

Mentorship:
Essential Guidance in Personal Development

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Mentorship

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Mentorship and Mythology

The word mentor is Greek in origin. It refers to a character in *The Odyssey*, a friend of Odysseus who offers counsel to his son during the father's long absence upon the sea. But the sage Mentor is actually Athena in disguise, the goddess of war and wisdom who guides and sustains Odysseus through his journey. A mentor, therefore, is a wisdom guide.

The mentors of literature are always wanderers. They have traveled, they understand the ways of the road, they have traversed their own circuitous paths in the desert. They have experience, hardscrabble wisdom, clarity, a history of grappling and reaching and searching. Of having faced up to it – whatever it is.

Adolescence is typically the most pivotal phase of a person's life. We decide, often without recognizing it, our trajectory into the world. And how we enter is how we go on. Adolescence is the first tentative step forward, the juncture at which we establish our speed and direction and even our purpose. The character of our movement is defined. And that character is shaped by mentorship more than by any other force. The mentor might be a parent, or grandparent, or friend, or coach – it doesn't matter much. But it must be someone whose temperament coaxes from us our better nature.

Without mentorship a child becomes a wanderer in a strange country.

At an indistinct age – fourteen, fifteen, perhaps as late as seventeen – most kids seek mentors and guides who are not parental. The horizon of adolescents opens,

and they enter a wider world. Historically, grandparents have been the ushers and guides of kids at this delicate stage. But in the modern age grandparents are often absent, or disconnected from the child's reality. In the wake of such absence, and without alternate mentoring provided by school teachers or coaches or spiritual leaders in the community, teens turn to one another. Sometimes they form a youth gang and choose the most vicious among them to be their mentor and guide. And the first thing such mentors wish to do is get high.

It might be possible for the current generation of mentors to change the pattern of adolescent alienation and drug use. The kids cannot do it themselves. But mentors (and parents, of course) possibly could: by staying in touch with the emotional lives of children, by being available, by confronting and talking about the legacies of addiction that have been passed down from our own parents. The mentor, perhaps more than any other social role, is in a unique position to influence, in fundamental and lasting ways, the entire lifespan of a developing child. This is a sacred trust, a gift of engagement offered to us by the generous spirit of childhood.

The mentor's task is to witness, to trust in the spirit of healing, to offer honesty and compassion. And to offer it to the defiant, the truculent, the dismissive, the unready and the unsteady in equal measure. Nothing less.

In the oldest Egyptian tombs and temples that have been unearthed, in rooms festooned with hieroglyphics, in texts that lay undeciphered for five thousand years, one may read of an ancient god who is the bringer of knowledge and of illumination. He is the mythological ancestor of Merlin, of Gandalf, and of the many guides and mentors who populate the old tales of every culture. He is the original storyteller, the inventor of writing, the trickster and wayfinder. His name is Thoth. The Greeks called him Hermes. He illuminates the labyrinths, the lost and switchbacking tunnels, and he is keeper of the great and hidden library.

Mentors today assume the storied mantle of the wayfinder.

Developmental Considerations

Early in their lives, from about birth to age twelve, children pass through roughly seven stages of development. These stages have to do with themes such as belonging, trust, safety, empowerment, self-expression, and so on. Typically, some of these stages go well for the child whereas others are more difficult. If a given stage is

difficult, the child may not fully learn the psychological tasks of that stage. For example, a child who experiences significant illness in the first year of life is more likely to feel anxiety about need fulfillment than another child who does not have the same experience. (This is because need fulfillment is the theme of roughly the first year, and problems during that year tend to impact that particular theme.)

Everyone is shaped by these developmental stages. In fact, these stages are the single most important factor in determining a person's character. This is the essential basis of modern psychology, and it's an idea supported by enough research – a mountain of research – as to be beyond dispute. Essentially, our basic character is formed by the time we are four years old. But our childhood development never unfolds perfectly. Everyone undergoes developmental themes that are less than ideal. When this happens, the child gets through the stage and moves on to the next one. The stage is left unfinished and the theme is incomplete. Children cannot afford to get stuck in one stage too long, so they leave unfinished themes behind and try to catch up with them later.

Adolescence (which now spans from about age 9 to about age 32) is the developmental phase of catching up with and resolving unfinished themes. Starting around age nine – with a process known as brain pruning – children begin to revisit the unfinished themes of their earlier development. (They do this unconsciously, but it manifests as rapid mood cycling.) Because their parents typically are too invested in the child's future and too biased toward particular outcomes, children often find that their parents are not so good at supporting them through this stage. So, children seek mentors.

