

The Military Cyber Professionals Association Mentoring Program

by Edward B. Rockower, Ph.D.

This is dedicated to Sam Abraham, my “Mentor” at General Dynamics.

When I was asked to write something about “Mentoring” for our Magazine I immediately agreed because I not only have experience as a Mentor to others, but also as a Mentee. From both of those roles I feel I’ve benefited greatly. In addition, I helped develop the Mentoring Program for Operations Analysts at Lockheed Martin and thus had exposure to many of the resources for other Mentoring programs inside, and outside, of that corporation. Before writing this article I began a review and synthesis of my materials on mentoring. I immediately remembered how important this topic is for our Association, hence should NOT be a “fire and forget” discussion of mentoring that might only provide the intellectual ‘bones’ of the subject. Rather, it should begin an ongoing venue for providing the “flesh” of our own “Mentoring Program”.

**“You manage things; you lead people.”
—Rear Admiral Grace Hopper**

When Mr. Honda was asked by a reporter “what is success made of?”, he replied “a lot of failure”. Continuing with that important life lesson, don’t the resulting hard-won lessons cry out to be transmitted to other, less experienced people? Mentors “mine” their experience and sift through the “ore” to find the nuggets that give meaning to their failures and successes.

Certainly, one of the more important functions of a “Professional Association” such as ours is to form a “Community” that not only supports its members in being successful in their careers, but also fosters finding, expressing, and passing along the important technologies, career lessons, and values of people engaged in a worthy activity to serve not just themselves and each other, but our larger community of fellow citizens.



The author (3d from the left) on “team MCPA” led by its founder (2nd from the right) at *Start-Up Weekend, Monterey Bay 2013*.

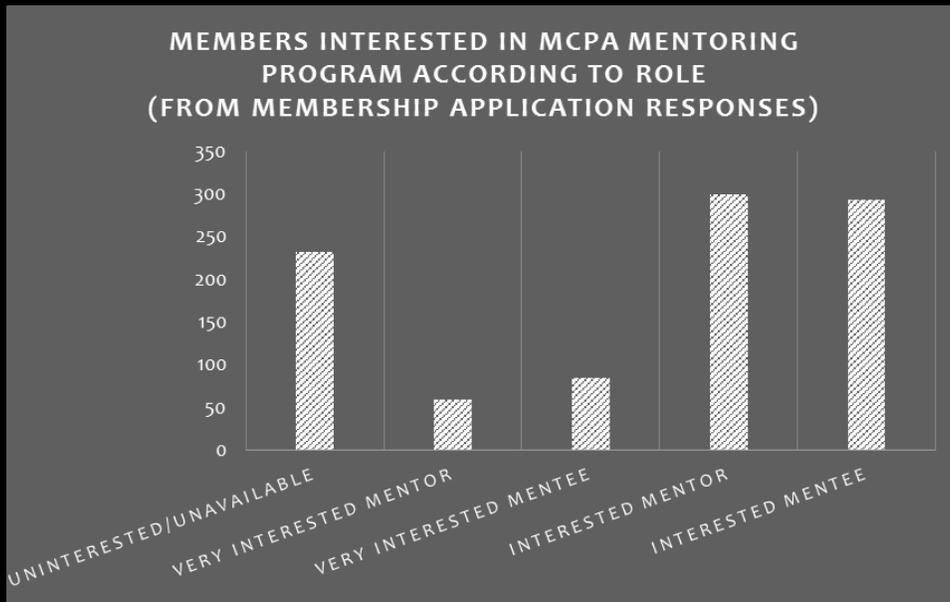


The F-16A from General Dynamics at Ft. Worth. Image courtesy of f-16.net.

There's a famous saying "when the student is ready the teacher will appear". You also see that paraphrased as "when the teacher is ready, the student will appear". To me, this emphasizes the symbiotic relationship of the mentor with the mentee.

My first Mentor, Sam Abraham: when I completed my Ph.D. in Physics I was hired into the Operations Research Department of General Dynamics, Fort Worth to work on the F-16 Program. Sam Abraham was assigned as my "Mentor". I cannot emphasize enough how many lessons he taught me. So many times over the years I've followed his advice, or echoed it to others. Most times I'm subliminally aware that I'm "channeling" Sam, having taken to heart the many engineering and life lessons he imparted to me, such as:

- There are 2 kinds of people, "technique oriented" and "problem oriented". You need to be the "problem oriented" type.
- You're like a little boy with a new hammer. Every problem looks like a nail.
- Sam taught me how to make effective slide presentations. As a result, I was selected to make presentations to the F-16 Program Office.



Some very interesting data provided by the MCPA.

I've sometimes felt a bit guilty about not adequately expressing to him my gratitude for his "taking the edge off of my ignorance and naiveté". However, I feel better when I pass along to others what I learned from Sam. In fact, by verbalizing those lessons to others I'm also helping to clarify and make more coherent my own inner landscape of understanding, just as when I teach a course. Sometimes it truly does feel like I learn at least as much as my students (and mentees).

I read somewhere that the favorite readings of Great People was the biographies of other Great People. How much more powerful to actually discuss careers, life, and lessons-learned with other admirable people who've "been there, done that" and are willing to share that with us. I have often said that "one of the most powerful forces in the universe is positive, supportive attention". "Attention" may be one of the most important elements of the mentoring relationship. In my own

experience, I've found that if there is at least one other person in the world showing some interest in my ideas and work, that that is a powerful motivating influence! In school, the student gives attention to the teacher; in mentoring, the mentor also gives attention to the mentee.

For forthcoming issues of this magazine I'd like to solicit your personal experiences as a Mentor or Mentee. What worked, what didn't, how you became connected, and any of the most important lessons learned and benefits resulting from that connection. Please consider this your invitation to an ongoing discussion! In the meantime, we'll be setting up a system to match Mentors and Mentees. Please email your interest to mentoring@milcyber.org, specifying your background and whether you want to be a mentor or mentee.



About the Author

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