



Advice for **Successful Mentoring Relationships**

Six Fellows of ARMA International recognize their mentors, share what they have learned about mentoring, and give advice for those interested in entering a mentoring relationship.

April Dmytrenko, CRM, FAI

Mentoring – what comes to mind when you think of the concept? Ideally, it elicits recollections of a personal experience in which a mentor invested in you, providing guidance in support of your professional or personal path. Or, maybe you were the mentor and are reflecting on the individual who successfully responded to your constructive advice.

The Evolution of Mentoring

Interestingly, mentoring dates to ancient Greek times; the word mentor was inspired by a character in Homer’s *Odyssey* who provided guidance to another. Mentoring continued to evolve in the forms of gurus and apprenticeships. Fast forward to the twentieth century when it blossomed into a way to support workplace equity as part of career mentorship programs.

Today it is a strategic, mainstream approach in the corporate environment for “moving up the ladder” and having opportunities that otherwise would not have presented themselves in fast-tracking knowledge, networking, and building confidence. Mentoring is truly an investment, and its long-term benefits can be life changing.

The traditional mentoring relationship is still alive and well – that is, a relationship in which a more experienced and knowledgeable person mentors a less experienced and knowledgeable person. It is a trusting, one-

on-one relationship-based exchange, typically over some period of time.

In a business environment the traditional mentoring relationship exists within an industry, professional association, company, or work-process. The right mentors can provide guidance on:

- Trends and changing practices
- New strategies and initiatives
- Company values, history, products, and leadership
- Career and skill set development

Today, there are also mentoring types that have evolved from the traditional model, and they make for an exciting way to tap into amazing talents anywhere in the world. Some may blur the “mentoring line,” but the results can be professionally enriching and career- and life-changing.

The following chart highlights three evolving types of mentoring. These and other types have emerged, in part, as a result of the Internet, social media, remote working environments, the expansion of global organizations, and the recognition of the value of diversity. Each is well suited to today’s dynamic business environment.

Fellows’ Mentoring Advice

Fellows of ARMA International (FAI) have myriad mentoring experiences, both as mentees that have been guided and as mentors that have cultivated our profes-

Three Types of Mentoring

Mentoring Type	Overview
Group Mentoring	<p>This approach has a regular meeting schedule and features multiple mentors in a group setting, such as peer, team, or other facilitated group. It is typically structured by the organization or an oversight individual, with identified goals, roles, and responsibilities to ensure success.</p> <p>Its value is in how it offers a wide range of perspectives within a similar group focus, thereby supporting an enriched knowledge base for multiple mentees. It further promotes the development of a large group of talent when there are limited mentor resources. It can also benefit the group itself by strengthening the sense of collaboration and team spirit.</p>
Social Media Mentoring	<p>Mentoring by way of social media can support a variety of short-term and long-term development needs. A short-term example might be project-focused, while a long-term example might focus more on professional development. The mentoring is effected through such online means as blogs, social sites, and virtual meeting venues.</p> <p>The approach offers access to a global network of diverse perspectives, expertise, and just-in-time ideas. It puts the responsibility on the mentee to drive the mentoring, but this in itself can serve as a developmental tool.</p>
Circle Mentoring	<p>Similar to group mentoring, circle mentoring has numerous mentees and an organizer or designated mentor, and the meetings are regularly scheduled. Members of the circle can be peers, but they tend to come from varying levels and types of knowledge and experience. All members take turns in serving as the mentor and mentee, and the individuals define their own topics to discuss.</p> <p>Circle mentoring provides value because mentees are exposed to a broader, more diverse knowledge base to learn from. Further, the circle acts like a trusted sounding board for mentee questions.</p>

sion. Following are some of their stories – all of which demonstrate the profound and lasting effects.



Become a Leader

Fred V. Diers, CRM, FAI #9

Leadership is the cornerstone of mentoring, whether being inspired by a colleague, teacher, or boss or inspiring others in achieving greatness through example and commitment. Records management has been the foundation of my professional career. Whether it is called information governance or records and information management, without effective leadership both professionally or voluntarily, our profession would not exist today. I remember:

- Bertha Carpenter, CRM, who showed me that records management was a career, not a [job as a] glorified file clerk
- Artel Ricks, CRM, former ARMA president and assistant archivist of the United States, who showed me what a leader in the profession could attain
- Bill Benedon, CRM, FAI, whose commitment to ARMA and the profession never wavered and who taught me what a leader in our association could accomplish

These are just a few of my mentors who demonstrated strong leadership skills that not only moved our profession forward, but ensured its sustainability. We are inspired by those leaders and mentors that have given their wisdom and insight to be the records and information governance leaders of today and tomorrow.

A leader, as one of my mentors once told me, is not the person who has a list of credits in his or her obituary, but one who shares experiences, perseveres, and consistently contributes, and leads the profession. That is my legacy that I wish to leave with those I have had the fortune to mentor.



Participate at All Levels

Juanita Skillman, CRM, FAI #10

I have found in my professional life there have been three types of mentors who have helped and influenced me: individuals, groups, and organizations. Early on, way back when I first learned there was such a thing as records management, I was fortunate enough to have a boss who not only knew what it was, but insisted I be a part of it. Judi Harvey was an officer in ARMA at the international level and one of the original FAIs, who provided training, support, and encouragement for me to become a Certified Records Manager (CRM). She not only insisted I join ARMA, but that I become active in our local chapter.