A mentor is someone who can assist a child to complete their unfinished childhood themes and to further develop their character. After parenting, it is the most important role a human being can undertake (despite the low status it earns). A good mentor encourages a child to feel safe, to take appropriate risks, to express whatever remains unexpressed. Mentorship does not have to be a long-term intervention. A child can undergo a transformative experience in a single meeting with a good mentor. One outstanding experience is enough to complete the learning for an entire unfinished developmental stage.

Mentoring requires immense sensitivity and interpersonal skill. Just as a good mentor can profoundly influence a child, so can a poor one. An inappropriate mentorship experience can severely damage the psychological development of a child. Mentorship is a trust, a role that is profound and powerful.

Development and the Nervous System

The nervous system possess habits of consciousness and action. These are developmental, and might be (somewhat arbitrarily) grouped under four themes:

- Flight Response
- Freeze Response
- Orient Response
- Fight Response

These imprints are learned in the first few years of life. They control a great deal of our behavior, emotion, and consciousness. The developmental features associated with the nervous system are among the most exhaustively researched aspects of psychology (especially with regard to trauma).

During the first four phases of childhood development, the four states of the nervous system are imprinted and tuned. This happens by way of parenting, immersion in the environment, genetic predisposition, and various other factors (some of which are still unknown).

Belonging

Flight response is correlated with belonging (roughly from birth to one month). If an individual does not experience a sense of belonging, he or she will withdraw (psychologically and physically), and will seek ways of adapting through imagination and inner resourcing. (Cold hands and feet are one symptom of this withdrawal, as is adolescent cutting.) In adolescence, this adaptive mechanism makes such individuals prone to hallucinogen addiction, addiction to the imagination, and addiction to the technologies of fantasy.

Need Fulfilment

Freeze response is correlated with need fulfilment (roughly one month to eight months). If an individual is abused or neglected during this period (any period, really), he or she will adapt by surrendering needs or fixating on specific needs (such as food).

Surrender and fixation are two aspects of nervous system freezing. Surrender and fixation are two aspects of opiate addictions, which are developmentally predisposed during this period of development. If individuals with lingering vulnerabilities from this stage go on to develop technology addictions in adolescence, those addictions will be focused toward online shopping, text messaging, image viewing (e.g. pornography) and television watching.

Autonomy

The developmental stage of negotiating the relationship between self and other (which occupies the period roughly from 8 months to 1.5 years) involves significant milestones of movement, exploration, personal challenge, and orienting. If an individual does not receive balanced imprinting at this stage, he or she will tend to become hyper-vigilant and hyperactive (not all hyperactivity is derived from this stage, however). One symptom of this adaptation is a craving for excitement and newness. If such individuals go on to develop addictions in adolescence, those addictions are more likely to involve stimulants. If the addictions involve technology, the individual will likely be drawn to stimulating video games, online gambling, and extreme immersive environments.

Will and Power

Between two and four years of age, individuals negotiate their relationship to their own power. It has been well-established that domestic violence and corporal punishment at this age are highly correlated with developmental and lifespan difficulties. Such difficulties are not only psychological: the risk of adolescent and adult obesity is increased (by fifty per cent) by the experience of childhood neglect. The fight response is developed and tuned at this stage. For those who will develop addictions in adolescence, the experience of neglect and abuse of power in childhood creates the predisposition toward alcoholism. This is why the rates of alcoholism are so high in war-torn countries and in cultures where cultural power has been destroyed. In terms of technology addictions, such predispositions are likely to involve addictions to video games involving fighting.

The Link to Adolescent Addictions

Addiction involves uncompleted impulses and fractured imprinting typically derived from childhood experience (this is not universally the case, but is almost universally the case). The nature of the addiction involves the way in which the addiction completes, temporarily, the unfinished imprinting:

- Flight response addictions allow one to fly away
- Freeze response addictions enable stillness and solace
- Orienting response addictions stimulate action and exploration
- Fight response addictions enable the illusion of empowerment

The more childhood difficulty an individual experiences, the more likely the individual is to seek multiple addictions in adolescence.

A Note on Predisposition

Adolescence begins with the brain pruning stage at roughly age eleven and continues until the end of the twenties (for the youth of today). This long period of development involves the integration of previous developmental stages. Incomplete or fragmented childhood imprinting re-emerges as adolescent psychological difficulty. Addiction is one method of easing the stress of such unfinished imprinting – by completing it temporarily. (Another method involves cultural inclusion and group formation; more on these later).

