

2

Mentoring

*There comes that mysterious meeting in life when
someone acknowledges who we are and what we can be,
igniting the circuits of our highest potential.*

—Rusty Berkus

*The unselfish effort to bring cheer to others will be the
beginning of a happier life for ourselves.*

—Helen Keller

*We make a living by what we get; we make a life by
what we give.*

—Winston Churchill

On several occasions during my High-Performance Mentoring Workshops, teachers have raised questions about the title of the program. “Why do you call it high-performance mentoring?” “Aren’t all mentors high-performing?” And, “What about the beginning teachers, don’t they have to perform as well if the relationship is going to work?” In response to the first question, I explain that I use the term high-performance mentor to imply that there are qualitatively different levels of mentor performance. The answer to

10 Becoming a High-Performance Mentor

the second question is related to the first. No, unfortunately, not all mentors are high-performing. The answer to the third question, regarding the beginning teachers and their role in the mentoring relationship, is not as easy to answer. In Chapter 3, I will more fully explore the role that commitment plays in a mentoring relationship. For now, one important perspective is simply this. High-performance mentors persist in their efforts to help beginning teachers, even when the beginning teacher does not evidence commitment to the relationship. They recognize that building a mutually satisfying relationship does take two, but they also accept that a host of factors can and often do influence beginning teachers to not fully commit to the mentoring process.

LOW- TO HIGH-PERFORMANCE MENTORING

The performance of mentor teachers working in school-based programs can, and often does, vary across a continuum that ranges from very low to very high. This fact, as disconcerting as it might be, should come as no surprise, for a couple of important reasons. First, human relationships are complex and flourish or fail in diverse contexts of time and space. And this is true even in relationships where both people chose to enter the relationship, which is often not the case in school-based mentoring programs. If any two people endeavoring to build or maintain a relationship fail to find the time and the space to meet and have honest and respectful dialogue, the relationship is likely to be arrested at a relatively low level, or may fail completely. Second, the complexities and competing demands of life and living work against people finding the time and space to build meaningful relationships. These basic facts apply broadly to virtually all human relationships, with obvious implications for the mentoring of beginning teachers.

Mentoring a beginning teacher can be a challenging, rewarding, and mutually satisfying experience that contributes to the personal and professional growth of both the mentor and the novice teacher. This I know to be true. However, this I also

know to be true: Mentoring a beginning teacher can be an effortless, disappointing, and mutually unsatisfying experience that contributes little or nothing to the personal or professional growth of the mentor or the novice teacher. I realize that this is perhaps an odd way to begin a book on becoming a high-performance mentor teacher, yet there is an important point to be made. Mentoring in today's elementary and secondary school environments is a unique enterprise that occurs in diverse contexts with often unpredictable and uneven effects. The problem, stated in a different way, is that a *mentor teacher* might not actually be a mentor. And conversely, a teacher who is not *the mentor teacher* might be the mentor. If you are a classroom teacher or building principal who is even a casual observer of school life, you know what I am talking about.

When working with beginning teachers, as I often do in my role as a university-based teacher educator, I frequently find the opportunity to talk with them about their first year of teaching and their mentoring relationships. I typically begin with a simple probe such as "So, how is it going so far?" When I receive the somewhat predictable "just fine" or "it's going great" I follow with a new prompt. "Okay, now that we have that out of the way, how is it *really* going?" This probe often uncovers a more honest rendering of the struggles that are predictably associated with the first year of practice. As specific problems are revealed, I take the opportunity to ask beginning teachers if their mentors have been helpful in dealing with those problems. I ask this question with no interest in evaluating the performance of individual mentors, but rather to gain insight into how beginning teachers vary in their perceptions of their mentoring relationships. I fully understand that in asking beginning teachers for such perspectives I am not getting the full picture. Certainly, I am not coming at the story from the other important perspective, that of the mentor teacher. Nonetheless, such conversations have consistently reinforced my earlier claim that mentoring relationships vary widely in quality. Consider, for example, the following answers from four beginning teachers.

