

# The MENTORSHIP DILEMMA CONTINUES

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**T**HE IDEA THAT MENTORSHIP is desirable and essential to professional leader development in the military has become axiomatic in recent years. An examination of the lives of Generals Dwight D. Eisenhower, George Patton, George Marshall, and others reveals that each had a mentor who helped mold him into the Army leader he became. They each continued this tradition by mentoring others in a cycle of intimate, one-on-one professional development. The Army's bureaucratic tendency to seek to replicate successful strategies has led it to create an "Army mentorship strategy."

However, this strategy is detrimental to Army values and results in decreased effectiveness. The Army organization should eliminate mentorship as a strategy for three reasons:

- Army doctrine is inconsistent with regard to mentorship.
- Mentorship is, by definition, exclusionary and therefore not in keeping with Army values. Attempts to change the definition to overcome this contradiction only serve to increase confusion within the Army regarding mentorship.
- Mentorship occurs naturally with or without an Army mentorship strategy. Indeed, it will occur better without the added confusion of such a strategy.

## Mentorship versus Leader Development

In Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus entrusted his close friend, Mentor, with both his son, Telemachus, and his palace. Mentor provided Telemachus with wise counsel. Since Homer, this type of relationship between an older, experienced person and a protégé became known as mentorship. The practice of mentorship in armies predates our Army's mentorship strategy by centuries.

In a 1985 *Military Review* article, Lieutenant General Charles Bagnal, Earl Pence, and Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Meriwether recommended that the Army emphasize a mentorship style of leadership. This style of leadership is characterized by "open communication with subordinates, role modeling of appropriate values, the effective use of counseling for subordinate development, and sharing of the leader's frame of reference with subordinate leaders."<sup>1</sup> This style of leadership, which occurs within the chain of command and focuses on leader functions like coaching, counseling, and teaching, provides many of the benefits the Army seeks to gain in its mentorship strategy. Furthermore, it does so without creating the confusion about mentorship that the current strategy exacerbates. Bagnal and his coauthors even suggested that

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PHOTO: Telemachus and Mentor, by Pablo E. Fabisch, from *Les Aventures de Telemachus*, 1699.

the development of subordinates should be a factor for consideration in promotion boards.<sup>2</sup> They also contend that the “primary role of Army mentors is clearly that of a coach and not a sponsor.”<sup>3</sup> The sponsorship aspect of mentorship, where a mentor seeks to influence the career path of his protégé to help the protégé obtain desirable assignments, seems to undermine Army values.

In a response to their article, Major General Kenneth Jolemore argues, “Because mentoring is a natural interpersonal human activity, it cannot be ordered away.”<sup>4</sup> He points out that mentorship will inevitably result in sponsorship, and “if the Army were to order it not to be done, the decision would create a barrier to ethical behavior. Surely sponsoring will continue, and those practicing it will be inclined to deny their actions.”<sup>5</sup> Jolemore recommends formalizing the mentorship process as some corporations have done. He concedes that “every leader should be a teacher and a coach,” but he argues that “not all leaders are qualified to be mentors in the traditional, historical sense.”<sup>6</sup>

The standard definition of mentoring when these articles appeared was Kathy Kram’s definition. In her book, *Mentoring at Work*, she defined a mentor as “someone who may provide a host of career development and psychosocial functions, which may include role modeling and sponsoring.”<sup>7</sup> The Army sought to resolve the contradiction between Army values and mentorship by redefining mentorship itself. The Army definition of mentorship differed from Kram’s by asserting that “mentoring is an inclusive process (not an exclusive one) for everyone under a leader’s charge.”<sup>8</sup> I agree with General Jolemore, however. Regulation cannot define away or end these aspects of mentoring. The refusal to acknowledge this fact has added to confusion within the Army about the differences between mentorship and leader development.

## Today’s Army Mentorship Doctrine: Confusion Continues

In 2005, the Army launched a new Army mentorship strategy designed to “reemphasize and reinvigorate mentorship throughout the Army and to encourage Soldiers and DA civilians to leave a legacy through mentorship.”<sup>9</sup> In an effort to give the appearance of presidential approval for this strategy, the Army mentorship strategy information paper

included a quotation from President George W. Bush’s 2003 State of the Union address. The quotation appears in brochures available on the Army’s mentorship website. This quotation is also taken out of context. It says, “It is the men and women of America who will fill the need. One mentor, one person, can change a life forever. And I urge you to be that one person.” The full quotation from the 2003 State of the Union address reads,

I propose a \$450-million initiative to bring mentors to more than a million disadvantaged junior high students and children of prisoners. Government will support the training and recruiting of mentors; yet it is the men and women of America who will fill the need. One mentor, one person can change a life forever. And I urge you to be that one person.”<sup>10</sup>

This example points to the ubiquity of “mentorship” as a buzzword in American society today, which increases confusion in the Army about the definition of the term.