The Role of the Mentor

The only way for an adolescent to develop integration, containment, and identity is through mentorship. The impulse of kids to form groups is healthy. In evolutionary terms, groups of young people seek leadership from adult mentors. In the absence of healthy adult mentors, adolescents form a youth gang, which comes to be led by the adolescent among them who is most aggressive, gregarious, or risk-prone. The absence of mentorship for adolescents is the most serious problem in our society today. Absence of mentorship is a primary cause of the addictions problem among

both youth and adults, the suicide problem among youth, the homelessness problem in youth and adults, and the depression and anxiety problem of many people.

Mentorship Tasks

A mentor is someone who can assist a child to complete their unfinished childhood themes and to further develop their character. After parenting, it is the most important role a human being can undertake (despite the low status it earns). A good mentor encourages an adolescent (or child) to feel safe, to take appropriate risks, to express whatever remains unexpressed. Mentorship does not have to be a long-term intervention. An adolescent can undergo a transformative experience in a single meeting with a good mentor. One outstanding experience is enough to complete the learning for an entire unfinished developmental stage. (This is a possible but not common experience.)

Mentoring requires immense sensitivity and interpersonal skill. Just as a good mentor can profoundly influence a child or adolescent, so can a poor one. An inappropriate mentorship experience can severely damage the psychological development of a child. Mentorship is a trust, a role that is profound and powerful. It is a gift offered to us by children. Usually, parents cannot fulfill the mentorship role, which requires a balance of deep caring and emotional neutrality. Parents possess deep caring, but they cannot be neutral about the choices their children make.

Mentorship for the Body-Mind

We live within a scientific context that is almost completely brain-centered. In many ways, our hyper-focus on the brain allows us to forget that the brain is only part of the larger nervous system, which in turn is part of the body-mind. Body and mind, as research consistently affirms, cannot be separated. And healthy development, of course, involves the entire body-mind.

One of the ways to simplify the immense complexities of the body-mind system is to use terminologies of the nervous system. These in turn can be grouped into mentorship roles:

- Flight response mentorship encourages trust, safety, and belonging

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- Freeze response mentorship encourages need fulfillment and solace
 - Orienting response mentorship encourages healthy action and exploration
 - Fight response mentorship encourages healthy empowerment

Mentorship involves both physical and psychological work. The nervous system of the developing adolescent must be addressed on a physical level, through activity, as well as on an interpersonal level.

Mentorship Goals

The essential goal of adolescent mentorship is twofold: To assist youth in completing the incomplete or fragmented nervous system imprinting from childhood, and to assist youth in expanding their range of choice of action through recognizing and broadening nervous system habits (for example, many fighters need to learn how to freeze or flee, many freezers need to fight or flee, and many fleers need to freeze or fight.)

Flight Response Mentorship

- Running (to complete belonging, and to complete the flight response)
- Competitive games (to activate the fight response)
- Squash (orienting)
- Soccer, frisbee, judo, aikido (safe fighting)
- Rock climbing (self-esteem)
- Community service and development

Freeze Response Mentorship

- Running (to unlock the flight response)
- Martial arts (safe fighting)
- Windsurfing (body awareness, centering)
- Weight training (energy increase and containment)
- Soccer, hiking, aerobics (energy management)

Orienting Response Mentorship

- Activities involving active choosing (orienteering)
- All team sports (collaboration)
- Safe extreme sports (white water kayaking)
- Meditation, relaxation Juggling

Fight Response Mentorship

- Relaxation (to activate the freeze response)
- Non-competitive games
- Games with containment and expression (tennis, backgammon)
- Meditation (the least favorite activity of fighters)
- Horseback riding, walking, gardening Tai Chi, Chi Kung

Psychological Mentorship

Working on the psychological level, a good mentor helps the adolescent to explore such themes as:

- What remains unfinished from childhood development?
- How does this create vulnerability to certain kinds of behaviors?
- In what ways does the adolescent get stuck?
- What are the adolescent's deepest values and beliefs? How might it be possible to manifest these?
- What is important to remember?
- What must be learned, un-learned, or re-learned?
- What is the adolescent good at?
- What are they so good at that it works against them?
- Where are they going?
- Who are they?

Therapeutic Mentorship

Social services practitioners often fulfill mentorship roles. For adolescents, such mentorship requires the following types of communication from the mentor:

- I want you to understand who you are.
- I want you to know yourself.
- I understand that sometimes things can be overwhelming, and I will assist you to understand and deal with this when it happens.
- I will help you become a lifelong learner.

- I will help you find ways of reaching your goals.
- I want you to plan and envision your life with joy.
- I am proud to see who you are becoming, and to be a part of it.
- I am proud of who you are.

The Rule of Four

Belonging

Theme of Belonging: Trust, safety, community. *Do I belong in the world? Can I trust the world?* Tendency for dissociation or distance. Sometimes skittish. Typically very intelligent, but often out of touch with emotions.