12 Becoming a High-Performance Mentor

“Mentor? What mentor? I haven’t met mine yet.” By the way, it was mid-November when that conversation took place. Here is another answer I encounter far too often: “I am not sure how it’s going. We haven’t talked for a while.” Or, consider this response. “Not that great. We got off to a rough start and it has been downhill from there.” Now, before you get discouraged, I frequently receive testimonials similar to the following: “It’s been wonderful. She is very accessible and yet gives me space as well. I can’t imagine getting through this year without her help.” The point of sharing such beginning teacher perspectives is not to suggest that only one in four mentoring relationships is successful, but rather to make clear that the quality of such relationships varies widely. The quality of any relationship is largely a function of the commitment that both people have to making the relationship work. Keeping in mind the idea that *it takes two*, let’s take a deeper look at what lay beneath the four beginning teacher comments.

What Mentor?

Colleen was a first-year, third-grade teacher working in a large elementary school in a suburban school district with a newly established entry-year program. Colleen’s mentor, Janice, was in her 27th year of teaching fifth grade. Janice received a phone call from her principal late one August afternoon. “We have a new third-grade teacher and I have to give her a mentor,” the principal explained. “I just wanted to let you know that I sent your name over to the board office. I hope that’s okay. I know you’ll do a great job.” Caught off guard by the call, Janice agreed to the assignment. Thinking about it later that evening, she told her husband that she was having second thoughts. “I’m not sure I’m the right person to be anybody’s mentor right now. I’m having enough trouble getting through the school year with all of the new stuff they keep piling on.” As the school year began, Janice became quickly immersed in her own classroom challenges and failed to introduce herself to Colleen. After a couple of weeks passed, Janice began feeling guilty about not introducing herself and offering help. Colleen,

on the other hand, was not sure what to do. She had connected with Sharon, a veteran teacher on her third-grade team, and was getting lots of great ideas and encouragement as well. Colleen had wondered from the beginning how a fifth-grade teacher could help with her third-grade curriculum, so she was happy to have Sharon's support. With each passing week, it became increasingly uncomfortable for Janice to think about how to start a relationship with Colleen. She frequently observed Colleen talking and laughing with Sharon and eventually concluded that Colleen didn't need her help. Meanwhile, the mentor-mentee list filed at the board office recorded Colleen's and Janice's names, side-by-side.

We Haven't Talked for a While

It was April when I had a chance to sit down and talk with Tony about his first-year experience in teaching geometry and Algebra I in a mid-sized urban high school. After listening to Tony describe his first year of teaching as "a real learning experience," I asked what role his mentor, Steve, had played in that learning. "None, really," he said. "We talked at the beginning of the school year and he helped me find some stuff I needed for my room, but that's been about it." "That's it?" I asked. "Yeah, pretty much. I mean, we pass each other in the hall and he always asks how it's going. I usually just say 'fine' or give him a thumbs-up sign. When we met in August he told me what room he was in and said I should feel free to come down whenever I needed help." "And you haven't taken him up on that offer?" I queried. "Not really, he's really busy with coaching on top of teaching, and I don't want to be a burden. Plus, I kind of like having to figure things out on my own." From Steve's perspective, he had helped Tony get off on the right foot by making sure he had enough desks in his classroom and by helping him grab a better overhead projector from the classroom of a recently retired colleague. He also felt good about his sincere offer to provide additional help. Fortunately, things seemed to be going pretty well because Tony hadn't been down to see him.

