



US Army Corps of Engineers

Natural Resources Management Branch

# CAREER NOTES

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## Mentoring partnerships for change

### An opportunity to direct your future

Many of us have felt unprepared for the changes associated with Corps attempts to reorganize in recent years. An array of missions from dredging to environmental protection promotes a kind of organizational schizophrenia when coupled with these attempts at transformation. To succeed, we are struggling to find new approaches for managing our futures, both as an agency and individually.

The Standard Organizational Structure, or SOS, is the new future we are challenged with now. Headquarters' commitment to SOS is firm. You probably had no control or input in its development and strategy, but you do have control over how you will react to its implementation. It's real easy and sometimes even fun to gripe and criticize, but

generally not very constructive. I offer an alternative as a salve for the flutter of anxiety.

#### Mentoring for change

Michael Beer, Russell Eisenstat, and Bert Spector state in their article, *Why Change Programs Don't Produce Change*, that organizations need "cultural context (role models from whom we learn)" in order to succeed in changing attitudes. That's why mentoring can be important to implementing positive and successful change within the organization while offering an opportunity for employees to gain control and direct their own futures.

Mentoring is the oldest form of learning, no doubt because it's simple and direct. Defined as a process of seeking guidance from someone who has at least three advantages: experience, perspective, and distance. It is a partnership in which an experienced member of the organization provides information, guidance, and support to another person. In particular, mentoring is an excellent way to transition from one career path to another. However, mentoring is not for everyone. Successful mentoring has its foundation in one thing, the employee or "protégé" has to be a highly motivated and self-directed individual. It's up to the protégé to establish the relationship, develop the goals and plan of action and direct its progress. Having said that, mentoring can benefit most of us

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when structured to accommodate our individual personalities and needs by following a few simple guidelines.

### Types of mentors

**Technical Mentor:** A focused relationship developed to learn a specific skill or task, e.g., learning confidence as a manager or learning a new computer system.

**Informational Mentor:** Generally short-term and as simple as meeting someone over lunch to discuss a particular objective or issue and then to seek guidance. This is an excellent opportunity for professionals or protégés who want to be involved in mentoring, but may not have the time or desire for a long-term commitment.

**Career Mentor:** The more traditional approach in which a mentor and protégé establish a relationship and commit to a plan of action with a set of goals over a specified period of time. This relationship usually lasts months or years.

Mentoring can include a combination of all three types and usually involves more than one mentor.

### Where, oh where, is my mentor?

Regardless of the type of mentoring style you implement, consider these steps in the process:

**Step 1:** Identify what you need or want to learn. The career ladders of the Career Development Guide provide an outline for the career path you choose. However, mentoring is an excellent vehicle to cross over to another career path.

**Step 2:** Develop a profile of your job mentor. What characteristics, skills and personal qualities do you need in your mentor? Do you just need support and listening, or someone who will impart new skills and expanded knowledge? In any case, you will need someone at least two levels above you who has demonstrated success and knowledge of the skills you are seeking.

**Step 3:** Complete a personal profile of yourself. What is your learning style and confidence level? What values are important to you and with what

kind of people do you best respond? Be specific about what skills, knowledge or personal growth you want to learn and how much time you have to commit toward this effort.

**Step 4:** Develop an outline of your mentoring plan. Include format, time requirement, and objectives.

**Step 5:** List all possible mentors available to you, pros and cons of each person, and narrow down the list to 2-3 possible mentors.

**Step 6:** Contact the mentor candidates and set up informal interviews. Be prepared to explain your precise goals and the format and time requirements. Most mentors are busy people; the more organized and focused you are, the better the response and guidance you will receive.

**Step 7:** Assess interviewed candidates. Evaluate their strengths and limitations and then make your selection.

**Step 8:** Establish the partnership. If you choose to engage in a formal mentoring relationship, a written agreement needs to be developed and signed by both parties. The agreement should include goals, length of time and how often you will be meeting as well as how progress will be evaluated.