Coping Style: Tendency for dissociation or distance. Sometimes skittish or flighty. Typically very intelligent, but often out of touch with emotions. Often socially awkward or isolating. Powerful imaginative life. Prefers imagination to actual relationship. Retreats during conflict. Nervous system habituated to flight response.

Typical Addictions: Hallucinogens, Entactogens, LSD, Ecstasy (MDMA), technologies of fantasy.

Mentorship Requirements: Slow, careful, and non-intrusive development of trust and safety. Nurturing of a sense of belonging in a community of caring and support. Emphasis on integrating imagination into actual work.

Need Fulfilment

Theme of Need Fulfilment: Emotional nurturing and support. *Can I get my needs met? Must I do everything myself?* Tendency for collapse and depression. Sometimes overly-independent. Typically very emotionally astute and sensitive, but easily overwhelmed by emotions. Enjoys calm and safe environments. Dislikes chaos.

Coping Style: Seeks emotional attachment and bonding. Responds well to nurturing, but also is highly demanding of relationships. Exquisitely aware of emotional situations and energies (and, when such situations are stressful, is strongly impacted). Turns inward during conflict. Nervous system habituated to freeze response.

Typical Addictions: Opiates (Heroin, Methadone), Valium, GHB, Rohypnol, Oxy-Contin, Talwin.

Mentorship Requirements: Personal connections, emotional commitment, loyalty and trust, community spirit. Attention to small details which make a large impact. Emphasis on healthy emotional atmosphere, with particular focus on kindness.

Autonomy

Theme of Autonomy: Dependence and independence. *Can I be my own person? Who must I depend on?* Tendency for over-commitment and anxiety. Possesses much energy, but burns out. Often is too independent (dislikes authority!). Assumes many tasks, has trouble completing them. Is very verbal and greatly enjoys conversation and chaos.

Coping Style: High energy, high motivation, but underlying depression. Keeps moving fast (the 'rolling stone' approach), and does not slow down enough to commit deeply. Has many balls in the air, is a good juggler, but crashes predictably. Changes activity in conflict (avoids). Nervous system habituated to orienting response.

Typical Addictions: Stimulants (Cocaine), Phencyclidine (PCP), Ritalin, Amphetamines, Methamphetamines, Coffee, Extreme sports.

Mentorship Requirements Skill development with regard to slowing down, focusing on one thing at a time. Development of collaborative instincts (which are resisted) and the skills to play by the rules (never!). Support of uniqueness and energy. Emphasis on enthusiasm.

Will and Power

Theme of Will and Power: Will, power, dominance. *Can I use my power? Will my power hurt others?* Tendency for conflict, tension, and anger. Possesses a great deal of energy but struggles with using it appropriately. Often is isolated due to power dynamics; is often the shadow carrier. Sometimes is too controlling, but is excellent at controlling. Organized, motivated, energetic.

Coping Style: Enjoys dominating (or being of service). Is often perceived as intimidating, sometimes responds to this by retreating or bullying. Often less than sensitive in emotional situations. Feels uncomfortable when out of control. Works hard – sometimes too hard – as a way of managing anxiety and anger. Orients to blaming in conflicts. Nervous system habituated to fight response.

Typical Addictions: Alcohol, gambling, workaholism.

Mentorship Requirements: Relaxation, collaboration, delegation. Development of soft skills, appropriate conflict resolution, emotional sensitivity. Slowing down, taking it easy (but never say “take it easy”!), steaming off safely. Emphasis in empowerment and capacity. Acknowledgement of indispensability.

The Shadow Carrier as Mentor

The shadow is the source of much psychological energy. It's the murky part, the part we don't like to look at. The shadow is selfish, passionate, violent, belligerent, sexual, simple, and very powerful. The shadow is the dark side (to borrow a metaphor from *Star Wars*). It's like a vast pool in which all of our hidden fantasies, impulses, actions and fears swirl around. Every deed that haunts us is there in the pool, never going away, just floating.

The shadow is the home of fears and un-acted desires. This is the source of its energy: it is raw, uncontrolled and unmediated passion. The mask tries to hide the shadow, but the more we try to hide the shadow, the more it comes at us sideways, in unexpected and self-sabotaging ways. We need the shadow; it's an essential part of the self. But it's very difficult to acknowledge that the stuff in the pool really is a part of who we are: sexual fantasies, the desire to harm and kill, the drive for revenge – all the dark and scary impulses that we disown and try not to think about.

