# Paying it Forward
## Building mentoring relationships in the interpreting community



*"A tree planted in a clearing of an old growth forest will grow more successfully than one planted in an open field. The reason, it seems, is that the roots of the forest tree are able to follow the intricate pathways created by former trees and thus embed themselves more deeply (Daloz, 2000 xiiii).*

*Interpreters who agree to mentoring relationships (both the newly planted tree and the tree from the old forest) are expected to grow. Mentors...report improvements in their own interpreting skills and knowledge (Clark, 1995; Zachary, 2000). Similarly, proteges or mentees who experience collegial nurturing, are likely to grow faster in the roots of their mentor's support."*

*From "Best Practices in Educational Interpreting 2nd Edition by Brenda Chafin Seal*

**Becoming a Mentor**

Many interpreters (and interpreting students) sense the need for mentors, but don't know how to begin the process. This packet helps us explore the meanings of mentoring relationships as a first step. The first section is for those of us who are willing to mentor someone, but feel unsure where to begin or what we might have to offer. The second section is the worksheet that offers mentees tips toward connecting with potential mentors and embarking on a shared growth process, so that potential mentors can see the guide mentees may have worked through.

Take some time to consider the questions below, and then we encourage you to try out some connections and see who you might click with in a mentoring capacity. You may never know all you have to offer another interpreter until you give it a go!

**Time Commitment**

   You're busy! You may not have a lot of time or feel ready to commit to a mentee. But the truth is that a lot of mentees don't need a lot of your *time*. You may just need an initial meeting to go over goals, and then oftentimes a mentee will reach out periodically to gain a more experienced perspective now and then. (Other mentees may prefer a more structured, on-going meeting type of relationship. The key is that you both agree to the same type of commitment.)

   When you consider entering a mentoring relationship, what kind of time can you invest? Regular meetings or as-needed? How much time per week/month/year can you be available? Can you meet for in-depth discussions or respond to brief questions now and then?

**Contact Options**

   Some mentees may not have time to meet in person and may not expect that of you. If you have time to answer emails with brainstorming advice, reflective questions, and input from your own experience, you may be able to connect with a mentee who needs exactly that. Take a minute and jot down the ways you would like to be in touch with a mentee, as well as communication methods that you do not prefer.
*(For example: face-to-face, online meetings, text, email, phone calls/voicemail, Glide, Facebook, WhatsApp, etc.)*

**Mentor Role**

   Mentoring can take many different forms. When you have helped someone learn something (even as simple as how to use a new technology or something) how did you help that person learn -- What type of mentoring do you think you might be best at?

Here is a list of some styles. You may have another approach that is not listed here that could make you the perfect mentor for someone out there! Take a few minutes to consider each of these and circle the ones you think would best fit you as a mentor. Also feel free to add descriptions of your personal approaches!

<u>Some Mentorship Approaches:</u>
- Tutor/skill-development
    - Typically a structured relationship with regular meetings
    - Explicit goals (often framed as "S.M.A.R.T." goals)
    - Specific activities and follow-up
- Ethics and decision-making: frameworks/models/paradigms
    - May be greatly or minimally structured
    - May meet regularly or as decision-making struggles arise
    - Often meet in real-time: in person, on-line, on the phone, etc., but may also work through text/emails/Glide, etc.
- Support, venting
    - Often minimal-to-no structure
    - The mentor helps the mentee "get it out" in a supportive environment and helps the mentee think through all the aspects of a situation.
    - The mentor may also offer additional viewpoints from their experience after the mentee has had some time to vent/process.
    - The mentor may share similar experiences they have gone through.
    - Typically a very mentee-led relationship
- Field advice: the "whats" and "hows" of interpreting as a career
    - Might be a one-time or periodic relationship wherein the mentee has permission to ask all of the "sticky money" questions, and other logistics of the career
    - Mentor is open to sharing the ins-and-outs of their business practices along with the rationale behind the choices they have made
- Peer Mentoring
    - May be structured or not
    - May meet regularly or as needed
    - No "mentee/mentor" roles, but rather two colleagues learning together "equally" (Truth be told, this is true of all mentoring relationships, but in "peer mentoring" it is more emphasized, and often is between two experienced interpreters.)

