

*Mentoring Adult Learners: A Guide for Educators and Trainers*

Author: Norman Cohen

Book Reflection: Steven Poenitz

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This mentor-mentee relationship model depicted in Cohen's book, reminds me of the assignment (not communicated to me) apparently given to a retired world division president to support, challenge, and enrich me while pastoring in a challenging district some years ago. This gentleman offered numerous tips and valued counsel in his visits to me in my district. I will never forget the sage advice and carefully chosen words offered to me on intentional occasions. There was a pinch of condescension, but the profile of this wizened counselor was engagingly accepted with best of intentions by me.

To the day I still remember him saying, "Bro. Steve, create events around which people can rally." He often would meet me at the conference office or at a pastors' meeting and suggest that we get together to "break bread and share tribal waters." His home was always open and he came to my district often where we would visit potential homes for Adventist education.

The transaction that Cohen explains as mentor-mentee relationship reminds me, albeit sketchily, of my relationship with young pastors that I've had the privilege of serving with. Various events we've shared together in leadership roles, so the preparation of the event, actual event, and de-briefing of the event occurred in both intentional and unintentional planned staff meetings. Sometimes, the jelling of team would occur in a surprise moment as we shared together following a specific learning event.

Oh, how I agree that the trust levels of mentor-mentee must be high before any comments that confront or critique are given by the mentor to the mentee! Timing is absolutely critical for trust to first develop between m & m. From my own personal connections with a senior pastor/intern relationship, I concur with Cohen's indication that the behavior of the mentor is most important in developing the learning climate of the relationship of the m & m.

Cohen makes it distinctly clear that in spite of the early, middle, later, and last phases of the mentoring model there are specific mentoring behaviors, he does offer the flexibility and fluidity that allows for individual growth and progress of the mentee. The 6 behavior functions of growth in the mentor-mentee model intrigue me. Cohen has some very specific results spelled out to accomplish:

1. Relationship emphasis to establish *trust*,
2. Information emphasis to offer tailored *advice*,
3. Facilitative focus to introduce *alternatives*,
4. Confrontive focus to *challenge*,
5. Mentor model to *motivate*,
6. And mentee vision to encourage *initiative*. (p.3)

These 6 functions are described by Cohen as the “complete mentor role” (p.5).

Cohen goes on to distinguish the mentor from the advisor, personnel specialist, and counselor. He further defines the mentor as one who offers “substantial personal investment over an extended time frame.” (p.5) He also speaks to the synergistic blending that occurs between mentor and mentee when the combination has become meaningful between mentor/mentee. Advisors do not have recurring, regular meetings with their students as mentors have with their counterparts—more short-term and definite than developmental and evolving. On page 7 Cohen suggests that counselors and personnel specialists must be careful how much interaction they have with their client; whereas, the mentor is expected to model self-disclosure. The limited time with client by personnel specialist, counselor, or advisor does not allow for full disclosure due to the minimal mutual contact.

On page 9 Cohen explains that time and frequency of meetings are the foundation for trust, information, and facilitation. He further explains that counselors rather than business or government specialists could facilitate the mentor model if they chose to invest more time with their clients. Unless appropriate time is invested, the counselor needs to be very careful with confrontive initiatives. (p.9) Confrontive approaches are dangerous and need to be carefully weighed if parties are strangers, much less, even the relationships that are infrequent.

The “Principles of Adult Mentoring Scales” for post-secondary education as well as business and government are intriguing to me for research in the field of pastoring. I would like to explore the possibility of developing a modified scale for pastoring through the re-working of Cohen’s scale of inventory questions. I found these 55 inventory questions interesting enough to consider a pursuit of developing my own questions and assessing responses from pastors I’ve mentored—the mentees! I’m also thinking of how these I might investigate responses (both from the past and the present) of pastors in the mentoring role right now.

The adult learner and the adult teacher have a fascination for me. I see where I have been less than confrontive in my relationship with mentees. These 6 behavioral functions of the mentor have given me definite fodder for thought, being in this mentoring role right now. Not only have I reflected upon how my mentors and supervisors challenged me, but how they affectively, I believe, showed affirmation and trust in the process of my development as a pastor.

Areas which I wish there had been more attention include vision, goal-setting, risk-taking, strategizing, decision-making initiative, etc. Certainly, I was blessed with mentors who spent time with me in relational areas, but may have needed to press me more with confrontive questions. I must say that various evangelists that I’ve worked with have challenged me in visitation, decision-making initiative, conflict management, etc. So, I’ve been given opportunity to foster firmness and forethought in pastoral ministry.

Right now from the war stories I've heard, I seriously feel the need to pursue this area of mentoring. It stimulates my personal career of ministry and fuels an interest in the area of ministerial collaboration with other pastors.

Cohen's chapter near the end that proposes mentor training and seminars brings another challenge to our church, I believe. We have not always effectively matched mentors and mentees. Again the war stories come to mind of mentors who issue menial tasks to mentees that accomplish no real career progress for the adult learner.

Another aspect of Norman Cohen's document which I appreciated was his challenge to be a life-long learner. Even from this Leadership Module as well as Cohen specifically, I've been encouraged to expand my horizon and portfolio of reading on mentoring and leadership. I've also attended a Billy Graham Training Institute one-day seminar on feeding the pastor's soul. I've attended a workshop in Chattanooga (Temple University) on Bible Works software operation. And the books I've uncovered have been delightful, such as *Anointed to be God's Servants: Lessons from the Life of Paul and His Companions* by Henry and Tom Blackaby.

The press of the time to accomplish this leadership module is stressful in full-time ministry, but the fascination and motivation to enjoy life-long learning is stimulating.

The conclusion of Cohen's book offers significant resource help with his bibliography of references on mentoring (even though they're dated, but the authors are helpful). I stopped by our local Presbyterian college library and was directed helpfully to a new encyclopedia set on leadership, entitled, *Encyclopedia of Leadership* by George Goethals, General Editor; Georgia Sorenson, General Editor; and James MacGregor Burns, Senior Editor. Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA 2004. I found numerous updated articles related to mentoring, coaching, legacy, relational leadership approaches, leadership succession, leadership theories overview, leader-follower relationships, etc. in these 4-5 encyclopedias.

Sometimes the author, Cohen, is a bit taxing in wordiness and his psychological terminology, but the overall material was helpful to give me the broad view of mentoring and the mentee relationship. I found his summary paragraphs at the end of each chapter helpful as well as his Appendix C which succinctly outlined the Mentor Role: Six Behavioral Functions.

I'm sure to refer back to Cohen's material in the future and have chatted with Walt Williams re: mentoring and learned that he has chatted with Cohen. He finds him pleasant and helpful to dialogue on this subject. I've pursued further the web site at the Denver Theological Seminar, understanding from Walt that there's a major mentoring program there. So much more to pursue. It's exciting!

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