops” on various topics of interest. These types of settings and learning
opportunities allow people with similar interests to meet and/or become closer. Zachary (2005) writes that “an organizational culture that fosters learning strengthens mentoring; if learning is not valued, learning is stifled and mentoring efforts are undermined” (p. 7). An organization’s leaders can play an important role in fostering mentoring relationships by expressing their support of them, and encouraging members of the organization to seek various types of mentoring relationships.

**Actions which I plan to take in order to foster exceptional mentoring**

**Rollout website: Exceptionalmentoring.com**

In an effort to organize my research findings, and to communicate key messages, I have an “Exceptional Mentoring” website. The home page explains what content exists in the site:

![Exceptional Mentoring Website](image)

Once they click on this page, they will proceed to:
When users are on the page above, they can click on any of the menu options. If they choose, for example, “Influencers – how to become a mentor?” it will bring them:
If they want more information about these elements, they will be able to download a file that contains insights from my research participants.

From the page above, they may also choose “Resources to help you grow as a mentor” which will bring them to a page containing with recommended books and training programs. Also available on the above page is the menu choice “Contact Us” which will allow them to get in contact with me.

By designing and maintaining this site, I can honor my commitment to continue my engagement and efforts to expand exceptional mentoring. It is my hope that visitors to the site enjoy its messages and insights, work toward becoming exceptional mentors, and help further the cause to make our society more inclusive and loving.
Develop training program/ motivational talk

Mentoring can have a powerful impact on society and I am committed to being an advocate for especially, exceptional mentoring. Therefore after completing my degree I may choose to develop a training program and/or motivational talk about my CEP. By doing so I hope to encourage several audiences to be more deliberate about giving or receiving mentoring. When showing the periodic tables, I will be sure to say “You don’t have to have all of the elements mentioned/on the periodic tables, but you may want to critically reflect whether you have some of these, want more of some of these, can discover/nurture/learn some of these elements on how exceptional mentoring happens and what it can do!”

Recommendations for further research

In my introductory chapter and literature review, I highlighted some of the race, gender, and power issues that may arise in mentoring relationships. Throughout my interviews, I did not ask questions about these areas, and none of my participants spoke to them, except Michelle who spoke about the power dynamic:

I think from the mentor's perspective they have to be willing to lend trust before the protégé does. Because there is somewhat in most times some sort of power dynamic that's going to go on in the relationship because the person is more experienced or is higher in the organization or is something most of the time in corporate America. So there is a power dynamic that the mentor has to even out so that you become equal and that there can be a reciprocal value that happens between. So the mentor has to let go of that power and has to be the one to lend the trust first and to create that atmosphere of confidentiality, too…
In reflecting on this now, I wonder why we didn’t discuss more about these issues.
Perhaps we didn’t talk about race because my participants and I are all Caucasian?
Perhaps we didn’t discuss issues of power or gender issues because in each of these five relationships, we had already established a sense of equality and comfort? Or perhaps these subjects didn’t come to mind in the time we had together. In any case, I would like to have more dialogue about these topics with my five exceptional mentor research participants, as well as with others interested in mentoring. As mentioned, I will have an opportunity soon to help develop cross-cultural and cross-generational mentoring programs. I look forward to discovering more about these topics, and many other aspects of what exceptional mentoring consists of.
Chapter 6

The ultimate outcome of exceptional mentoring: More Inclusive Communities

A strong, inclusive community is possible only if we each accept responsibility for and undertake our own growth and development, and then reach out from that standard to connect with others. As mentioned, this is the essence of exceptional mentoring. Palmer (1999) supports my viewpoint when he writes, “A strong community helps people develop a sense of true self, for only in community can the self exercise and fulfill its nature: giving and taking, listening and speaking, being and doing. But when community unravels and we lose touch with one another, the self atrophies and we lose touch with ourselves as well” (p. 39).

In a recent presentation, Clifton Taulbert (2007), author of the book The Eight Habits of the Heart (1997), described what a successful community looks like. Among many things he shared, he challenged us to care for and accept one another:

When assessing our performance as a company, ask yourselves “Did we maximize the internal strengths of the team?” This becomes the conversation of diversity. Have we allowed historical biases to impede our progress? A community has the power to motivate its members to exceptional performance. Community can set standards of expectations for the individual and provide the climate in which great things happen. Building community is important! It is your commitment to wholeness within the workplace. This process allows for
pluralism and diversity to not be swallowed up by homogeneity and likewise for pluralism and diversity to not be a constant threat to a shared vision.