The tendency is for people to disown the shadow; to hide it in themselves and point out the shadow traits in others. This is called projection, and it is the central challenge of self-awareness work. We must learn to own the shadow, to acknowledge that we are in fact capable of the very acts we abhor in others. We are the whole world; everything we see is a reflection of our innermost natures. Coming to terms with this is the most difficult and most rewarding aspect of personal growth.

Try this: think about a person you strongly dislike. Consider the specific behavior this person does that bothers you. Try to accept that you yourself do this same behavior. You might hide it better, with the mask for example, but it's a cosmic rule of the psyche that we dislike in others what we possess, and hide, in ourselves. An old parable suggests that whenever you point the finger, remember that there are three fingers pointing back at you!

In every family, in every group, someone is generally disliked: they are cranky, or aggressive, or troublesome. People don't like dealing with such people, who in fact exert great unspoken psychological influence and control many situations without realizing it. They tend to be isolated, angry, misunderstood, disrespected. Such people are shadow carriers: they hold, by way of projection, the shadow material of a group. They are essential features of any human community, and are important people to befriend. They are straight talkers, they know what's going on behind the

scenes, and they are strong. Dealing with them teaches us about ourselves, shows us how to recognize and take responsibility for our own shadows. Developing relationships with shadow carriers can be a profound spiritual path, and is generally much more effective than meditation.

Specific Scenarios: Younger Children

Mentoring requires immense sensitivity and interpersonal skill. Just as a good mentor can profoundly influence a child, so can a poor one. An inappropriate mentorship experience can severely damage the psychological development of a child. Mentorship is a trust, a role that is profound and powerful. Here are a few areas in which a competent mentor will assist a child (of any age) in self-development and self-awareness through the use of judicious communication:

Please, come join us.

I want you to feel safe and comfortable.

I want you to trust me.

You are safe.

I want to help you learn.

I will help you ask for what you need.

Don't give up.

I want you to depend on me for some things, yet do some things on your own.

I will help you slow down when you speed up too much or become overwhelmed.

I support your individuality.

You are strong!

I will stop you if you become unsafe.

You are smart!

You know many things.

You have strong beliefs.

I have strong beliefs.

If our beliefs are different, that's OK.

I will not make fun of you or your ideas.

I enjoy hearing about your ideas, I enjoy your way of sharing them.

You are unique.

I want you to discover and value your uniqueness.

I want you to sometimes push yourself while doing things you find difficult.

I want you to discover your potential.

I enjoy seeing you as part of the group and also doing your own thing.

Messages and Strategies by Developmental Age

Birth (Flight Response)

Messages:

I want you to feel safe and comfortable.

I want you to trust me.

I want to be here with you.

I will not abandon you.

You are safe.

I want you to be here.

We (or I) welcome you with love.

Strategies:

Holding, with particular emphasis on the “bonding point” which is located between the shoulder blades, on the crest of the back. For many children, the bonding point is the location which first comes into contact with the inner surface of the womb. Gentle touch on the bonding point may promote feelings of safety and support (this is why many people instinctively touch this spot on others when showing empathy, caring or support). Creation of safe space. For fostering or adoption: secure, reliable placement. Quiet, non-intrusive atmosphere.

Infancy (Freeze Response)

Messages:

I want to help you meet your needs.

I will help you learn to ask for what you need.

I cannot meet all of your needs.

I will help you find others who may also help you with your needs.

Don't give up.

Don't retreat.

I want you to trust me.

We (or I) will meet your needs with love.

Strategies:

Infants use as many as 150 different cries, each of which has a specific meaning, is a specific request, or represents a specific expression. Awareness of the vocabulary of this language of cries is a central task of caregivers of infants. The tendency is to interpret many cries as requests for food. Only a small number of cries derive from hunger; most involve requests for interaction, or emotional comfort, or simply for being together, which is the main ingredient of healthy dependency. (And, sometimes, babies just cry, for no apparent reason; usually in the evening, inconsolably, for durations of up to a couple of hours. This pattern is not currently understood.) Many people with unfinished imprinting from this age have chronic problems staying warm, particularly in the hands and feet. They often enjoy warm water, in hot tubs and baths.

Toddlerhood (Orienting Response)

Messages:

I want you to depend on me for some things, yet do some things on your own.

The world is an amazing place.

I want you to be motivated to explore the world and to find interesting people and experiences.

I will help you slow down when you speed up too much, or become overwhelmed.

We (or I) support your individuality with love.

Strategies:

Cross-pattern movement: this is any type of movement that utilizes opposite sides of the body at the same time, for example the left hand and the right foot. The most common types of cross-pattern movement are crawling, walking and running. Intentional crawling (in which crawling is a game, and the adult crawls too). Nature and cultural experiences: will expand a child's experience of the world. Physical exercise: anything with cross-patterning.

