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## PIBC MENTORSHIP GUIDE

Two members—a mentor and a mentee—share their different experiences with mentorship

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# Mentees and Mentors Unite!

What to Expect as a Candidate Member

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s new Candidate members, we know that having a Mentor is a required part of becoming a Certified member of Provincial and Territorial Institutes and Associations (PTIAs) and as a Registered Professional Planner. Time spent with a Mentor should be a valuable experience, and choosing a Mentor is an important decision to make that requires that you know yourself. Take your time to determine if you have a chosen a good counterpart and ensure that your mentorship is a powerful experience. In addition to checking the necessary boxes, the mentorship is also an opportunity to provide both participants with professional prosperity. What do I mean by this? I believe that our exchanges have the potential to enrich our professional lives not only with the

knowledge and experience that a Mentor can offer, but a friendship and camaraderie that can last for a lifetime. There is more to this experience than lessons.

Prior to launching into my new planning career, I had been a consultant for a decade and consider myself a mid-career professional. As graduates establishing our careers, we have prior experiences that have played a part in shaping our views and interests. As Mentees, the tricky part is to find a Mentor who recognizes our experiences and will provide guidance to complement our professional philosophy. The focus can then be on filling the gaps in knowledge and discussing the competencies that make individuals exceptional planners. For the rest of my days, I will hear Pam Shaw's voice saying, "Make good choices", and it couldn't be truer! I was lucky enough to have a Mentor introduced to me during my studies in Community Planning who is an extraordinary match and continues to be a gift to my professional development. I am challenged by her professionally, occasionally we get to

laugh together, and we knit our brows over the immense challenges we face as planners in the world today.

There are a few things to keep in mind about the regulatory and required part of being a Mentee. We hold in our hands a lot of the responsibility for building the relationship and making it count. As a Mentee, we have to keep in touch and be proactive about the meetings and conversations we schedule, and then keep it up! In addition to meetings, we have to also keep exceptional records of the conversations we have, and what kind of follow-up took place. In fact, this is just good business practice and it's applicable to most professional experiences. And always ask a lot of questions as a Mentee. After all, our curiosity helps to nourish this professional relationship and, in part, is a motivation for Mentors to participate.

I've learned how to frame my questions to my Mentor well, because it's important to drawing out the best experiences and knowledge. Lessons arise from discussions that relate back to the required competencies and CIP Code of Professional Conduct, and

the Professional Standards Board provides a helpful list of topics to use if it's needed. However, I found that the best questions are formed from our real-world experiences. For example, my Mentor and I have discussed the perceived and actual differences between municipal and consulting planners and how

our association's professional standards are applied. And as a former consultant, I know that from an ethical perspective, there is no difference between the two. As planners, we all work to the same Code and ethical standards.

Outside of the regulatory aspect of mentorship, a significant task is to choose a

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Mentor who has similar professional interests and who has expectations of the experience that align with our own. For example, my needs as a mid-career professional are very different than a new planner who hasn't dipped a toe into the professional world yet. Of course, it's important that we find someone who will provide insight into ethical topics, politics, and procedures, but equally important is a Mentor who becomes an ally and who is sincerely invested in our professional success. The mutual trust and respect that is built in the Mentor / Mentee relationship is an invaluable example of how to relate to our colleagues on a day-to-day basis. In addition, I've been fortunate to find individuals in my new career who act as my informal mentors, who fuel my passion for planning and design. These are colleagues who are willing to share their experiences, and who have purposely and actively enriched my first years as a planner and urban designer.

The requirements and roles of the Mentor and Mentee are clearly provided to us as Student members and then as Candidate members in our PTIA. What we make of the experience outside of what is required, is up to us. On the road to registration as a Registered Professional Planner, there is so much to learn. Fortunately, our professional associations provide us with the obligation and the potential for Mentees and Mentors to become better together. ■

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# Mentoring New Planners in BC and the Yukon

by **Ed Grifone** MCIP, RPP, M.A.  
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hen I was asked to prepare an article about mentoring our new and young planners in BC and the Yukon, I immediately went to the literature, numerous websites and the Professional Standards Board for Planning in Canada. However, some of the best information was brought forward from my own experience as both a mentee and mentor over my 40-year career. The steep learning curve we have all endured in our earliest days out of university was usually made easier by our peers and supervisors, and in some cases those who provided us with advice from outside the work place. Similarly, many of us have taken on mentoring roles as our careers have progressed, and young planners have become our responsibility to train and nurture. Over my four decades of planning

practice I have grown to respect the role and value of my mentors. Now, with some credible experience and wisdom, I have enjoyed taking on the role as mentor to new colleagues in the office, students, and other practicing professionals pursuing careers in planning and urban design.

