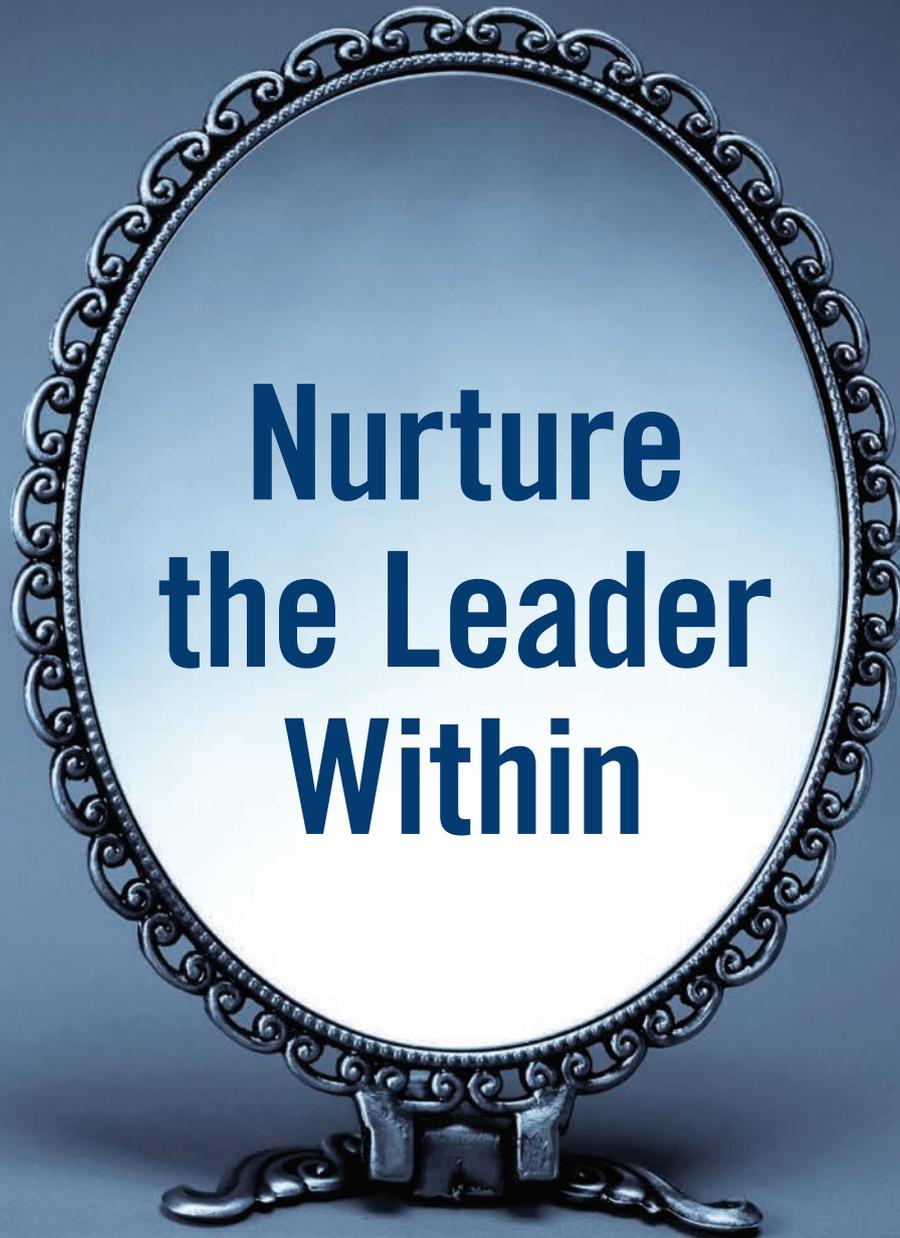


Where Health Information Experts Come Together

# PLEXUS

NOVEMBER 2011

VOLUME 7, ISSUE 6



**Nurture  
the Leader  
Within**

Your Journey of  
Professional Growth

**CLINICAL MEDICINE** PAGE 23  
*Radiology*

**EMPLOYERS GUIDE** PAGE 44

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## CONTENTS

NOVEMBER 2011  
VOL. 7, ISSUE 6

### COLUMNS & DEPARTMENTS

- 1 Editor's Message**  
*Kristin M. Wall, CMT, AHDI-F*
- 6 President's Message**  
*Sherry Doggett*
- 8 Connections**  
*Carrie Boatman, CMT, AHDI-F*
- 9 Around the Country**
- 36 News and Who's Who**
- 39 Funny Bone**  
*Richard Lederer, PhD*
- 42 2011 Article Index**
- 44 Employers Guide**

