

CAREER SPEAK is a six-part series being published throughout 2008 by *The Reservist* in support of a broader Reserve Junior Officer (RJO) Career Management Program initiative. The series discusses successful career strategies and important how-to's in managing your Reserve career. Enlisted members are also encouraged to read this series to gain insight, especially if considering the Selected Reserve Direct Commission program in the future. The first part, entitled, "Are YOU Running Your Career?" was published in Issue 2-08. Part two, published here, addresses many of the characteristics and behaviors necessary for a successful Reserve Junior Officer (RJO) mentoring relationship.

Part 2: A Four-Step Process to Successful Mentoring

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The word "mentor" is defined in the Random House College Dictionary as "a wise and trusted counselor." Some of the key organizational benefits of effective mentoring include: the development of human assets, greater retention and the transfer of tacit knowledge.

On an individual level, those benefits are realized for both the mentee and mentor when they serve in their roles effectively and with true passion.

Surely, you know one or more Senior Reserve Officers (SROs) who has that "special" gift to share and communicate with Reserve Junior Officers (RJOs). Others need some practice and role modeling in the ways to become more effective mentors. For the RJO, or protégé, it is important to make a proper mentor match. Finding compatible working styles, personal characteristics, behaviors and temperaments upfront are keys to a successful mentor equation.

If you are to take on the mentee (protégé) role, you must be ready to invest the time and commitment required for success. Once you have made the commitment to be mentored, you must address the often-touchy subject of how both you and your mentor conduct yourselves as effective partners. You both MUST "walk the talk" together. It is critical that you seriously consider and respect the mentor's time, counsel and special career guidance offered.

"Don't put yourself in the position where you look back 10 years from now and sadly realize, 'If only I had employed mentors to help me develop my career, I would be so much farther along.' Instead, go for it now, and reap the personal and professional benefits of mentoring!"

Step 1:

Gaining Knowledge, Trust and Confidence Early On

A successful protégé sets the standards for "victory" high. You make yourself accessible to your mentor; in other words, you are ready and willing to invest the time and energy required. You plan out and orchestrate self-development exercises by steering your mentor onto important and germane career goals you have set for yourself. Volunteering yourself for new projects and career enhancing teams often opens up the door for establishing new skills, competencies, talents and being sought-out for challenging jobs. Other vital characteristics to look for in selecting a compatible mentor are:

- Respected reserve senior officer within your own organization.
- Has good people-development skills — that is, he or she is a great listener.
- Expresses empathy for RJOs and has a track record as an effective goal setter.
- Facilitates counseling and nurturing throughout the process.
- Understands how you, the protégé, learns best; through discussion, experience and/or training.
- Has knowledge/access/desire to use available online mentoring support tools (Coast Guard web-assisted mentoring program).
- Establishes and maintains total trust, respect, and confidentiality in all written and/or oral communications.
- Avoids using their own performance as a yardstick to measure your growth.

- Understands the necessary balance between your work/career/family.

This is a long list, and it is doubtful that you will ever find a single person who embodies all these characteristics as the perfect mentor. Yet many reserve senior officers fit this general description and have been ideal mentors in the past.

Step 2:

Establishing Goals and Applying Online Tools, Strategies and Measurements for Success

Protégés look to mentors as role models of sustained high performance and leadership success. You should learn as much, if not more, from observing your mentor than from what your mentor tells you. Successful mentors initially shorten the distance between mentor and protégé, that is, they are skilled at putting you inside the larger picture of reserve career management. Ask your mentor to explain what worked and what didn't as he/she climbed their own reserve career ladder. Seek mutual agreement on all goals, expectations and timelines.

Both protégé and mentor are strongly encouraged to begin their bonding discussions by registering online on the web-based open mentoring site, <http://learning.uscg.mil.mentoring/>. This valuable tool is a simple self-paced workbook resource that will help you through the process of selecting the appropriate mentor to fit your needs. Additionally, it focuses on the intangible elements of mentoring relationships, those factors that make up the personal, human pieces of mentoring. The Coast Guard web-assisted mentoring program will provide you insight into the pros and cons of various career options and paths. It can also serve as a support tool in the transition to a new role or location. The tool will also provide you with constructive and positive feedback on professional and personal development areas. Finally it will allow you to accelerate training and development. Sign on today and create your own protégé profile. Mentors have their own Coast Guard web-assisted mentoring program workbook section giving the mentor a renewed enthusiasm for their role as an expert in developing and supporting career goals and aspirations.

Step 3:

Measuring Success From Year to Year

The protégé should establish a top ten list of initiatives to accomplish in any one year with joint quarterly progress review sessions. Separate out learning initiatives from tactical initiatives. Learning means reading, studying and applying key educational opportunities. Tactical means applying and practicing the use of newly acquired skills and competencies. Setting completion timelines and milestones are critical. State exactly what is being measured. If it is acquiring new job related competencies, skills, talents and knowledge, give yourself enough time to reach a basic level of proficiency and expertise. Have your mentor test and validate you competency level with exercises designed to confirm your acquired level of expertise.

Step 4:

Market and Promote Your New Protégé Career Marketing Plan

You are your own career marketing guru. Never be passive

about marketing your new skills, experiences, competencies, leadership capabilities and accomplishments. Make them part of your personnel record. Ask your mentor about the value of adding a "communications" letter to your personnel record highlighting any new competencies, skills, or job-related abilities/experiences you have mastered. Promotion boards use every little tidbit of information about you and your new abilities gained from the mentoring or training experience. After all, if not you, who is going to spread the good word about the progress you have made toward becoming "fully/best qualified?"

In Summary

Don't put yourself in the position where you look back 10 years from now and sadly realize, "If only I had employed mentors to help me develop my career, I would be so much farther along." Instead, go for it now, and reap the personal and professional benefits of mentoring!

Semper Paratus!

About the Author: *Captain Price is the Chief, Reserve Personnel Management Division within the Coast Guard Personnel Command. As Division Chief, he executes delivery of centralized human resource administrative services for 8,100 Selected Reservists (SELRES), 2,000 Individual Ready Reservists (IRR) and a 3,100-member Standby Reserve force. His service in the Coast Guard Selected Reserve began in 1975 and he was selected an RPA in 1983.*

Helpful Hints

Here are some things to keep in mind for both the mentor and mentee:

- The "boss" should never be a mentor.
- Long distance relationships are complicated, stressful and impersonal but sometimes necessary for both parties. Early bonding and trust helps close the distance.
- Select a mentor that understands the essential nuances of gender, race and organizational culture.
- More than one mentor is ok. You may need a generalist career mentor and a second mentor for acquiring a specific competency.