14 Becoming a High-Performance Mentor

Off to a Bad Start

According to a beginning teacher named Angie, it was the day before school started when she first met Carmen, her assigned mentor. Angie had just finished decorating her classroom in preparation for welcoming her sixth-grade science students the following day. Angie had hung colorful posters around the room. Some featured inspirational quotes below dramatic pictures of men and women engaged in challenging outdoor activities, such as mountain climbing and whitewater kayaking. Other posters featured famous athletes and singers popular with middle school students. From Angie's perspective, the room looked warm, inviting, and fun. "It was just the kind of atmosphere I always dreamed about creating once I had my own classroom," she explained. Unfortunately, that perspective was not shared by Carmen. After entering the classroom and introducing herself as Angie's mentor, Carmen began examining the room with a concerned look on her face. "You need to get this classroom ready for science instruction. These posters have nothing to do with science or scientists. You need to create a more academic climate or these kids are going to run you out of town." Angie was hurt and struggled to disguise her emotions as Carmen proceeded to inspect the room while asking questions about what Angie planned to do on the first day of school. When Angie described an interest inventory she planned to have her students complete, Carmen suggested Angie start instead with explaining her discipline policy. "Lay the law down early and make it stick if you want to make it in this world." By the time Carmen left the room, Angie was on the verge of tears. When she was gone, the tears came. Carmen, in contrast, drove home feeling good about the sound advice she had provided. She sensed that Angie was not happy with all the suggestions she gave, but was totally confident she would thank her later.

It's Been Wonderful

In contrast to the above scenarios, a first-year teacher named Judy could not have been more positive about the

relationship she had with her mentor. "To be honest, I had some early reservations about having a mentor," Judy began. Having just finished student teaching, I guess I was anxious to be on my own, to have my own room, my own students. I don't know, I guess I just didn't know what to expect from a mentor. Now, I can't imagine what this year would be like without Beth." Beth, a 10-year veteran teacher and experienced mentor, was assigned to work with Judy by the district's mentoring committee, which matched the two based on Judy's job as an intervention specialist and Beth's prior experience as a special education teacher. Beth was currently teaching fourth grade in the same building where Judy had responsibility for servicing students in Grades 1 through 5. Their relationship had gotten off to a good start when Beth gave Judy a call in early August inviting her to a cookout at her house. Judy enjoyed meeting Beth's husband, Jack, and their two young children. After dinner, Jack and the kids left for the mall to see a movie. Beth and Judy sat on the patio and talked into the evening. Driving home to her new apartment later that night, Judy felt a mix of relief and excitement. She was relieved to know that Beth seemed genuinely interested in her success and very respectful of her ideas as well. She was excited because she had truly enjoyed the evening and was looking forward to perhaps having a new friend. Later that same night when Jack returned home, he asked Beth how things went. "It went great. Thanks for taking the kids to the movie. I think we are off to a good start. She is going to be a real asset to our building. She has a tough road ahead, though—I just hope I can help her deal with the potholes." "You know you will. She's lucky to have you," was Jack's reply.

The first three vignettes serve as examples of three basic ways by which a mentor teacher can fail to become a high-performance mentor, the first of which is failing to show up for the job.

Failing to Show Up for the Job

The first way a mentor teacher can fail is to simply not show up for the job. Such individuals typically lack any real

16 Becoming a High-Performance Mentor

commitment to supporting the beginning teacher to whom they have been assigned. In many cases, this phenomenon occurs in school districts with very informal entry-year support programs, or in specific buildings where the school culture places little value on mentoring. It has always intrigued me why a veteran teacher would agree to support a beginning teacher, agree to be a mentor, and then abandon the responsibilities associated with that role. There are of course many factors that might influence this behavior, and these will be discussed in Chapter 3 in an exploration of the role of commitment in high-performance mentoring. In the opening vignette titled "What Mentor?" you will remember that the first-year teacher, Colleen, never met her *formal* mentor Janice, but found support and guidance from her grade-level colleague, Sharon. In the end, it appeared that Janice used this observation to rationalize her decision not to begin the mentoring process. As a cautionary note, I would not want readers to conclude that the real problem in this scenario was the lack of a grade-level match. While teaching the same grade level may have been a factor that helped Colleen and Sharon build rapport, the lack of grade-level match was not instrumental in Janice's failure to commit. Other forces in Janice's personal and professional life seemed to be at work.