### CLINICAL MEDICINE

#### Radiology

- 27 The Doctor Is In**  
*John H. Dirckx, MD*  
**1**  CLINICAL MEDICINE
- 30 Let's Talk Terms**  
*AHDI Research Team*  
**1**  CLINICAL MEDICINE
- 32 CMT Challenge Quiz**  
*Laura Pecoraro, RN, CMT*  
**1**  CLINICAL MEDICINE



## FEATURE

### 10

#### NURTURE THE LEADER WITHIN: YOUR JOURNEY OF PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

*Karen Fox-Acosta, CMT, AHDI-F*

**1**  PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### 16

#### MENTORSHIP: WISDOM OF THE PAST GUIDING THE LEADERS OF THE FUTURE

*Michael Stratford, MCC*

**1**  PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### 20

#### SETTING THE BAR FOR ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

*Kristin Wall, CMT, AHDI-F*

**1**  PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### 23

#### A TRIBUTE TO JOHN H DIRCKX, MD



# Mentorship: Wisdom of the Past Guiding the Leaders of the Future

Michael Stratford, MCC

Most of us have had a mentor at some point in our lives. It might not have been in a formal setting. It might have been short-term, but we've all learned from someone who has walked a path on which we too seek to walk. Without mentorship, there would be nothing passed down to others in any profession. This would be a huge loss of human experience and wisdom that is readily available for those who seek it. Without mentorship, we would not only have to reinvent the wheel but also the tools, forge, and metal used to make it.

Mentorship abounds everywhere and at every stage of our lives. It may be an older brother or sister teaching you "coolness" or the headwaiter in your first restaurant job. It may be a teacher at school who saw your "spark" and offered additional assistance or advice, other than just the day's teaching. They may have shared life lessons as well. And there are those who've preceded you in your profession who have shared a tip here and a bit of advice there.

We also receive mentorship from books and blogs we read and the chronicles of success by anyone who has "made it." This is a passive form of mentorship. However, mentorship is most powerful when it's active, in a one-to-one relationship.

## SO WHY MENTOR SOMEONE?

While many people speak about the benefits of having a mentor, the benefits of *being* one are not spoken of nearly enough. And there are many.

As a Master Certified Coach, I've mentored many coaches in my life (among other mentoring jobs). I'd like to share with you just some of the benefits I've experienced:

- 1. Mentoring deepens your own learning.** There's an old adage that says, "If you want to learn, then teach." Lessons that have been integrated through experience become enriched for mentors when they have to go back, see what they've done, and distill out the principles that they used.
- 2. Mentoring brings prestige and respect.** Being perceived as a "wise one" in the community conveys a level of respect not accorded to one who is new. It grows your ability to influence in real time when you are seen as "one who knows."
- 3. Mentoring makes a stronger community.** Any profession benefits from bringing the history and best



practices forward. Mentors are a significant way in which this happens. If you belong to a community and have an investment in that profession's survival, it's in your best interest to help the community get stronger. The stronger it is, the stronger you are, and the more opportunities there are for you too.

**4. Mentoring feels good.** It always feels good to contribute to others, to the tribe. Helping others adds to your own feeling of being valuable. This is especially helpful as you get older, as more and more we see cultures tending to push the value of elders into the background for the sake of the new.

**5. Mentoring stretches you.** It's easy to relax into what you know. Newbies will bring a challenge to you as they question what has been done before. Often the naiveté of a mentee will have her/him asking questions and seeing things you wouldn't have asked or seen simply because they haven't been living from the mental model you've constructed in your profession. By this process, you gain insight and stretch your own views.

## DEFINITION OF MENTORING

Before we go further, let's look at the definition. What is mentoring really? Well, it's been called teaching, coaching, and wise counseling, among other things. Dictionaries all have some version of this definition for mentor: "a wise counselor."