Two to Four Years (Fight Response)

Messages:

You are strong.

I see your power.

I want you to express yourself.

You do not need to hide your power.

I am not afraid of you.

I will stop you if you become unsafe.

If you need to fight with me, I will stand in and not run away; but I won't sacrifice my own boundaries or safety.

I won't give up my power for you.

I want you to feel strong without needing to hurt yourself or others.

We (or I) see your power, and love your power.

Strategies:

Strong self-awareness, relaxation, and containment on the part of caregivers. Combining parental kindness with firmness. Conversations about power (physical, emotional, verbal): discuss what power is, how to use it, when to avoid using it. Wrestling (using Aikido-type principles, in which conflict is perceived as flow, or energy). Non-competitive games, or games in which success depends upon co-operation and collaboration (for example, Frizbee, tossing a ball, Lego-building).

Three to Six Years

Messages:

Your body is yours.

Your sensations are yours.

Intimacy and sensuality are normal, healthy feelings.
Intimate feelings must be shared carefully and appropriately.
We (or I) see and feel your loving feelings and support them.

Strategies:

Conversations about sensual boundaries, safety in the community, norms and behaviors, etc. Safe romantic play.

Five to Eight Years

Messages:

You are smart!
You know many things.
You have strong beliefs.
I have strong beliefs.
If our beliefs are different, that's OK.
I will not belittle you or your ideas.
I believe in the power of ideas.
I will try to find joy in ideas together with you.
I want you to find your own voice, your own truth.
I love your ideas and your way of sharing them.

Strategies:

Strong self-awareness on the part of caregivers: differing views/opinions must be OK. Recognition that it does not matter (much) who is right; the relationship is the important thing. Encouragement of conversation, debate, dialog. Provision of educational opportunities.

Seven to Twelve Years

Messages:

You are unique.
I want you to discover and value your unique gifts and talents.
I want you to find a healthy group of peers.
I want you to excel at things you enjoy, and sometimes to push yourself to excel at things you find difficult.

I want you to discover your potential, and to find your place in the world.
I love to see you in groups and also doing your own thing.

Strategies:

School involvement. Coaching. Support of friends and the peer group (in other words, being an involved parent or caregiver). Assistance with finding a skill at which the child excels. Assistance with the complexities of peer group relationships. Humour, playfulness, relaxation.

Specific Scenarios: Young Adults

As a result of complexities in the modern world, the achievement of adulthood has shifted from age 19 to age 35 since the Second World War. The central task of this stage is to integrate one's life experience, including the unresolved childhood themes, and to develop a sense of the path one will choose in life. Broadly speaking, this is consistent with what psychologists call the adult ego, or adult observing ego. This stage is the beginning of one's "life wisdom."

These are the stages of adult development:

12 to 19: First integration of childhood themes.

19 to 28: Transition to adult ego.

28 to 32: Choosing of life path.

32 to 35: Final choices toward adulthood.

35: Adulthood!

These are complex developmental stages during which mentors are required. The role of the mentor in the life of the developing adult is to be supportive, to guide without coercion, to invite a sense of openness and possibility. But the mentor also must assist the developing person to grapple with difficult questions. Here are a few:

What remains unfinished from your childhood development, and how does this make you vulnerable to certain kinds of moods or behaviors?

In what ways do you get stuck?

What are your deepest values and beliefs? How are you going to manifest them?

What is your experience of other people? How do you approach relationships with them?

What is the one thing you must remember?

What is the one thing you must un-learn, or re-learn?

What are you good at? What are you so good at that it works against you?

Where are you going?

Who are you?

Specific Scenarios: Mentorship in the Workplace

Professional supervision, management, and leadership are particular mentoring roles that require great openness to personal development. Basically, the best supervisors are those with the greatest self-awareness. And those with good self-awareness make good mentors. But it is not a simple exercise to establish your role as a mentor supervisor. Here are some suggestions for how to develop that role more easily:

Recognize that the supervisor/mentor is a role that precludes friendship. This may sound odd – because, after all, good supervisors are friendly – but friendliness and friendship are not the same. Friendship is based on equality. In supervisory and mentorship situations one person has more power. This cannot be changed. If you attempt to change it, you will harm the supervision relationship (and you will not have an authentic friendship). This does not mean that you must keep your distance, or be remote and unavailable. On the contrary; the best mentors are freely available. But you must remember that you have a specific role, and in order to keep it – and to best serve those with whom you work – you must keep a boundary around your role. You cannot make friends with your supervisees.

