

MENTORS AND MENTORING

Health Care Workers Hope to Find Integrity in Their Work, Organizations, and Leaders

At lunch the other day, a man I know happened to say how fortunate he felt to be on the board of a certain health care organization. When I asked him why, he mentioned the board's chairperson. My friend said the chairperson was a man who lived life with integrity, passion, and a hunger for justice. Although the two had never used the word in their conversations, the chairperson had—in quiet but profound ways—*mentored* my friend for many years.

I increasingly run into people—from business, health care, education, and various types of ministry—who say they wish they could meet somebody who would act as a mentor to them. According to the Canadian Oxford dictionary, a mentor "is an experienced and trusted adviser or guide."¹ Those two words, *experienced* and *trusted*, speak volumes. No one goes to school to learn how to be a mentor. Instead, one *becomes* a mentor because of the quality of his or her life—a quality involving trust, inner exploration, and vulnerability. In my friend's case, the mentoring he receives from the board chairperson occurs through association, not by intent. The chairperson would probably be greatly surprised to hear that his life and manner of being have influenced not only my friend but many others as well.

THE STORY OF IVO

As I reflect upon mentors in my own life and in the lives of others, I recall certain common characteristics. My earliest mentor was a fellow high school teacher and Holy Cross brother named Ivo. He was able to awaken a potential that lived deep within me, although I myself was ignorant of it. Through his insights, deeds, and commitment, he challenged me to go deeper into my life, to keep developing and growing.

Although Ivo and I never talked about this

relationship, we both knew it existed. He pushed and challenged me in ways I never would have permitted from another person. Why did I let him do it? I sensed in Ivo not only the ability to awaken my inner potential as a person but also an insistence that I make my journey in life entirely my own.

Ivo did not want a "copycat" version of himself. Nor did I want to be a copycat. For, although he was a great man in some ways, he also had his flaws. I thus learned from him not only who I wanted to become, but also who I did *not* want to become. Ivo's flaws, which were all too visible, were often his undoing. Even so, as my mentor he helped open up my hidden potential, helped me to find my way, and reminded me of the dangers involved in living the unexamined life. And, 25 years after his death, his power to mentor continues. It continues because I know he trusted life and trusted himself, both of which I continually I need to remind myself to do.

Two years after Ivo's untimely death, when I was serving as the Holy Cross brothers' vocation director, I was invited to speak at a school where we had both once taught. There I encountered a group of seniors whom I had known earlier as freshmen. As it turned out, they did not want to talk about becoming Holy Cross brothers. They wanted to talk about Ivo and the impact he had made on their lives. In their brief association with him, they had felt recognized and valued. And, in him, they had seen someone as vulnerable and flawed as they were. What Ivo had done was give them hope for their lives.

FEAR OF "LARGENESS"

These days mentoring is often used interchangeably in business circles with the word "coaching." But I believe they mean different things. Mentoring happens through association with an

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experienced and trusted person; coaching, on the other hand, can be learned in any one of a variety of skills programs. Mentoring is about awakening the soul to its fullest potential; coaching usually involves teaching people to use a specific skill set so that they can handle a specific challenge.

Some years ago, when I was involved as a teacher in a sabbatical program at the Gradu-

ate Theological Union in Berkeley, CA, the participants asked me to teach them a series of skill sets that would help them in particular situations. I balked at that request. I was prepared, I told them, to help people understand the images and stories that shaped their lives. And I could help them understand their responses to both internal and external events. But I was not prepared to teach skills.

The other program participants and I compromised. We hired another person to teach skills—certainly an important component of both ministry and life—and I focused my attention on my own specialty. Needless to say, teaching skills is easier than helping people discover the inner stories that shape their worldviews.

James Hollis, a Jungian analyst, writes, "What blocks us in living our inner truth is fear—fear of loneliness, fear of rejection and most of all fear of largeness."² Although we are all familiar with fears of loneliness and rejection, the idea that one might have a fear of "largeness" may seem novel. In Hollis's view, people are "afraid to move from the confining powers of fate into the invitations of our destiny, afraid to step into the largeness of our calling to be who we were meant to be."³

In thinking about mentoring, I find Hollis's notion to be a powerful one. As I travel around visiting health care and other organizations, Hollis's words speak to me loudly and clearly. Our organizations, it seems to me, often contain a tremendous amount of fear of all three types: fear of loneliness, fear of rejection, and fear of largeness.

I would argue that the primary role of mentors today is to demonstrate, through the quality of their lives and their leadership, an authenticity that flows from being comfortable with themselves. The French speak of an ability to "live within one's skin." This, I think, is the ability a

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mentor needs most. But what does it mean in actual practice?

As we consider the last few years in Catholic health care, we might be tempted to say with the poet W. B. Yeats, "The center cannot hold."⁴ Our organizations have often become the captives of faddish, flavor-of-the-month ideologies, in the process losing touch with the beliefs on which they were founded. If we who

worked in such organizations happened to challenge those fleeting ideologies, we often wound up feeling lonely and rejected. Ideology is tyrannical. It leaves little room for soul, creativity, individuality, and trust in the power of one's own experience and intuition. Indeed, ideology can shrink the soul and paralyze the spirit. Fear, not love, then dominates the workplace.