Dictionaries also tell you that the word comes from a character named Mentor, in the *Odyssey*, who was charged with the task of guiding and counseling Telemachus, Odysseus' son, while Odysseus went to Troy. It does make me wonder what we'd be calling it if the character had a different name.

In any event, the definition from University of Southern California's Alumni Mentoring program is the one that most thoroughly says it for me: "Mentoring is a developmental partnership through which one person shares knowledge, skills, information, and perspective to foster the personal and professional growth of someone else."



● **Modeling is the most critical.**  
**The "what you do" part is the piece that many mentors don't pay nearly enough attention to.**

## MODELING AND MESSAGING

As stated, there are many roles a mentor may play and many skills a mentor may employ. From my experience (yes, this is a mentor moment to budding mentors), I'm electing to share about **the two most important aspects of mentoring—what you do and what you say**, otherwise known as modeling and messaging.

The first aspect, modeling, is the most critical. The "what you do" part is the piece that many mentors don't pay nearly enough attention to. Here's the skinny on why it's important.

**People will imitate the model before they'll listen to the message.** No matter how great a communicator you may be, no matter how much experience or expertise you may have, people will mimic your behavior first and notice your words second. People often respond as if the words you say are important. But when the rubber meets the road, they watch you. They notice how you interact; how you move, your tone, pitch, and volume when you speak; your presence; and especially the level of congruence between words and actions. Then they'll match your actions. More often than not, they won't even know they're doing it.

There's no mystery as to why this occurs, it's simply the biology of survival. And while every now and then someone will override the genetics of mimicry, the majority of the time an organism learns most of its survival skills from watching the successful organism's moves in the environment.

You've already noticed this phenomenon if you have a child and are suddenly surprised by them doing something. You ask, "Where did they pick that up?" Then you remember that you recently exhibited that same behavior or attitude. Now, with more than a little chagrin, you recognize the seed you planted.

Here's a personal example of mimicry: When my son was little and learning to run, he would often fall down. Given that he was still at the beginning stage of his learning curve, he often looked to his mother or me to model how to relate to the event of falling.

There was a curious thing I noticed. When he fell down, in the milliseconds after falling he would look to his mother for her reaction. When she spoke with hyper-emotional concern and worry, rushing to pick him up, he responded by crying.

On the other hand, perhaps because I was playing a lot of softball at the time, when he fell and looked at me, I made a gesture with my arms like an umpire at home plate and said "safe." It might look like he was

continued on page 19 ►

# SIX

## COMMON BLUNDERS FOR MENTORS TO WATCH OUT FOR

*There's really only one trap for mentors, and that is, "the pit of ego." Although there are some variations in how ego shows up, it all comes down to having an inflated view of oneself – where one's head can proverbially get so big one wonders how they fit through normal office doorways. Here are some of the different versions to look out for:*

1

**Thinking you know "it" all.** First and foremost, *no one* knows it all about any subject. Since change is the order of the day, everything we know is being adapted, changed, or morphed into something new to meet the ever-changing conditions of the world we live in. Technology is the most external example of the change phenomenon. Change is happening at a much quicker rate than ever before.

2

**Thinking your information is what makes you valuable.** It doesn't. What's valuable in the mentor relationship is not what you know. That element is but a small component. It's how you convey the information and how you guide the mentee to use the information in ways that is congruent with who they are that matters.

3

**Thinking your way is the only way.** Once again, being so full of oneself to think just because you're successful that it means the way you got there is the only way. Yes, there were principles underneath how you got there that are beneficial to relay but the exact steps were yours. Your mentee's exact steps will be theirs, and need to be.

4

**Thinking you have nothing left to learn.** Once one gets to the point where they are being asked to mentor others, there's potential for the mentor to think, "Hey I've arrived! There's nothing left for me learn. Now I just pass it all along." Nothing could be further from the truth. A good mentor knows there's more out there to be discovered, and it just might be through the mentee's questions that it happens. After all, they don't see the world through your eyes, and that's a plus for both of you.