The Army currently defines mentorship as a “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.”<sup>11</sup> According to Army Regulation 600-100, *Army Leadership*, the three ways leaders can develop those junior to them are mentoring, counseling, and coaching. The regulation echoes the definition of mentorship from the information paper and adds, “The focus of mentorship is voluntary mentoring that extends beyond the scope of chain of command relationships and occurs when a mentor provides the mentee advice and counsel over a period of time.”<sup>12</sup>

In 1999, the Army maintained that mentorship occurs within the chain of command. Today, the Army claims that mentors are experienced senior leaders whose mentorship occurs outside the chain of command. In both instances, the Army maintains

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that good mentorship involves wise advice and counsel but does not result in favoritism or sponsorship. There are two problems with this definition. First, even within the current Army mentorship literature, the Army does not consistently apply this definition. Second, as General Jolemore noted in 1986, the model of mentorship presented is historically inaccurate.

The Army's mentorship website has a wealth of resources for mentors and their protégés including tri-fold brochures about the benefits of mentorship for both parties. The mentor brochure claims "Anyone can be a mentor, regardless of rank, duty location, or career field."<sup>13</sup> This contradicts statements elsewhere in Army mentorship literature that mentors should be at least two levels above their protégés and outside the chain of command. The protégé brochure reassures the reader that mentorship is for Soldiers on active duty, in the reserves, or in the National Guard as well as DA civilians, DA contractors, veterans, cadets, spouses, retirees, and family members.<sup>14</sup> This list of possible protégés seems to imply that mentorship is for everyone connected with the Army in some way. In effect, it portrays mentorship as a life improvement program instead of a leader development strategy.

### Mentorship is Exclusionary

The conflicting statements about mentors stem from the Army's desire to make mentorship seem inclusive and reflective of Army values. Mentorship by its nature, however, is exclusive and selective. In 2002, Lieutenant Colonel Bette Washington wrote at length about this "Army dilemma" and concluded that the Army should "eliminate mentoring and focus on leader development."<sup>15</sup> That the Army's mentorship strategy is voluntary does not lessen the impression that the Army views mentorship as a hallmark of successful leaders.

The Army's definition of mentorship concedes that a mentor-protégé relationship can have origins in a senior-subordinate relationship. However, a mentor-protégé relationship should ideally occur outside the chain of command and not result in favoritism for the protégé. Historically, however, this is not the case. Mentorship relationships often occur within the chain of command and often result in favorable treatment for protégés at the expense of others.

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Major General Fox Conner was a model Army mentor. Conner served as a mentor to Eisenhower, Patton, and Marshall and did not hesitate to use his influence to further the careers of his protégés, which some in today's Army would see as favoritism. When Eisenhower found his career stalled because he had published an article that displeased the Chief of Infantry, Conner used his influence with the War Department to get then-Major Eisenhower assigned to the Command and General Staff School



**The best known mentor-mentee relationship in the West was that of Julius Caesar and Marc Antony. Here Antony sycophantically offers Caesar the crown; though thrice refused by Caesar, merely offering the crown by this obsessively servile protégé led to the triumvir's assassination.**



at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, in spite of the branch chief's objections.<sup>16</sup>

Major General William Smith demoted Patton from G-3 of the Hawaiian Division to G-2. When Conner replaced Smith as division commander the following year, he helped to salvage Patton's career by writing in Patton's final efficiency report that "I know of no one whom I would prefer as a subordinate officer."<sup>17</sup>

During World War II, Conner even attempted to shield a former aide from further combat tours. Conner sent a telegram to Army Chief of Staff George Marshall stating, "J. Trimble Brown after two years combat duty was rotated and returned safely five weeks ago. He just received orders to return to combat duty tomorrow. He was my aide for 11 years, and I strongly recommend that orders be canceled and he be retained at Fort Benning."<sup>18</sup> Marshall forwarded this telegram in a memo to his G-1 and asked for an explanation of Conner's claim regarding Brown, citing Conner's faithful service to the nation and his personal relationship with Marshall. The G-1 responded to Marshall that Brown would certainly stay at Benning and that he had never seriously considered plans to deploy him.

