

VIEWPOINT

Mentoring: Is it Nice to do or is it a Duty?

By Rebecca Winston

I've been wondering, as I look at my busy schedule or try to sort through the never ending list of e-mails or even try to decide what phone messages to return, whether mentoring the succeeding generations is a nice thing to do or a duty that we have in this profession we call project management. I am asked often how I got to where I am; how I managed to become a consultant with a relatively stable list of clients; how I became involved in my professional society, or so involved in my professional society; or how I decided to do the type of project management I do.

The other day when I was feeling ever so tired, looking at several prescription bottles after a night in the emergency room, I received a phone call from a younger project manager who is just starting out and who was wondering about professional direction. He had just suffered a bit of a set back. He wanted to meet for dinner and to talk. I wanted to crawl in bed. I asked myself the question: "is it nice to do or a duty?".

I went to dinner. I don't believe I every really answered the question fully. I felt as if I must meet this young professional for dinner because I somehow owed it to the PM profession, and to myself.

We discussed career paths. We discussed focus. We discussed giving up "spare time" for writing papers and seeking to understand trends and best practices. I found myself offering to write a paper with him and to design career paths. The enthusiasm of his beginning overcame my illness. The issue of "nice or duty?" did not even enter into it at that point.

The bottom line for me that night was not--that it was nice to do or that it was a duty. It truly became the right thing to do. I discovered that I was reinvesting in my enthusiasm for my own career by investing in his career. Mentoring is two sided. Yes, it is sharing from the cup of knowledge that we have learned through the field of professional experience. But it is also an experience of recharging those "I want to be involved" batteries. I again wanted to make a difference in the profession.

The career is not just mine but again it is ours. We are project managers who share and grow with one another and better one another. I believe that mentoring is part of being a professional. Mentoring is to be a wise and trusted counselor to others during our professional lives. I think it is part of why we can claim we are professionals.



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Ms. Rebecca Winston, Esq., JD, PMI Fellow, is a former Chair of the board of the Project Management Institute (PMI®). An experienced expert on the subject of project management (PM) in the fields of research & development (R&D), energy, environmental restoration and national security, she is well known throughout the United States and globally as a leader in the PM professional world. Rebecca has over 25 years of experience in program and project management, primarily on programs funded by the US government.

She is a graduate of the University of Nebraska's College of Law, Juris Doctorate (1980), in Lincoln, Nebraska and has a Bachelor's of Science (BS) degree in Education from Nebraska Wesleyan University and a Master's Degree in Biology from Iowa State University in the USA. She is a licensed attorney in the states of Iowa and Nebraska, USA. Active in PMI since 1993, Rebecca Winston helped pioneer PMI's Specific Interest Groups (SIGs) in the nineties, including the Project Earth and Government SIGs, and was a founder and first co-chair of the Women in Project Management SIG. She served two terms on the PMI board of directors as director at large, Secretary Treasurer, Vice Chair (for two years), and Chair (2002). She was elected a PMI Fellow in 2005. She is also a member of the American Bar Association and the Association of Female Executives in the United States. Ms. Winston currently serves as a consultant to organizations such as the National Nuclear Security Administration (USA), U.S. Department of Energy and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security on topics ranging from Program and Project Management to project reviews, risk management and vulnerability assessments. She has extensive recent PM experience in the areas of national defense and security, and has worked closely with local, regional and national officials, including Congress and the Pentagon. She lives in Idaho Falls, Idaho, USA and can be contacted at Rebecca.Winston@associates.dhs.gov