Exceptional mentoring plays a very important role in creating this type of community because it helps people feel the support and confidence necessary to take risks, be more creative, critically reflect on past paradigms and gain wisdom. When people receive life changing guidance and care, most will want to pay it forward and mentor others. When this becomes contagious, there is likely to be greater acceptance of diversity and ultimately the type of community that Taulbert describes.

As Palmer (1998) writes, “Community cannot take root in a divided life” (p. 89). “Only as we are in communion with ourselves can we find community with others” (p. 90). Mentoring, as described in my research findings, is an effective way to achieve that goal. When we take on the responsibility of learning how to be an exceptional mentor, and act to the best of our ability, our community (in both personal and professional areas of our lives) as well as the greater society, becomes a better place. We individually and collectively benefit by living life with more of a sense of purpose, belonging, and value.
Epilogue

Who am I becoming?

Laura Lee Larson, age six: seeking connection and opportunities to help

As a child I had the innocence to see the world’s possibilities, and the sensitivity to see what happens when people are bullied or ignored. I rode my bike to get away, think, sing, dream, pray, observe, kill time before dinner by myself…. I also discovered things about myself and the environment. I knew that I needed to make a positive difference in this world. Perhaps naïve, I took it upon myself to protect those whom I perceived as being wrongly picked on or oppressed. I was a good athlete in grade school,
and therefore popular. So I regularly chose Jimmy Butsfa, commonly known as “Fatso”,
to be on my team when I was captain. When I saw the 6th grade bully push down all the
bikes in the bike rack, I confronted him. He pushed me several times, and I punched him
so hard that I broke his nose. Several times I went to the rescue of my girlfriend whose
parents were mean. I defended people from gossip or lies. I gave money to church causes.
I came up with the idea to clean up my hometown of Northbrook by handing out flyers to
everyone I met and asking them to pick up trash they saw.

These memories have a great impact on me and ultimately influenced my decision
to obtain my doctorate in adult education. I want to further help those who are beautifully
unique, but misunderstood. I want to help those who feel stifled to bring out their
brilliance and unleash their potential. I want to spend time understanding people’s
problems, struggles and differences. I want to give resources to help make the world a
more beautiful place. My goal is to return to the roots of my childhood. I want to take the
advice of one of my research participants, Carol, who said:

Along the way somewhere we give that up, or we are told ‘that is not the money
making proposition’, or ‘that is not the best career move...its la la la’... Bullshit!
Bullshit! ‘Cause if that is where your heart is as a child, there is some reason...
You can chalk it up to just the innocence of not being life weary... You know
some will say, ‘Of course you want to clean up the world, you are just a child!
You have no understanding of the complexities of or the reality of… blah blah
blah.’ So what! Who cares if you don’t understand or you know that it exists but
are oblivious to it… Follow your heart – What is your passion? And I really
believe that the money, the success, all of that will follow… It will come!
I have found this to correspond with my own experience. As I have become more true to myself, and follow more closely those paths that naturally fit with my authentic self, I continue to expand my horizons, both personally and professionally. I am excited to discover more about the professional possibilities that match up with my passions. The more aware I become, the more self-confident I am to try new experiences, including that of being a champion of exceptional mentoring. Another quote from Carol that is particularly motivating to me:

This person said ‘there is no hell – the only hell that exists is that which we create for ourselves on earth’. From that point forward, I knew that that is what Hell was. It clicked with me – I was 10 or 11 years old... In my mind, it is not burning inferno that our souls go to. It is the contraption that we build around ourselves that prevents us from experiencing life with joy, with love with abandon, with that youthful innocence like your little girl on a bike. I have a picture of me in my bedroom with my dolls lined up and I am in this 1st position ballet thing (I had never even taken a ballet class) – and I am displaying my dolls for the world to see! It is the cutest picture of me that exists… that to me, hell on earth is when you walk away from all of that! When you believe in the BS that ‘I have to be something I am not’. That is what Hell is – could you imagine a worse fate than to go through life, 70 some years or whatever your span is, disenchanted, lacking joy? And not accepting yourself? That is hell!

As a corporate adult educator I not only want to, but am in a position to help adults, especially those who can benefit from my power as a white female executive in corporate America. I have come to believe that if I, and others in adult education, become
more effective mentors we can facilitate the identification and development of future exceptional mentors. When more of us are prepared to assist other adults either by helping them feel safe practicing their unique selves, discovering more about their possibilities or potential, or using our power to reach out and help them achieve higher ground or wisdom, positive change is likely to take place more quickly and become more deeply rooted.