Conner was not the only senior officer who used his influence to advance his protégés. In many ways, personnel battles between the followers of John Pershing and Peyton March defined the Army's officer corps after World War I. In World War II, those who sought protection from MacArthur frequently clashed with protégés of Marshall.

## **Mentorship Will Occur Without an Army Strategy**

If mentorship is exclusive, selective, and can potentially result in unfair treatment, can it be good for the Army? I submit that it can. While we will never know the results of roads not taken, most people agree the examples I've cited turned out well for America. Mentors like Pershing inspired a generation of junior officers to stay in the Army through the difficult interwar period. Eisenhower was uniquely qualified to be the commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force because of his mentor. Patton became one of Eisenhower's best tactical field commanders, and Marshall became the Chief of Staff Roosevelt relied on throughout World War II. Each of these leaders, in turn, mentored others.

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Mentorship happens naturally between professionals who impart knowledge and those who seek it. Because of this, mentorship will happen without an Army strategy, as it has for centuries. Even though mentorship is exclusive and selective, the Army cannot prevent it from happening. Mentorship will not happen for everyone, however, and for that reason alone, it should not be part of an Army strategy. Mentorship requires a large commitment of time by both parties and typically lasts four to ten years.<sup>19</sup> The *Army Mentorship Handbook* recommends that mentors have no more than three protégés at a time. Even if all leaders at all levels had three protégés, there would still be a shortage of mentors. The fact that not all leaders seek or welcome such developmental relationships compounds the problem. Protégés should seek out mentors who are highly successful, and mentors should look for junior leaders who are already intrinsically motivated towards self-improvement, a category that includes many, but not all, leaders in the Army.

## **Conclusion**

Mentoring is relatively new as a watchword, but not at all new as a practice. Mentoring frequently begins within a senior-subordinate relationship, extends for many years, often includes a degree of sponsorship or favoritism, and will happen with or without the Army's help. An Army mentorship program only serves to perpetuate confusion about the nature of mentorship and distract from the Army's focus on developing subordinate leaders. The existence of an Army strategy, even a voluntary one, sends a signal to leaders that many will perceive them as failures if they do not participate in such relationships. The Army would be better off as an organization if it ignored mentoring and focused on chain-of-command leader development. The Army will continue to reap the benefits of mentorship, but it should not be in the position of trying to make a selective process seem egalitarian in order to match Army values. **MR**

## NOTES

1. Charles Bagnal, Earl Pence, and Thomas Meriwether, "Leaders as Mentors," *Military Review* (July 1985): 15.
2. *Ibid.*, 18.
3. *Ibid.*, 16.
4. Kenneth Jolemore, "The Mentor: More than a Teacher; More than a Coach," *Military Review* (July 1986): 8.
5. *Ibid.*, 8.
6. *Ibid.*, 16-17.
7. Kathy Kram, *Mentoring at Work: Developmental Relationships in Organizational Life* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, and Company, 1985), 25.
8. U.S. Army Field Manual 22-100, *Army Leadership* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], 31 August 1999), 5-16.
9. U.S. Army Office of the G-1, "Army Mentorship Strategy Information Paper," 2 May 2006, <[www.armyg1.army.mil/hr/mentorship/docs/Legacy.pdf](http://www.armyg1.army.mil/hr/mentorship/docs/Legacy.pdf)> (14 January 2009).
10. George Bush, State of the Union, <[www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/01/20030128-19.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/01/20030128-19.html)> (14 January 2009).
11. Army Mentorship Strategy Information paper.
12. *Army Leadership; Army Regulation 600-100* (Washington, DC: GPO, 8 March 2007), 5-6.
13. U.S. Army Office of the G-1, "Mentorship Brochure," <[www.armyg1.army.mil/hr/mentorship/docs/Mentor%20brochure%203-27-07.pdf](http://www.armyg1.army.mil/hr/mentorship/docs/Mentor%20brochure%203-27-07.pdf)> (26 January 2009).
14. *Ibid.*
15. Bette Washington, "Mentorship: An Army Dilemma," U.S. Army War College (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2002), iii.
16. Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower: Soldier, General of the Army, President-Elect, 1890-1952* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 42.
17. Carlo D'Este, *Patton: A Genius for War* (New York: Harper-Perennial, 1995), 341.
18. Memo from Marshall to G-1, 16 November 1944. Source held in private collection at Ossining Historical Society, Ossining, NY.
19. Bagnal et al., 15.



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