

My
Mentor
Turned
Mountains
into
Molehills



The author, Craig Harrison, DTM, with his mentor, Ginger Kane, DTM.

Mentors provide a different kind of accountability, a special partnership and a mutual investment.

We learn life's lessons in many ways. We read, observe and experience. As Toastmasters we attend training, and we learn through doing. Whether it's the different meeting role we play each week or the officer role we assume for six months or a year at a time, our learning is experiential. We learn by being

evaluated verbally and in writing. And yet my learning curve really accelerated when I adopted a mentor – or rather she adopted me. Yes, an experienced Toastmaster agreed to work with me in between club meetings, on the phone and in person, to further my development as a Toastmaster. She saw the road ahead and knew where it could take me. She saw the potential in me and knew how to drive me to develop it. And her tutelage has not only accelerated my learning but opened new doors during my Toastmasters tenure.

When I joined Toastmasters I was fiercely independent, proud of my achievements but clueless about the many avenues available to me: speaking, training, leading, working with youth, competing and promoting Toastmasters to non-members. My mentor knew about these and other roads awaiting me, and she was able to sketch the terrain ahead and encourage me to new destinations.

Mentors offer more than experienced eyes and ears. They provide a different kind of accountability, a special partnership and a mutual investment.

A Mentor Makes Meetings More Meaningful

As a new Toastmaster, I benefited by having a designated mentor to ask questions or receive instructions from. I remember hearing about contests and not knowing what to expect. My mentor told me they were not only fun, but that contests were educational learning experiences worth pursuing.

BY CRAIG HARRISON, DTM

I was already learning by attending meetings. Yet working with a mentor meant that I was focusing on improvement between meetings as well. We would talk by phone or meet periodically for coffee. What a font of information my mentor was. But the key was that I had to ask for it!

In Thee We Trust

My mentor, Past International Director Ginger Kane, DTM, and I developed a friendship. I felt safe confiding in her my fears, failures and insecurities. In turn she comforted me by letting me know I was not alone in this regard. She shared her own stories of overcoming fear, accepting new challenges and reaching new heights. Her success stories buoyed me. Without a trusting relationship, I would not have shown my vulnerabilities and opened myself up to growth and learning opportunities.

Once trust is established, your mentor can help you evaluate opportunities, assess your strengths and weaknesses and help identify new challenges for you. Over the years my mentor has helped me in a myriad ways:

- Plan contests and pick personnel.
- Resolve a personality conflict within my home club.
- Strategize how to achieve a Distinguished Area.
- Gauge whether to run for Lt. Governor of Education and Training.
- Pick a theme for my district governor term.
- Evaluate talent within the district as I built teams and committees.
- Creatively motivate diverse personality types.
- Understand that my unsolicited feedback of others often wasn't appreciated.

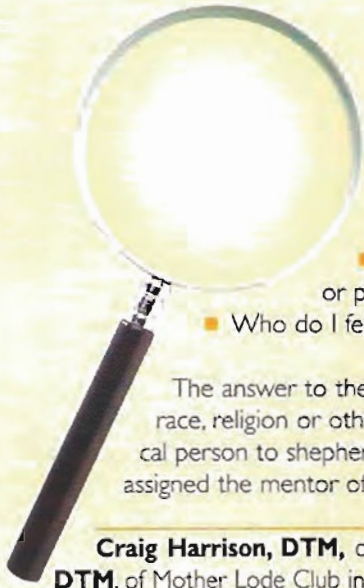
Making 'the Ask'

By Craig Harrison, DTM

◆ HOW YOU ASK FOR HELP OFTEN DETERMINES the results you receive. Understanding how to ask for help is an important skill that can help you build boards and committees, form teams and complete projects – even help you find a marriage partner. Here's how to ask for help from a mentor:

