

Where do I go from Here?

Seeking 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 xiii).

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

Finding a Mentor

Many interpreters (and interpreting students) sense the need for mentors, but don't know how to begin the process. This worksheet guides your exploration of the meanings of mentoring relationships and offers tips toward connecting with potential mentors and embarking on a shared growth process. Writing your answers often helps formulate clearer thoughts than just internal processing, so we encourage you to write at least brief answers after you consider each of the questions. Then you can share as much or as little as you'd like with peers and potential mentors or mentees.

- 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?

A few final words from our student representatives:

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 under skirt 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.