Not Staying on the Job

The second way in which veteran teachers can fail to meet the standard of high-performance mentoring is by failing to take the initiatives to build a relationship over time. This phenomenon occurs more frequently than the first problem of not showing up for the job. Many mentor teachers start with good intentions and a vision of how they hope the mentoring relationship will develop, but subsequently fail to take the steps necessary to realize that vision. In contrast, still others start with a very limited conception of their role and the impact they might have on the life of a beginning teacher. Such limited conceptions often become self-fulfilling prophecies. Such was the case in the vignette titled "We Haven't Talked for

a While.” Steve, the mentor in this case, seemed to have a rather narrow conception of his responsibilities as a mentor, perhaps believing that it was up to Tony, the beginning teacher, to assume responsibility for seeking help. When Tony didn’t take that initiative, Steve concluded that everything was going well. Of course, a first year of teaching in which everything goes well is hardly the norm. By the way, this is not to imply that all blame for the failed relationship rests on Steve. As in the first vignette, the beginning teacher contributed to the problem. In this case, Tony liked the autonomy that Steve afforded him because he felt it gave him room to experiment and learn things on his own. The potential problem in this situation was that Steve’s decision to take a laissez-faire approach did not seem to be based on any careful consideration of Tony’s needs, but rather on Steve’s personal belief that it was Tony’s responsibility to seek help.

Showing Up, Staying On, and Failing Anyway

In the case of “Off to a Bad Start” you were introduced to a mentor teacher named Carmen and her strongly held beliefs about what constitute effective middle school practices. Carmen took her mentor assignment quite seriously and stayed committed to the job throughout the school year. The only problem was that Angie hoped and prayed that she would leave her alone. In each of their meetings, Carmen made it clear that Angie would be a success if she would just follow her advice. Carmen rarely if ever asked Angie for her thoughts on a classroom issue or situation. And when she did, the question usually began with an accusatory “why.” Why Carmen felt such a strong need to control Angie’s development is an interesting question for which I have no answer. The only thing I know for sure is that it did not seem to be based on a real consideration of Angie’s classroom performances or professional commitment. My guess is that her controlling approach was meeting some personal need rather than any respect for needs that Angie may have had. Quite to the contrary, Angie, like many beginning teachers, had

18 Becoming a High-Performance Mentor

a strong need to be accepted into the school community and to be respected by her colleagues. She also had an understandable need to express herself and her ideas in the classroom. Unfortunately, Carmen met none of these basic needs and only increased Angie's anxiety and doubt.

QUALITY MENTORING AS QUALITY CONVERSATION

Clearly there are many ways to conceptualize a mentoring relationship. Typically, however, such conceptions tend to focus on the role of the mentor. For example, conceptions such as coach, counselor, political advisor, role model, guide, or resource person all tend to focus on images of the mentor at work. Such images are important and each is worthy of analysis in terms of its implications for mentoring. In addition, when considered collectively, they present a multifaceted portrait of the diverse roles that mentors play in supporting beginning teachers. Recently, however, I have been particularly drawn to a simile for mentoring that captures, from my perspective, the very heart of the process. Consider, if you will, the conception of mentoring as a *good conversation*.

Reflecting back on our vignettes, each could be analyzed from this perspective. In the case of "What Mentor?" there was no conversation because Janice never introduced herself, never initiated the dialogue. In the case of "We Haven't Talked for a While," the conversation got off to a good start when Steve talked with Tony and helped him find resources for his room. Unfortunately, the conversation died quickly as Steve waited for Tony to reengage him, which he never did. Then of course you remember Carmen, the mentor in "Off to a Bad Start." In this case, there was a lot of talk going on, but it failed to meet the test of good conversation, as Angie had little opportunity to share her perspectives and over time came to view Carmen as a toxic force in her life. Finally, in "It's Been Wonderful," we have an image of two people finding the time and space to have a meaningful and respectful conversation

that left both mentor and mentee looking forward to the next opportunity to continue the dialogue.

Several years ago, Brother Raymond Fitz, then President of the University of Dayton, made a speech to the faculty that I found particularly memorable. In that speech, he spoke of the idea of the university as a *conversation*. By this he meant that, at its best, a university is defined by the quality of dialogue between and among professors and students in common pursuit of the answers to life's most compelling questions and humankind's most troubling problems. Similarly, the quality of a mentoring relationship can only be as good as the quality of the conversation that connects the mentor and the beginning teacher. If the conversation is superficial and focused on the trivial, so likely will be the relationship. If, by contrast, the conversation is deep and focused on the meaningful, so likely will be the relationship. A mentoring relationship, at its best, finds mentors and beginning teachers in common pursuit of answers to our profession's most compelling questions and solutions to its most troubling problems. These, of course, are the questions and problems that inevitably focus on student learning and what we as teachers can do to motivate and support that learning. Perhaps the most significant challenge for any mentor teacher is to help beginning teachers join that conversation, which hopefully will sustain and inspire them throughout their teaching lives.