Fear of largeness keeps us from taking the risks involved in becoming the people God calls on us to be. I increasingly meet people in Catholic health care who are overwhelmed by statistical reports and other paperwork and generally feel overextended. Although we in the ministry like to say that we "honor the body, mind, and soul," do we really? Is that a lived reality or only a slogan?

AN UNMENTORED GENERATION?

Many people intimately familiar with the story of Catholic health care are leaving our organizations because of frustration and burnout. In a meeting I recently attended, Ontario mission leaders voiced special concern about the lack of mentors in their organizations. At such meetings, I repeatedly hear the question: Who will mentor the next generation of health care providers and leaders? The question is serious and demands urgent attention.

People still come to work in faith-based organizations in the hope of living out their deeper calling there. But, in doing so, they often find themselves in what is essentially a *business* culture—one in which profits, acquisition, and money are the main indicators of success—and they feel torn between work, on one hand, and God's call, on the other. It is this split—this sense that the "center" is not holding in our faith-based organizations—that, I suspect, causes our hunger for mentors, for experienced, trusted people who might again awaken the spirit in us.

In Catholic health care, we spend a good deal of money on skill-development programs, often with success. But I sense a hunger to reconnect to the depths of our calling as healers of body, mind, and soul. Unfortunately, we also have a deep fear of doing the *inner work* necessary before one can perform "work that is good for the soul," and this fear can paralyze us. Growth always requires letting go of something: an image, an attitude, a way of doing or viewing things. The work that will change us asks us to let go of our fear of largeness. But doing that is difficult and we often resist it.

"BE THE CHANGE YOU WISH TO SEE"

Gandhi once said, "Be the change you wish to see in the world."⁵ If we want organizations in which "healing of the body, soul, and mind" is more than a slogan, we need to take seriously both our inner and outer lives.

Creating such organizations must begin with leaders. My experience tells me that, when it comes to setting the tone, the most important person in any organization is the CEO/president. Top leaders are mentors, whether they want to be or not. And, as leaders, they either open up the culture to one of largeness, marked by candor, integrity, and inner growth, or they keep it focused on fear and loneliness. I would argue that, for leaders today, Gandhi's words are the great challenge. If we in Catholic health care want faith-based organizations bearing a distinctive culture rooted in healing, we need to model such an organization. Doing that will require us to endure a certain loneliness, however; if we create such organizations, we may not mirror the corporate culture around us.

Today's hunger for mentors represents dissatisfaction with the superficial. When I ask people in health care circles about their mentors, the words I hear most often are "integrity" and "passion." The quality we call wholeness, when glimpsed in a mentor, enables others to intuit their own potential. When a leader in palliative care died recently, her eulogists referred not just to the wonderful care she provided the dying but also to her zest for life and her integrity. Something in the way she lived her life helped others to live with greater congruency and hope.

Mentors, as I have noted, emerge from lived experience, not training programs. Most seem to have the following characteristics:

- They have a good sense of themselves and are not afraid of self-knowledge. They are willing to do the necessary inner work, to grapple with their "demons" in order to live with greater integrity.
- They do work that is good for their souls. They place themselves in situations in which the work they perform gives meaning and purpose to their life. Meaning in life, not financial concerns,

is primary in their lives.

- They usually have been mentored themselves, in both conscious and unconscious ways. As a result, they have learned to value their experience and intuitions.

- They do not offer themselves as mentors in the marketplace. Mentoring is not a billable commodity to them. It is an exchange between people involving mind, body, and soul.

- They are aware of their limitations and flaws. They understand that an unexamined life is not worth living.

- They value the inner life as much as the outer one. They understand that balance—although often difficult to maintain—is the key to mentoring.

- They reveal the path of transformation we are all called to walk in order to continue to nurture the spark of the divine living within our souls. Through the events of daily life, mentors point the way of knowledge, love, and service to God and other people.

I recently stopped by a hospital to see a physician friend. I found him talking to another visitor, a doctor from Latin America. Later, the Latin American physician and I went to get a cup of coffee and he told me how impressed he was with my friend. "It's not just the wonderful work he does," the visitor said. "It's the *person*. He moves something deep inside me." The Latin American doctor was right. My friend lives from his heart and that makes all the difference.

To be effective mentors, people must live from both their hearts and heads and be unafraid to admit it. My friend the physician recently gave the keynote presentation at a conference on palliative care. He finished by saying that caregivers must first do their inner work before trying to work with the dying. He was not just being clever. He was being himself. And, at that moment, he mentored the entire audience. In his willingness to speak openly of what makes sense in both his inner and outer life, my friend was trusting in the power of his lived experience. And we audience members knew it. □

NOTES

1. Canadian Oxford Dictionary, Katherine Barber, ed., Oxford University Press, Oxford, England, 1999, p. 906.
2. James Hollis, *The Archetypal Imagination*, Texas A&M University Press, College Station, TX, 2000, p. 104.
3. Hollis.
4. W. B. Yeats, "The Second Coming," *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, revised 2nd ed., Richard J. Finneran, ed., Scribner, 1996, p. 187.
5. Quoted in C. Michael Thompson, *The Congruent Life*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2000, p. 151.

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