5

**Thinking you'll lose importance if they surpass you.** Nope. What you gain is an even higher level of respect. People begin to see you as not only knowledgeable and accomplished in your field but now they view you as one who can help others grow beyond. It's the leader who develops leaders who is truly valuable, not just the leader who can merely get people to follow them.

6

**Thinking you have nothing to offer.** This is the anti-mentor version, where humility is taken to the extreme. You can belittle what you have done and learned or even think it's not valuable to mentor people. Some believe others should "make it on their own, like I did." But in truth, no one ever makes it alone, and to dismiss yourself as not useful is to belittle all the effort you put into getting where you are.



▼ continued from page 17

responding to what I said, but in truth, he would notice my absence of worry. He saw my playful look, then giggled, got up and ran again. Of course, if he was truly hurt we would see that and take care of him, but those moments were infrequent.

This was a regular pattern, and it occurred to me that he was taking his cues about how to behave regarding emotions from us. If we were overly upset about the fall, he would cry; if we weren't, he would be okay. Our behavior directed his. Sometimes he seemed to fall down deliberately just so he could get the "safe" call.

**As a mentor, your influence is enormous. Use it wisely.** If the mentor is modeling a behavior or an attitude, others around will pick it up and imitate it or the essence of it. So as a mentor, when a protégé is particularly challenged, it's important to model the appropriate demeanor. And yes, sometimes the necessary demeanor is urgency. But more often it's akin to equanimity. People will follow your lead and over time they'll take it into themselves as a way to respond to things. So here are some questions for self-reflection:

- When things don't go well, what are you modeling?
- When things are challenging, what are you modeling?
- When things are puzzling, are you modeling open thinking or are you modeling forcing an old methodology?
- Are you modeling openness to new ideas or *only* the tried and true?
- Are you modeling giving feedback in a non-judgmental way and a willingness to receive feedback with curiosity rather than defensiveness?

**Give principles, not prescriptions, so mentees can make the principles their own.** The number two critical aspect of mentoring is messaging. It starts with the recognition that the person you are mentoring is *not* you. Here's the distinction between principles and prescriptions:

*Principles* are timeless, fluid, and adaptable to many. This allows for individual integration. *Prescription* basically says, "do it exactly this way, the way I did it" and mostly fights with an individual's methodology.

The latter message may be perfectly fine when dealing with inanimate objects. It's good to have best practices, policies and procedures, and techniques to handle "things," but people are different.

Here's an example of what I mean: My wife and I like to hike around Sedona, Arizona. We find it physically challenging as well as satisfying for the panoramic views we encounter along the way. My wife is a bit more spry than I am. I may "motor" up the mountain, but

she's particularly adept at motoring down. At one point coming down from the top of a very steep climb, I began to watch where she was putting her feet as she negotiated the narrow path down. Had she been *prescribing* to me what to do she would have said, "Step where I step, on this rock, on that rock, and then here and there." Instead, the only thing she said was, "This loose gravel is really slippery. I'm looking for the solid rocks."

As I watched I noticed her stepping in a sort of side-to-side fashion while appearing to seek and land on an embedded rock rather than stepping just anywhere. Now, my wife's stride is longer than mine, so had I simply attempted to step on the rocks she stepped on (the mentoring model of "do as I do"), I would have fallen often. To reach where she stepped with my shorter legs would have put me out of balance.

She had messaged a principle ("solid rocks") that she was employing rather than prescribing "step where I step," and then modeling behavior—the perfect mentoring combination. I then accommodated my difference of leg length while still enjoying the same level of stability and agility she had. It increased my ease and speed down the mountain significantly once I caught on.

**In a mentoring position, rather than saying exactly how you did something successfully, take the time to understand the principles underlying your actions.**

Relay these principles to your protégés. Allow for their uniqueness to kick in so they can question, modify, and adapt it all to fit. This will help them understand the basic truths of what you're saying while also staying true to themselves. It's letting them live in their own skin instead of telling them they must wear a hand-me-down set of someone else's clothes in order to succeed.

So remember...

**If you're not modeling the message, the message won't matter. P**

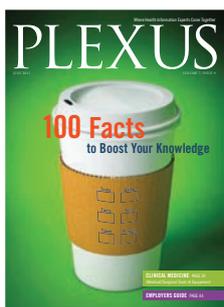


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