GOOD MENTORING AS GOOD TEACHING

High-performing mentors understand that, in many ways, being the good mentor is not unlike being the good teacher. Both proceed in their daily actions with a heartfelt belief that they can be helpful, that they can make a difference in the life of another. At the same time, they do so with deep understanding of the reality that individuals are ultimately responsible for making changes in their own lives. The most caring mentor cannot help the struggling, beginning teacher who is not ready for change, and not open to the help of another. In

20 Becoming a High-Performance Mentor

the same way, no dedicated teacher can help the struggling student find success in mastering new or difficult material if that student is not at least open to being taught. In other words, the ancient notion that “when the student is ready, the teacher will appear,” holds true. With this knowledge, being the good mentor, being the good teacher, becomes an even nobler enterprise as both continue to take action believing that with caring tenacity they will eventually make the breakthrough that will lead to the ultimate success of the one they seek to help. In other words, both practice what might be best described as acts of applied faith. High-performance mentors have and keep the faith, and do so even when the beginning teachers they are trying to help are less responsive or more defensive than they would like. Mentor teachers operating at lower levels have little tolerance for such behaviors and quickly use them as excuses for lowering the expectations they held for their own performance and for the growth of the beginning teacher.

Another important way in which mentoring and teaching are alike involves the need to respond thoughtfully to the differences in the groups of students one teaches, or to the differences in the beginning teachers one seeks to mentor. Teachers are quick to acknowledge that each new school year is interesting and challenging, in part because they can never accurately predict what type of class or classes they will encounter. The character, dynamic, or personality of different classes varies widely from year to year. Each year, consequently, presents new challenges and opportunities. In similar fashion, veteran mentors understand how each mentoring experience is profoundly affected by the differences they encounter in the beginning teachers they seek to support. Because of this reality, it is difficult, in many respects, to know what kind of teacher or mentor you might need to be in advance of meeting and getting to know the students you will teach, or the new teacher you will mentor. Chapter 4, which focuses on the role of acceptance in a mentoring relationship, will explore multiple frameworks for thinking about the many and varied ways in which beginning teachers are different.

Just as teachers and students in a classroom setting develop different relationships, mentor and beginning teachers develop different relationships as well. One year a mentoring relationship may evolve into a significant friendship. The next year the same mentor might describe the relationship with a new mentee as more professional in nature. It's important to remember that there are many types of relationships that can be helpful to beginning teachers, and mentors consequently need not feel the pressure or necessity of finding a new and perhaps life-long friend. Nonetheless, friendship can be an unexpected gift of the mentoring experience. In contrast, other mentoring relationships provide the gift of a new and respected colleague. And still others require extraordinary efforts on the part of the mentor just to open and maintain the most basic lines of communication.

One thing I have learned is that the relationships between mentors and mentees are complex, idiosyncratic, and very much a function of the personal biographies, needs, interests, and dispositions of both the mentor and the mentee. Consequently, it is important to be cautious of making uninformed judgments about the nature of a mentoring relationship. I remember vividly one of the experiences that led to this insight. I was working with a group of veteran mentors near the end of the school year, and they were reflecting on some of the ways in which they felt their respective relationships had been successful. One of the women, when it was her turn to share, began describing the fact that she phoned her mentee each morning before school. Before she could finish, several other mentors reacted spontaneously with various expressions of surprise and dismay. The teacher who was sharing reacted immediately, challenging her colleagues to explain their reactions. When no one responded to her challenge, she matter-of-factly described how her mentoring relationship had evolved into what she described as a mother-daughter type relationship. As it turned out, the mentor had lost her husband to illness several years earlier, and both her children were living out of state. The mentee, on the other hand, was living in a new community several hundred miles from her

22 Becoming a High-Performance Mentor

family. Not only did they talk each morning before school, they had dinner together every Thursday night, one week at the mentee's apartment, the next week at the mentor's home. The point of the story is simply this: The relationship was working at both a personal and professional level for both people, and that was all that really mattered.