My youngest days in my planning career were set in the Regional District of East Kootenay in the mid/late 1970s. It was an extremely busy planning department with turbulent times related to the introduction of the ALR/ALC, several new coal mines, new sawmills, ski resorts, first-time OCPs and zoning bylaws and a constant barrage of development applications. As a result, one of the first Environment and Land Use Committee (ELUC) imposed development moratoriums opened more planning and political wounds than it provided answers. It was certainly a steep learning curve as I was given considerable responsibility during those first three years. The operational or day-to-day aspects of my position were

learned quickly with experienced technical and administrative staff at my side. However, challenges came with trying to understand Board politics, public sentiments, developer and corporate agendas, and the process of keeping many initiatives flowing. For example, a proposal for a large gravel pit in the Windermere Valley drew a standing-room-only audience to my first public hearing. To make their point in opposition of the development, the objectors threw rocks (OK, perhaps pebbles) at the front table panel. Shortly after that scare, while conducting door-to-door surveys for a new OCP I was threatened by a homeowner. Those and other similar events caused me to wonder if I had chosen the right career path. Those first few years were challenging but intriguing. I asked a lot of questions, and my colleagues, as busy as they were, provided time and attention. All four of these great mentors, some not much older than myself, went on to be directors of large planning departments, city administrators and respected consultants. Their personalities and willingness to share encouraged me to stay in touch and reap the benefits of their knowledge and expertise well into their careers. Their enthusiasm and friendship never faltered. They led by example and were respected role models. Over the years, I have tried to emulate them as a mentor. I receive the greatest joy in passing on practical and philosophical advice to students and young professionals whenever I can or whenever they ask. Admittedly, I will try to make a difference in a short visit or call from outside the office, for an enquiring student or for professional colleagues that are aspiring to build their career in planning and urban design.

The main reason to create more awareness about mentorship is that it has now become a requirement for Candidate members seeking to get their Registered Professional Planner (RPP) designation. The Professional Standards Board (PSB) stipulates a formal requirement of a one-year mentorship from time of application by a Candidate member. Essentially, it is acknowledged that young and upcoming graduates will benefit from senior and experienced professionals through learning, encouraging their growth, sharing knowledge and ideas, ongoing guidance, and ultimately assisting them in their transition from Candidate to RPP status.

To make the program successful, both the mentor and Candidate member must participate. The PSB's Guide for Candidate

Members and Mentors (available on its website) states that the "responsibility for identifying and securing a mentor rests with the Candidate member." In many cases, a mentor (more experienced and skilled professional) may be readily available in the new place of employment. However, there will be instances where the Candidate member does not have access to an immediate mentor, as a result of being located in a more remote community or wanting to source a mentor with a particular expertise or experience. It is also understood that a new/young graduate that has not been exposed to the professional planning work force may require assistance to make connections. Nevertheless, the mentorship program is not intended for work placement. A common worry of RPPs when asked to be a mentor is that they will be asked by the Candidate to help them find a planning job. The various accredited university planning programs in BC (e.g. UBC, UNBC, SFU and VIU) are creating their own mentorship programs as part of their degree requirements. Recent graduates are encouraged to keep in touch with such mentors, as they often can act in a similar capacity when the graduate applies for Candidate membership.

### MENTORS

The following guidelines are intended to help Certified members understand what their role and expectations are:

- Talk about and address expectations together early in the mentorship relationship
- Offer collegial advice on a regular basis
- Be a trusted advisor and confidante
- Be a positive role model
- Take personal interest in a mentoring relationship
- Be enthusiastic about the field of interest to the Candidate
- Value on-going learning and growth in the field
- Try to be available (at agreed upon times throughout the year)
- Offer career wisdom
- Be a good listener

### MENTEE

The success of the mentorship relationship depends on the commitment of the mentee to the program, and includes the following:

- As the Candidate pursuing their RPP status, the onus is on you to ensure the

mentorship requirements are met and the necessary paperwork is completed and submitted to the PSB.

- Think commitment, not lip service. You are the one that wants to learn and will benefit.
- Show up for the relationship. Your mentor wants to help, but the responsibility to participate remains with you.
- Give back and get more. Communication must be a two-way dialogue.
- Keep expectations realistic and professional; your mentor is not a psychologist.
- It's risky, but it's healthy. Do not be afraid to admit lack of knowledge, fears and professional anxiety.
- Be yourself; communicate in a sincere and genuine manner.
- Don't be afraid of your mentor's silence. You may have much more under control than you think. Look forward to your next meeting with your mentor when you may have more to discuss.
- "Pay it forward," offer what you have learned to others.

In closing, I reference some inspiring and thoughtful words from *The Professional Planning Manual for CIP* (2002) produced by my former colleague, David Witty, PhD, FCIP, RPP where he quoted Maurice Strong, the former Director General to the 1992 UN Environmental Summit, in his keynote address to the APA/CIP 1995 Conference in Toronto. Strong noted that urban centres, which will continue to attract the majority of the earth's human population, provide the most significant opportunities to ameliorate global warming, social disparity and ecological crisis. The battle for sustainability will clearly be won and lost in urban centres. Strong went on to identify how planners would take centre stage when he stated "planning has become one of the most challenging and most necessary pursuits in the modern era."

As planners we are now more than ever, influencing political leaders, developers, investors, community organizations and other professionals involved in building cities and in evolving neighbourhoods. Our roles as mentors, as brief as it may be, will be critical to providing a foundation for the new generation of planners, who will be tasked with creating the liveable communities of the future. ■