Learn to delegate. If you try to do everything you will burn out. And if you don't do enough you will earn the disrespect of those you supervise. So, balance the equation: do what you do best, and learn to trust that others can support you by doing their part. If necessary, teach others how to do things better, or faster, or more efficiently. Teach with sensitivity, and gentleness, and care. If you want people to enjoy working with you, and if you want to enjoy your own job, communicate your needs and expectations clearly. If someone fails, take at least some responsibility for not teaching them well enough. Remember: it's not about anyone else, it's about you. Own your part.

Model Health The best supervisors are those who demonstrate – not by talking, but by doing – that they care about those with whom they work. This is a simple and powerful principle, and it is true in all situations. Good mentors show their caring by being attentive, by listening, by being proactive. If you are looking for someone to set an example, let it be you. That's your job. It's almost all of your job.

Meet Every Day Many working teams in both the corporate and social services fields spend time and money on so-called bonding activities (such as whitewater rafting) designed to help people become more familiar with each other. Almost universally, such practices do not work: they are superficial, brief, and contrived. Conversely, effective team integration derives from the same kinds of experiences as those that contribute to good family and community relationships: time spent together every day. Ideally, the team should meet at the beginning of every day for a meeting of about fifteen minutes. This is a time to hear about personal or professional items that may impact upon the day, to hear how people are doing generally, and simply to chat. It is extraordinarily difficult for a team to work well if a daily meeting is not held.

Meet Once Every Season, and Once Per Year Longer meetings, such as planning sessions (one day) and retreats (two or three days) are also essential. We all spend too much time putting out fires in daily work to think about the big picture, but it's in the big picture that our vision of our work will eventually manifest. Without a sense of that vision and how it is unfolding, the work becomes drudgery.

Place Boundaries around the Work In any social service setting, social service workers (who typically have poor boundaries anyway) face the occupational hazard that the work begins to find its way into all the areas it does not belong. This is why the typical career-life of a social service worker in a given position is less than five years. Burnout happens (see next item). The best way to avoid this is to create clear and strong boundaries in the work. Create set hours for time with students/clients and stick to them. The sign on your door should say when you are in and when you are not. Fight for your space and time. Otherwise, it will be taken from you.

Avoid Burnout Expect some type of burnout every three to five years. It's simply part of the territory of working with emotional situations (especially with children). Pay attention to the warning signs – compassion fatigue, cynicism, emotional shutdown, erosion of boundaries, health problems, guilt, depression – and try to catch them early, when there is still time to take a break. Know when you need a rest. If you miss the signs, you will damage yourself and others (obviously). Consider burnout as an occupational stage, not as a disability.

Simply catch it early (transforming it from a potentially crippling experience into a relaxing break).

Debrief In any context where emotional intensity is the norm, daily debriefing is a minimum requirement for all staff. You need to be able to go into the office of a colleague, shut the door, and talk for a few minutes about what has just happened. You also need to be able to call dependable mentors and peers (paid or otherwise) who will give you supportive and ethical feedback and advice. Without such support, you simply cannot preserve both your empathy and your presence.

Train Together In the social services, psychology, and counseling, things change quickly (and with many disagreements). As such, ongoing professional development is an absolutely essential requirement for professionalism. Team members who train together assist the team in two ways: personally, by way of enhanced skills and contributions; and synergistically, by way of deepened relationships.

Avoid Politics The consistent poison in most organizations is politics: of unions, of management, of team dynamics, of “the way things are done.” The most effective way to diminish your personal sense of purpose and compromise your professional direction is to become involved in these squabbles, which do not end and which routinely fracture organizations. Some involvement in politics is normal and necessary (and can even be healthy); but when exertion exceeds reward, the process becomes toxic.

Fight the “Corrosion of Character” Modern business practices tend to erode traditional work values such as loyalty, commitment, and team cohesion. Large organizations have great difficulty resisting this corrosion of character (a phrase from Richard Sennett), but individual teams can make different choices: at the local level, where a high degree of daily autonomy exists. The skills for management and mentorship at the local level are soft skills – effective communication and conflict resolution, mostly – and should be taught to every team member.

Ten Statements You Should Never Say

Calm down.

I'll be with you in a minute.

It's not my fault.

No one else has a problem with this.

I don't make the policy.

There's nothing I can do.

I can't help you.

The rules apply to everyone.

We've always done it this way.

If you don't like this, you can leave.

Ten Statements to Work In Whenever Possible

Let me help you.

I can give you all the time you need.

Let's figure this out.

Whatever the issue is, I'll help you get it resolved.

It's very important to me that you are satisfied with what happens here.

You are unique. I'm happy to adapt things for you.