MENTORING AS PATHWAY TO PERSONAL GROWTH

One of the most common statements you are likely to hear regarding the mentoring of beginning teachers is that the mentors can benefit as much from the relationship as the new teachers. In many cases, such a sentiment is supported by the idea that the veteran teacher might acquire a new instructional idea or practice that the novice teacher learned in college. In other cases, the rationale is more focused on the benefit of having the opportunity to associate with an idealistic beginner who has not been hardened or embittered by some of the difficult realities of professional life. Still others speak simply to how the mentoring relationship can cause one to take a fresh perspective on one's own classroom practices, or serve as the stimulus to reflect on one's own early career experiences. Whereas such explanations all make sense and have obvious value to a veteran teacher, I would like to suggest one additional insight that I have been thinking about a lot in recent months. The idea is simply that veteran teachers who truly dedicate themselves to being good mentors may well have the experience of becoming better persons.

In the process of working to become good mentors—and *process* is the right word—veteran teachers will have many opportunities to experiment with, reflect on, and integrate into their daily lives a constellation of dispositions and behaviors that can enrich their own lives and their interaction with others. Take, for example, the challenge of becoming a more accepting and less judgmental person. There is a strong and quite natural tendency for humans to judge others, and this

tendency is often heightened when observing someone perform in an area with which the observer has personal experience, if not expertise. Although clinical assessment may have an important role to play in helping a new teacher develop new technical skills, assessments that are communicated as judgments of inadequacy are almost always counterproductive. Watching a beginning teacher struggle, for example, with behavior management issues can lead a mentor to quickly jump to a number of judgments about the beginning teacher, including her university preparation, her discipline plan, her personal demeanor, her physical appearance, her personality, and the list goes on. Such judgments become particularly insidious when they collect in the mind of the observer and are not recognized for what they are, or for the influences they are likely having on the behavior of the mentor himself. If you believe, as I do, that learning to reserve judgment—or to at least be mindful of when it is beginning to influence one's thoughts and actions—is a habit of mind worth fostering, then you understand what I mean by the claim that being a good mentor can mean being a better person.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

Over the years, I have reviewed a number of models that seek to describe how mentoring relationships develop over time. I have studied such models in the hope of finding a cogent way to help prepare mentors for their challenging and important work. Each of the models I have examined offered a slightly different way of thinking about the stages or phases of a mentoring relationship, and I have gleaned one or more important insights from each. On the following pages, I introduce my own model, based on my earlier claim that the quality of a mentoring relationship can vary from low to high, and that the level any such relationship attains is primarily related to the *nature* and *focus* of the conversations that characterize that relationship. See Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Four Phases of a Mentoring Relationship

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Process</i>		<i>Product</i>
Initiation	Orienting	Introducing	Mentor and mentee meet one another and form initial impressions. The mentor offers, or the mentee requests, assistance in preparing for the early days of the school year. Problem solving is focused on technical and logistical issues, including finding resources or clarifying policies and procedures.
	Accepting		
Exploration	Self-Disclosing	Sharing	Mentor and mentee begin the process of self-disclosure as they conference about the needs, interests, or goals of the mentee. Early impressions are reinforced or revised as each person moves toward or away from accepting the other. Formal and informal agreements are sometimes negotiated.
	Trusting		
Collaboration	Respecting	Appreciating	Mentor and mentee act in a trustworthy manner and openly share their personal thoughts and beliefs about a wide range of personal and professional issues. Both become increasingly transparent in their communications. Mentee believes the mentor intends to be a helpful force.
	Appreciating		
Consolidation	Respecting	Appreciating	Mentor and mentee appreciate each other on a personal and professional level, and over time develop a strong and enduring sense of positive regard and mutual respect. The relationship merges into one of genuine collegiality and consolidated purpose.
	Appreciating		

In an ideal case, a mentoring relationship develops through four major phases, including *initiation*, *exploration*, *collaboration*, and *consolidation*. In other cases, due to a variety of interpersonal and contextual factors, a relationship between a mentor and mentee may arrest in one of the first two phases. In each of the four phases of the relationship, mentors and mentees engage in two basic and somewhat sequential processes that, if successfully engaged, lead to the next phase.