By listening to the stories of exceptional mentors, and capturing some of their insights, I have been learning how to be a stronger catalyst toward positive change in my spheres of influence – both current and future. My hope is that through my research and through my daily efforts I can emulate or teach people with whom I am frequently around more about exceptional mentoring and its benefits to mentors, mentees, protégés, peers and organizations, in general. Through these efforts I also hope people involved become more fascinated by unique talents or strengths in themselves and others.

My long held belief that we have the power to make a better world has been informed throughout my life by exceptional mentors who have persuaded me through their own lives that I, too, might become an exceptional mentor. This lifelong commitment fits with my growing conviction that every day is a gift with numerous opportunities to make a positive difference, and the time to make a positive difference is now. I have endeavored to learn more from those who have both a reputation and history of proven success helping others. My desire for this paper was to discover how exceptional mentors became the positive change agents they are by researching their lived experiences. I have been truly inspired by the ability of these individuals to balance
their demanding routine responsibilities while effectively leading and/or encouraging others to achieve their own personal best.

In my ongoing research, I want to continue to invest in understanding myself, and those with whom I spend my time. I want the research in which I participate to enable me (among other things) to design training/development programs, and to facilitate workshops designed to help employees build a stronger, more inclusive, and successful community – all in the spirit of meaningful mentoring. I plan to continue researching effective vehicles toward change by learning from exceptional mentors, who demonstrate the type of leadership that embraces diversity and unleashes people’s highest potential. By learning from leaders who stand out as those who are true to themselves and bring out the best in others, I intend to make a greater and more positive impact in my daily life, both personally and professionally. I will endeavor to become an expert, who may share my hard-earned insights with corporate America, and the adult education community to help educators better understand ways to positively impact their worlds, even as I have and will continue to do. I intend to further develop the content on my Exceptional Mentor website so that those interested in becoming exceptional mentors can access the latest insights. These types of activities will help hold me accountable to the CEP commitment to critically engage, and further develop myself. Through my own efforts, I seek to find what Parker Palmer, in The Courage to Teach (p. 107) describes as community in its finest form:

- We invite diversity into our community not because it is politically correct but because diverse viewpoints are demanded by the manifold mysteries of great things.
• We embrace ambiguity not because we are confused or indecisive but because we understand the inadequacy of our concepts to embrace the vastness of great things.

• We welcome creative conflict not because we are angry or hostile but because conflict is required to correct our biases and prejudices about the nature of great things.

• We practice honesty not only because we owe it to one another but because to lie about what we have seen would be to betray the truth of great things.

• We experience humility not because we have fought and lost but because humility is the only lens through which great things can be seen – and once we have seen them, humility is the only posture possible.

• We become free men and women through education not because we have privileged information but because tyranny in any form can be overcome only by invoking the grace of great things.

I plan to continue my journey towards becoming a more caring catalyst or exceptional mentor to others for the rest of my life. My hope is to help others, especially by modeling attitudes and behaviors, to unleash more of their full potential so that we may live every precious day more thoughtfully, responsibly, and passionately. Ultimately I hope that through this new awareness, others might feel the added joy that comes with living with *all four tires on the road* and that I myself might continue to *stay off the shoulder*. 
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Appendix A

Glossary of terms

In order to further explain exceptional mentoring I have used terms that more closely describe how it differs from other types of mentoring:

- Adult Educator - Adult educators are positive difference makers or change agents who care about the development of others. Therefore, whether they reside in academia or corporate America, or any organization/community, adult educators can aspire to become exceptional mentors.

- Caring Catalyst – Any mentor who chooses to accept the challenges and risks involved in helping someone move through transitional or transformational periods in their lives. The mentee must be self aware and receptive enough to accept this gift.

- Exceptional Mentor – one that demonstrates mentoring that cares about the mentee as a whole person. It does not happen in a vacuum outside of organizational context, but does require measured risk. It builds upon, and progresses beyond the mentoring skills intended to transfer skills that improve business results. One can be an exceptional mentor without being a caring catalyst, because the mentee may not be receptive or aware of all the personal care that is possible. Both an exceptional mentor and a caring catalyst are difference makers.
Mentee – This term aligns with exceptional mentoring more than the frequently used term, protégé because it is less formal, and more interchangeable with/connected to mentor.
Appendix B

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