**Fears and Frustrations**

Often the reasons we give for why we are not mentoring, while they are valid, are not really the true reason. Take a few minutes to think about what fears you might face about the prospect of mentoring. Maybe you feel you're "not good enough" or don't have anything to offer? Or maybe you have had a negative experience with a previous mentor or mentee, yourself.

Jot down the fears you have about <u>your abilities</u>, as well as about a <u>potential mentee</u>. Then talk about them with a trusted colleague or friend, and see if there might be ways to enter into a mentoring relationship that can develop a positive and fruitful time for both you and a mentee. (ORID Board members are also happy to chat about these with you anytime!)

Below you will find the questions from the worksheet we offer interpreters and students who are seeking a mentor. As you meet with a potential mentee, it can be beneficial to discuss these questions together:

1) Think of a time you learned a new skill: walking, riding a bike, using email, smartphones, etc.. How did you learn these skills -- who helped you, and what did they do that supported your development with that skill?
   Did they know they were a role model for you, or did you emulate their skills/actions/attitudes just by watching and internalizing what you saw?

2) Similarly, think of a time someone else learned from you -- perhaps a younger sibling, a friend learning your hobby, a classmate struggling with homework. Did you know from the start that you were modeling something they wanted to learn? What did that process look like?

3) When you say "I want/need a mentor" what do you envision that relationship looking like? What kind of structure or relating would help meet the need you are sensing?
   *(For example: how often do you want to be in touch, and how? In person, online, short texts, long emails/videos? How much structure/activities would you like and what might that structure (or fluidity) look like?)*

4) With professors, peers, and classmates/colleagues, you have access to a lot of people that can help answer questions and guide you through a learning process. A mentor can fill a different role. What sorts of things do you feel you want guidance on that your professors, peers, and classmates in the program or colleagues aren't able to help you with?

<u>A few final words from our student representatives:</u>

As you begin your search for mentors, keep in mind that you have a TON of resources at your fingertips already! Be sure you are making the most of what you have now, so that as you access more resources, you will be in the habit of active learning and reflection.

Ask yourself who you have available to you and how they can help! Do you want a specific skill development practice, tutoring, feedback, and affirmation? Peers are a great resource for these things and most professors are happy to help give some specific feedback.

Some benefits of *mentoring* relationships that we, the student rep committee of ORID, have noticed are:

★ Developing needed professional skills in the interpreting field requires knowing the "jargon" of the profession. Being exposed to the "jargon" and terminology used in the interpreting industry helps solidify concepts that underskirt the processes and practices that the interpreter operates within.

★ Networking provides support to working interpreters. This support may be "brainstorming" for effective ways of managing a difficult circumstance within a given interpreting setting. It is a support system to seek advice or suggestions from more seasoned interpreters who may have insight from their past experiences, job listings and background/reputation, etc..

★ Having a connection labeled as a "mentoring relationship" can help your mentor prioritize reading and responding to your emails/texts/Glides over the many others they may receive every day, and this can be very pleasant for working interpreters to know they have something to offer their current or future colleagues and field.

★ Having a mentor gives you an immediate "go to" person when something comes up you're not sure how to handle. You can always enlist others' help, too, but it's nice to know you have a first place to go when something hard happens.

★ A mentor will notice when you improve on something that you've been working on. Other interpreters or consumers might not see the difference, since they don't know it is a focus area for you, but it can be very encouraging to have your mentor see the change and cheer you on.

★ Depending on the kind of mentoring relationship you want, you can develop a safe space where you both share your struggles and process. Hearing about an experienced interpreter's past failures can give you hope when you are faced with your current limitations.