Initiation

The initiation phase of a mentoring relationship consists of two processes, *introduction* and *orientation*. In this first phase, mentors and mentees meet for the first time and begin the relationship-building process. Both parties begin to develop initial impressions of the other. It is not uncommon here for mentees to begin to assess the motives and intentions of the mentor. Similarly, mentors often begin to assess what they perceive to be the mentee's openness to being helped. These initial encounters can range from feeling comfortable to uncomfortable, relaxed to strained, and smooth to awkward. In many cases, these introductions often conclude by focusing on the immediate needs of the mentee. Janice and Colleen, you will remember, never made it to this first level of relationship building because Janice failed to initiate the relationship by introducing herself to Colleen.

Soon after, and sometimes during their first meeting, it is quite common for mentors and mentees to begin focusing on the immediate needs of the mentee, many of which could be classified as orientation needs. For example, mentors often help their mentees find necessary supplies, understand school policies and procedures, or help them in any number of ways prepare for the first days of school. In the best situations, mentoring teams achieve this level before the school year begins, or very early in the school year. Steve helping Tony locate an overhead projector for his classroom would be an example of the kind of help that typically occurs at this level of the relationship.

26 Becoming a High-Performance Mentor

Exploration

In the exploration phase of the mentoring relationship, mentors and mentees engage in the process of learning about one another. This process is accelerated to the extent that they find the time to meet and engage in conversations in which they begin to reveal their personal biographies, including their past experiences, beliefs, dispositions, and behavioral preferences. Essentially, this is the first step in the process of building a trustworthy relationship. Trust is a function of self-disclosure. Self-disclosure occurs when two people have a shared experience and both parties reveal a personal reaction to that experience. Picture a mentor and mentee sitting together at a beginning-of-the-school-year meeting and hearing the principal articulate her goals for the year. After the meeting, the mentor shares with the mentee her belief that the goals are unrealistic. In this case, she has self-disclosed. Next, imagine that on the following day, one of the mentor's colleagues approaches her and says, "So I hear you think the goals are crazy, too." If the mentor had not shared her thoughts with anyone else, she will likely begin to question how trustworthy her mentee is going to be. In this way, and over time, trust between two people is built or shattered. The more personal the self-disclosure, the more value it carries as a matter of trust. Without self-disclosure, trust cannot be established. Some mentor teams never move beyond this level, because one or both of them refuse to engage in the process of self-disclosure, or behave in an untrustworthy manner.

After they have had some initial contact and conversation, the mentoring team faces its first interpersonal crossroad. With their new understandings of each other, will they accept each other in a way that will give their relationship a chance to mature to higher levels? *When* this crossroad is reached depends on many factors, but it is important to note that it is not reached simultaneously. This is important, because if one party begins to send messages of a lack of acceptance, he or she can quickly create reciprocal feelings in the other. This

is likely what happened in the story of Carmen and Angie. When Angie discerned that Carmen was not respectful of her personal ideas about teaching, she began to build a wall of defensiveness. In return, Carmen became increasingly aware of that wall, interpreting it as a sign of Angie's immaturity.

Collaboration

In the collaboration phase of the mentoring relationship, mentors and mentees establish trust and begin the process of genuine sharing and collaboration. Once trust is established in a relationship, mentors and mentees begin to take their conversations to deeper and more personal levels, opening the possibility that meaningful dialogue will ensue. If both people remain trustworthy, they will eventually take greater risks in their conversational exchanges. However, one violation of this trust can quickly and often permanently end the development of the relationship. Oftentimes, the offending party never understands what happened. All this person knows is that something has changed in the way the other person is behaving. The mentor who casually shares with his principal that his mentee is struggling with managing student behavior may never know that the principal referred to that conversation in his evaluation conference with the mentee. All he knows for sure is that something has changed in the relationship.