- **WIIFM?** Phrase your request in terms of the benefits to the listener. Speak to what's in it for them. Why will they benefit from saying yes to your request?
- **Be positive.** Will the experience be fun? High profile? Build new skills? Lead to a promotion? Make the world a better place? Will it give all involved a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction?
- **Show respect and appreciation for your prospect.** When you recognize a person's skills, track record, personality or other attributes, he or she feels special. It's flattering and affirming to be asked to participate, whether as a mentor, club officer, contest chair or other role.
- **Give accurate and clear expectations of what the position requires.** It's tempting to tell people what they want to hear, or only emphasize what is easy or fun. Give a fair explanation of your request.
- **Listen to the prospect's concerns.** What are they worried about? How will they base their decision? Strive to understand their needs, their fears, their constraints.
- **Give your prospect an appropriate amount of time to make an informed decision.** Don't pressure, manipulate or overwhelm your prospect. This often backfires.
- **Strive for win-wins.** Use flexibility and creativity to find mutually acceptable outcomes.
- **Accept their answer,** whether or not they agree to your request.
- **Consider a counter-offer** should your initial request be rejected. Having a fallback offer allows your prospect to join your team or work with you in whatever capacity they are able to.
- **Thank them either way for their time and willingness to consider your offer.** By treating them with respect and care, they are more likely to say yes in the future.





Finding the Right Mentor

Ask yourself these questions:

- What do I need to know and who can I learn from? Who, in my club, area, division or district, has the experience I seek?
- Is there a Toastmaster whose style I admire or wish to emulate?
- Who is in a position I aspire to someday reach or attain within my club, district or profession?
- Who do I feel a kinship with? Who do I feel safe around? Who is supportive? Who do I respect?

The answer to these questions is likely your mentor. Your mentor may or not be the same gender, age, race, religion or other variables as you, yet for the commonalities listed above, he or she will be the logical person to shepherd you to success. Share these findings with your club's Vice President Education to be assigned the mentor of your choosing.

Craig Harrison, DTM, of Lakeview Club in Berkeley, California, and Past International Director **Ginger Kane, DTM**, of Mother Lode Club in Grass Valley, California, believe the best mentors have mentors.

Mentor Not My Mirror Image

It's a misnomer to presume your mentor must be like you. Consider my situation. I am a male, my mentor is female. I have black hair, hers is white. I am shorter and stoop slightly, she's tall and statuesque. We're of different faiths, belong to different clubs and in many other ways wouldn't appear to have much in common. Yet she's walked a path I am on. I wanted to learn and she was willing to coach me. And so we bonded.

Mentors and Mentees Support Each Other

"To have a mentor is an earned privilege. Don't bleed time from other people's lives if you are not prepared to follow their advice. You are ruining it for the rest of us who follow." So says Terri Sjodin, co-author of *Mentoring: A Successful Guide to Mentors and Protégés*. "You've got to give to get. What's in it for them? Understand the reciprocal nature of our world."

Once I had a mentor, I found myself trying a little harder, caring a little more and wanting to make my mentor proud. In a certain way I felt my successes and failures reflected on my mentor as well as on myself. I felt a responsibility to always do my best where before I wasn't as focused or consistent in my preparation and delivery, my approach and my demeanor.

Paying It Forward

When I began working with my mentor, I couldn't understand why she would give so freely of her time. After all, she could already speak well. She had worked her way through both the communication and leadership tracks and reached the highest levels before I had even joined our organization. It took me a while to realize that mentors

enjoy giving back. They derive a special satisfaction from nurturing others. They vicariously enjoy seeing the progress of others as we matriculate in the Toastmasters program.

When I asked Ginger how I could repay her for her countless hours of help, there was a twinkle in her eye as she shared yet another lesson with me, as I was one of many people she was mentoring at the time. She explained that others had helped her when she was new to Toastmasters and it was up to me to pass along the favor by mentoring others yet to come. Applying the premise of the motion picture *Pay It Forward*, I have sought to mentor a variety of other Toastmasters in the years since I first received mentoring. Having been a protégée actually helped me become a better mentor. I was in touch with what it felt like to be on the receiving end of mentoring, and it made me a better mentor.

I strive to maintain a level of excellence for other club members, to be an example and a role model. Why do it? I get personal satisfaction from seeing the improvement and growth of those I mentor. To be part of another person's success is gratifying.

Success is always sweeter when it's shared with others. Seek and select a mentor, and together you will succeed beyond your wildest dreams. Find a mentor, be a mentor and success will be yours! **T**

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Craig Harrison, DTM, is a member of Lakeview Club in Berkeley, California, and a frequent contributor to this magazine. Visit Craig's Web site www.craigspeaks.com.