**Step 9:** Evaluation and closure. An evaluation of the progress made, with positive closure, will lay the foundation for the next step in your career development.

The days of spending your working life with one agency in one job are gone. Change and flexibility are the hallmarks of today's work environment. Those who expand their skills and keep up-to-date with new technologies are poised for success. Feeling in control of your destiny heightens confidence and motivation. Mentoring is one way to achieve the balance you need to succeed.

Contributed by Nancy Rogers, Bay Model

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# NRM career development bulletin board

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The Corps has installed an Internet information service at the Cold Regions Research and Engineering Laboratory (CRREL) in Hanover, NH. This service stores information as hypertext. This allows us to set up pointers that let you see a different part of the same document or can show you an entirely new document. Access to this service is obtained through the World Wide Web. Eventually, you will only be able to see the Natural Resources Management Career Development bulletin board as World Wide Web pages stored on the USACE server at CRREL. You may want to check with your local Information Management people to determine if your location has, or will be getting, a World Wide Web connection. For planning purposes, we would like to know the status of your location in acquiring connectivity. Please let us know by contacting the Career Development Steering Committee office at (614) 292-0117 (phone) or (614)292-3868 (fax).

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## Career notes

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*Career Notes* is a quarterly newsletter of the Natural Resources Management Career Development Steering Committee designed to address concerns and needs of field personnel in the areas of training and career development. You may communicate with *Career Notes* directly at the CDSC office or through your division's representative on the Career Development Steering Committee (see page 4).

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# Professional organizations

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## What's in it for us?

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Park, Recreation and Resource Management professionals both in the Corps and outside have been asking this question more and more lately. We have competing demands for both our time and our money. Why should we pay our dues, spend our time at meetings, or be on a committee?

My reply to this often asked question is, you can't afford not to be involved. In my view, a "job" is a task performed for wages. A "profession," on the other hand, is a higher calling. What distinguishes recreational "professionals" from our sons and daughters that hold "jobs" flipping burgers at the local fast food eatery is our INVOLVEMENT in bettering our profession. This is accomplished by belonging to professional associations, reading their journals, and giving back to the profession.

In our District, we have been rather fortunate in being able to get folks to the NRPA Congresses. I do require that the employees be dues paying members of the organization. Since OCE has gotten a "Corporate Membership," this significantly reduces the cost to the individual. I was a little disappointed last year when several of my field folks initially indicated interest in going to the congress. When reminded that we would only send members, several opted not to attend. Remember, my distinction between a job and a profession? To those of you who feel like second class citizens, or feel like you are looked down upon by engineers and other professionals, I say grow up and smell the roses. Either get involved in your profession or just sit back and let it be nothing more than a "job." The choice is yours!

Contributed by George Hardison, Rock Island District

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# Update of training needs survey

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The Career Development Steering Committee is conducting a series of phone and fax interviews with a small representative sample of natural resource management personnel to assess the changing character of training needs. Approximately forty team members from across the country, representing rangers, managers, specialists, maintenance, and administrative support have mentioned needs for new directions in training and more team members will be contacted. Respondents are being asked what skills are required in their jobs today that were not required four years ago. They are also asked if they were adequately trained in those skills.

So far, representatives in almost all job classifications most frequently report needing additional training in computer related activities, TAPES, and ERGO. Park rangers and managers identify budget/analysis, supervision/leadership, personnel evaluation method, cultural resources, and hazardous materials as the most common areas where training is inadequate.

Maintenance team members and facility managers identify a wide range of technical skills training including wastewater treatment, pesticides, confined space entry, and personal safety. Administrative support team members report additional training needs related to budgeting but give high marks to the CETAL, MARKS, and TQM training they have received.

Staffers and chiefs interviewed report many of the above needs with the addition of contract administration, ADA, managing change, cultural diversity, ethics, and stress management.

If you would like to complete a survey form, please contact the CDSC office at phone: (614) 292-0117 or FAX: (614) 292-3868.

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# CDSC members

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