When we become comfortable with another person or group of persons, we feel free to reveal our true selves. We become more transparent in sharing our thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and interpretations. Gone is the tentativeness that often characterizes interactions and communications with people we do not know or trust to have our best interests at heart. At this level, mentors and mentees feel free to share their thoughts and feelings with one another in much the same way as they might with a trusted colleague or friend. Humor, for example, is used in new ways as both parties become comfortable with their own fallibility. At this level, a beginning teacher, for example, might openly share the story of a lesson gone badly. She does so knowing that her mentor will be

28 Becoming a High-Performance Mentor

able to identify with what happened and enjoy the story as well.

Mentors and mentees who reach the collaboration phase of mentoring have jointly created an interpersonal context in which a mutually satisfying relationship can be built and sustained. For many mentors and mentees, reaching this phase of relationship development will be the final phase they will experience.

Consolidation

Some mentoring relationships will, however, mature to a fourth and final phase. At this level mentors and mentees begin to truly appreciate one another, not only as teachers, but as persons as well. The deeper understanding of one another that comes from successfully moving through the preceding levels of relationship building results in feelings of positive regard. The relationship at this level is often described as being friendly in nature. The mentor and mentee enjoy each other's company and look forward to opportunities for meaningful conversation about professional and personal matters.

At the highest level of relationship building, both mentor and mentee arrive at a place of mutual respect that transcends appreciation. Here, for example, mentees may respect their mentors for a variety of reasons, including the knowledge they possess, the caring support they have provided, or the dedication and professionalism they exhibit in their daily practice. In return, mentors may respect their mentees for their enthusiasm and energy, maturity, openness to feedback, or any number of other reasons. How or whether the mentoring relationship continues will depend on a variety of factors that are all part of the serendipity of life itself. Whether they continue to work in the same school and have ongoing dialogue, end up in different states but stay in touch by phone, or never see each other again, really does not matter. For a period of time, they both found satisfaction in sharing their lives as teachers, one more experienced and one just beginning his or her journey. In the story of the beginning teacher Judy and her mentor Beth

described in the vignette titled “It’s Been Wonderful,” we see an example of a relationship with the potential to evolve to this highest level.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ON MENTORING

Use the following questions to prompt reflection on the content of this chapter and on your current work as a mentor teacher.

- What do you think your beginning teacher would say if I were to ask him or her, “How is it going with your mentor?”
- Did you *show up for the job* of mentoring? If so, how did you do with regard to the following tests:
 - *Intentionality*: Does your beginning teacher sense that you truly intend to be a helpful and therapeutic force in his or her life?
 - *Clarity*: Have you taken the time to speak clearly and specifically with your mentee about the expectations that you hold for yourself as a mentor?
 - *Sincerity*: Does your beginning teacher believe that your communications are honest and well intentioned?
- Have you *stayed on the job* of supporting your beginning teacher? Have you been persistent and tenacious in your efforts? If you are not happy with your answer, what obstacles or setbacks have caused your commitment to slip?
- Have you met the test of time? Are you and your beginning teacher comfortable with the amount of time you are devoting to your relationship?
- If you are *still on the job*, do you believe that your beginning teacher is glad that you are?
- Have you walked your talk with regard to your performance as a mentor teacher? Have you kept your promises? Have you followed through?

30 Becoming a High-Performance Mentor

- If high-performance mentoring is like a quality conversation, what is the quality of the dialogue you are having with your beginning teacher? Consider the following tests of the good conversation:
 - Have your conversations focused on the deep and meaningful issues of teaching and learning? Or have they been limited to the trivial and superficial?
 - Have they been characterized by acceptance and mutual respect?
 - Have they led to shared meaning?
 - Have they strengthened your relationship?
- If high-performance mentoring is like good teaching, how would you compare your efforts in the classroom with your efforts in your mentoring relationship?
- Finally, after reviewing Table 2.1, what phase do you think your mentoring relationship is in? What can you do to move it to the next higher level?