



By Marc Meybaum

*“Mentorship is the voluntary developmental relationship that exists between a person of greater experience and a person of lesser experience that is characterized by mutual trust and respect.”*

- [AR 600-100](#): Army Profession and Leadership Policy

As a young leader I had heard leaders implore my peers and I to seek out mentorship, yet I was reluctant to do so. There was the fear of approaching a person who was older, wiser, and more accomplished and asking them to mentor me. Also, early in my career, I had a limited professional network and was still cultivating relationships; I was simply not sure who to ask. This is not to say I did not learn from more experienced professionals around me. I have benefited tremendously from the formal and informal counsel of commanders, supervisors, senior NCOs, and others. However, I could not yet fully appreciate the benefits of having mentors who not only know you but know your strengths, your weaknesses, and your character. Despite these early shortcomings, mentors found me. At crucial moments, the people I most admire in this profession took it upon themselves to foster this relationship.

A mentoring relationship opens the door to another level of growth and development. As the Army definition states a mentor/mentee relationship exists between professionals of different experience levels and is based on mutual trust and respect. My mentors are people who I hold in high regard not only due to professional experience and competence but, more importantly, due to their personal character. The benefit of this relationship is the authenticity of our conversations. We share our hopes, fears, burdens, and successes. The breadth and depth of our conversations surpasses what can be achieved in a counseling or coaching relationship. As such, It is transformational in its ability to help a young leader navigate the Army profession.

The strength of the relationship can give you the confidence to take risks where you may otherwise have been timid. Mentors are able to provide more candid and pointed feedback for your development and they know you well enough to challenge your assumptions and viewpoints.

So where to start? The most difficult barrier to overcome was my assumption that leaders neither had the time nor willingness when, in fact, the opposite is true. The best leaders in our profession would like nothing more than to mentor the next generation. Start with a conversation, schedule a chat with a leader you admire, ask some questions over coffee or a volitional PT session. If you like what you hear, come back for more. Though you may not find one on your first attempt, your mentors are out there.

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*Editor's Note: In June, we asked our [From the Green Notebook](#) community a simple but profound question: What's the one thing you wish you would have known before you started your last assignment? This week, we are pleased to share the nuggets of wisdom leaders have learned with the hope that it doesn't have to be relearned by someone else the hard way.*

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