Chapters were our lifelines before the Internet, and the Orange County Chapter of ARMA, and later the Greater Los Angeles Chapter became the group mentors

that I could go to with any questions, problems, new technologies, and vendor questions. There was always someone who knew the answer, had done it before, or knew who to go to find out what I needed to know.

I was so fortunate to know people like [fellow FAIs] Bill Benedon, Nyoakee Salway, and Preston Shimer, who were always ready with help and advice. Through them I became active in ARMA International, and the Institute of Certified Records Managers, finding the resources through people like Diane Carlisle [long-time ARMA International staff member and current director of professional development] and the backing I needed to advance in my career. I am thankful for mentors who became and remain friends, like [fellow FAIs] April Dmytrenko and David McDermott. We have traveled a long way together.



Get Out of Your Comfort Zone

Marti Fischer, CRM, FAI #28

Gail Pennix truly was a “mentor for all seasons.” She and I entered the records management profession around the same time, back in the early 1980s. Maybe it was because she was a couple of years older or more motivated than I. More likely it was because she was Gail. In any event, she advanced rapidly in the profession and was very active in what was then the only ARMA chapter in the Bay Area. She soon earned her CRM designation. Then she began to mentor her fellow ARMA chapter members, including me, encouraging us all to apply and sit for the CRM exam. It was as a result of her mentoring and support that I sat for, and subsequently passed, the exam.

Several years later, Gail again used her mentoring skills to encourage me to apply for membership in the Company of Fellows. But most of all, Gail was my best friend and my life mentor. She supported me through good times and bad (I tried to do the same for her). Gail was an excellent skier and I was her junior ski buddy. She was relentless in her mentoring of my skiing efforts. Her gentle nudging moved me past my physical comfort zone, in the same way that she moved me past my professional comfort zone.

Gail was the perfect embodiment of a mentor, not just to me, but to so many people whose paths crossed hers in her too short life. I strive to emulate her.



Desire to Help – And Be Helped

Wendy Shade, FAI #34

Mentoring means different things to each of us, and I was reminded of that twice recently.

When asked by an employee where I received training, I shared how fortunate I was to have worked under the leadership of someone with an extraordinary business mind. For more than 10 years I

found myself to be the “mentee,” absorbing every bit of wisdom I possibly could. He didn’t share this with me because he’d made a commitment to “mentor” me, but rather because he wanted me to grow.

The second reminder came when a past employee asked to meet. To my surprise, she wanted to thank me for the mentoring I had given her years ago. I was very flattered, but frankly had never thought of it as mentoring, but rather saw her as a talented individual who I wanted to help succeed. My belief in regards to mentorship is that it’s not a label that simply describes one action. It’s so many things, but at its core is a desire to help and be helped . . . a desire to speak honestly and be willing to accept honesty . . . the ability to walk in someone’s shoes (which of course means removing your own first), and, most important, the ability to not only hear, but listen! If the terms “mentor” or “mentee” had been used in these scenarios, I might have gotten hung up on trying to make them fit a specific description, when in reality it’s what occurred naturally.



Notice the Potential of Those Around You

Judy Sitton, IGP, CRM FAI #58

Records management found me before I knew it was a profession. Four decades later, I am still smitten with this fascinating and challenging occupation. LoVaca Gathering Company was my first job in records management. My boss, Jim Moore, was a past president of the Houston Chapter of ARMA. He spotted me working as a temporary in a department across the hall from the engineering file room he managed and offered me a job. Immediately he introduced me to ARMA and began teaching me how to become a records and information management (RIM) professional. I never imagined how that happenstance opportunity, coupled with the dedication of that one person, would change my life.

I was also fortunate to train with Frances Fuller – champion of the Paperwork Reduction Act – who

in later years became Frances Chartier. She was the corporate records manager for Coastal Corporation, the parent company of LoVaca at the time. LoVaca spun off from Coastal Corporation and became Valero Energy.

I learned as much as I could from these amazing mentors, as well as from an excellent records management course taught by Ann Bennick, CRM, who sponsored me for the CRM exam in the 1980s and later asked me to co-author *Managing Active Business Records* with her. My whole career has been built on this strong foundation, and I have done my best to continue the legacy.

The Mentee’s Responsibilities

The right mentor is only half of what is needed for a successful relationship and experience. The other half of the “success equation” is the equally important role and responsibility the mentee plays. Following are important responsibilities the mentees must be prepared to take on:

- Identifying their long-term and short-term expectations when seeking a mentor
- Recognizing if they have the right mentors and knowing when it is time to change (hint: change if a mentor is only complimentary)
- Being an active, thoughtful listener
- Being open and honest in accepting counsel and direction
- Acting on advice, constructive feedback, needed change
- Driving the relationship, rather than being passive
- Appreciating those investing their time in you

Take the Challenge: Give Back

Consider this article to be a challenge for you to give back by way of mentoring. And, remember, no one is too old to be a mentee; we are all looking to improve. The world is filled with great mentors with great quotes. I especially like this one from filmmaker Steven Spielberg: “The delicate balance of mentoring someone is not creating them in your own image, but giving them the opportunity to create themselves.” **E**



About the Author: April Dmytrenko, CRM, FAI, is a recognized thought leader in information governance and compliance, a C-level strategist as both a practitioner and consultant, and a successful change agent. The speaker and author was inducted into ARMA International’s Company of Fellows in 1993, served as the group’s chair for many years, and is currently serving as a contributing editor for *Information Management* magazine. Dmytrenko can be contacted at April2018SAI@gmail.com.

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