I really want you to feel that this is a community and that you belong here.

When things don't work so well, we fix them together.

I take my role, and yours, very seriously.

I will stay with this until we find a resolution.

Specific Scenarios: Self Mentorship

1. Sit quietly. Turn down your thoughts. Breathe.
2. Allow your consciousness to settle down. If you drift toward thinking (thoughts such as *this is really stupid*, for example), focus on your breathing.
3. On a sheet of paper, write down the phrase *This is what I know*.
Beneath this phrase, write down several things that you know about yourself and your life: what kind of person you are, what important truths you have learned, what you believe (about anything). Keep it positive.
4. Write down *Who I am*.
Beneath this, write a few things about yourself: your culture, or background, or interests, or career direction, or family role – or whatever you like. Imagine that you are describing yourself in a nutshell.
5. Write down *I am very resourceful and skilled at...*
Beneath this, write down a few areas in which you excel: sports, or certain types of situations, or specific areas of knowledge, or ways of thinking (or whatever). Come up with at least three.
6. Write down *Sometimes I get stuck when...*
Beneath this, write down two areas in your life where you have difficulty. This might be a psychological thing, such as anxiety or cynicism or impatience; it might be a specific type of situation, such as interpersonal conflicts in your family, or thinking about your career vision; it might be an odd little thing like a pet peeve. Write down whatever works for you. No one is going to see this, unless you choose to show it to them.
7. Write down *I must remember...*
Beneath this, try to articulate what it is that you must always remember.
8. Write down *My personal development depends on...*
Beneath this, write down whatever you thoughts you have about your own direction and development.

9. Find a partner. Taking one item at a time, share with one another what you have written down. Share as much or as little as you like. The partner's job is to listen, to be curious, to be non-judgemental.
10. Take your paper home, put it in a safe place, and review it in five years.

Specific Scenarios: Trauma

Trauma occurs when stress exceeds an individual's containment capacity. Physiological (i.e. emotional) energy breaks through the emotional containment of the self and splits off to create what is known as the trauma vortex. Incomplete responses to the traumatic situation (fight, flee, freeze, orient) are locked in the trauma vortex and contribute to the continued erosion of containment. Subsequent traumas are evoked by and contribute to these frozen response patterns.

In the work of trauma healing, energy is slowly reclaimed from the trauma vortex and reintroduced to a newly-stabilized container (by way of careful titration). This requires the completion of locked response patterns and the development of new adaptations for dealing with similarly stressful situations. This sequence follows the evolutionary imperative toward healing.

Healthy containment involves the development of core relational, consciousness, and body awareness skills. These include grounding, centering, and boundaries. When combined in the spirit of authentic inquiry and relationship, these skills deliver presence, emotional management, safety of feelings, and overall psychological health.

Here are some guidelines for mentorship within the context of trauma:

- Practice grounding, centering, and boundaries in yourself.
- Be contained, and prevent your own activation.
- Work to build containment in the present moment.
- Work on safety and developing safe space.
- Work on grounding, centering, and boundaries.
- Work on developing body sensation skills.
- Help contain dissociation, overwhelm, and fear.
- Work on incomplete nervous system responses (for example, many fighters need to learn how to freeze or flee, many freezers need to fight or flee, and many fleers need to freeze or fight).

- Encourage physical activities (such as sports) to learn a wider range of response choices.
- Help to develop a support system.
- Avoid revisiting or reactivating the trauma (i.e. by “telling the story”).
- Do not focus discussions on the past (build containment in the present).
- Do not use unstructured or spontaneous expressive techniques (get training).
- Do not validate or discount recovered memories (treat them as “in process”).

Recommended Reading

- Hedges, Chris. *War is a Force that Gives us Meaning*
- Horgan, John. *The Undiscovered Mind*
- Laird, Ross A. *Grain of Truth: The Ancient Lessons of Craft*
- Laird, Ross A. *A Stone's Throw: The Enduring Nature of Myth*
- Levine, Peter. *Waking the Tiger*
- Macnaughton, Ian. *Body, Breath, and Consciousness*

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About Ross A. Laird

Ross Laird, Ph.D. teaches creative process, leadership, psychology and counselling at various educational institutions. His approach is experiential and collaborative, with particular emphasis on the creative as an instrument of change. He is a clinical supervisor to social service agencies, an award-winning poet and scholar, and best-selling author of *Grain of Truth: The Ancient Lessons of Craft* (shortlisted for

a Governor General's Award). His most recent book, *A Stone's Throw: The Enduring Nature of Myth* is currently in bookstores. A new book on addictions will be released in 2008. Visit www.rosslaird.info for more information.