

## Mentoring a Millennial

By

Amanda Lee Gardner and Laura Mae Gardner

October, 2014

Eight months ago we began a mentoring relationship; one of us is in the Builder generation, the other is a young Millennial. So there are two generations between us (Boomers and Gen Xers). How did this new relationship work? What made it work? Why did we decide to do this? What have the benefits been? What has been difficult? How did we begin?

The suggestion that we engage in a mentoring relationship did not have its roots in a deficit. Amanda is a bright, godly, focused young woman, happy with herself and moving along God's path for her. Laura Mae was busily engaged in her life and did not need something more to do. The motivating factor was that this could be a growth effort on the part of both of us.

Amanda was at a juncture in her life in that she had been asked to move out of state and take on a heavy role nannyng four small children along with maintaining her college courses on line at night. She was doing something very new to her (live in another state, on a farm, where it was cold, and it was winter! Experiencing this change meant that she would be thinking new thoughts and having new experiences. Mentoring can be a process tool, turning these experiences into new levels of awareness and growth.

We examined the literature, defining mentoring, identifying the qualities necessary for a good relationship on the part of both mentor and protogee, hammering out a structure and time frame, procedures and goals. And we had a plan.

How do these disparate generations see each other typically? Viewed from the perspective of older generations, millennials are self-absorbed, naïve, demanding

without earning, pampered, superficial, arrogant, eager to learn but disregarding the lessons of history or of past generations.

Millennials see themselves as ‘The Greatest Generation’ in terms of their potential and their numbers. Born between 1980 and 2002 they number around 80 million. They are very innovative and entrepreneurial, they are hopeful and optimistic, eager for leadership, energetic, ambitious, and thrive on change. They have several nicknames—Gen Y, GenNext, the Google Generation, the Echo Generation, and the Tech Generation. They are impatient with old ideas and old ways, and hungry for newness.

Millennials view older generations as being out of date, judgmental, close-minded, intolerant, critical, and ignorant, especially of technology.

The older generation of Christians views itself as experienced in life, Biblically literate and sound, wise, thrifty, loyal, discerning, stable, reliable, demonstrating integrity in life and word.

Builders’ values include loyalty, steadfastness, appreciation for our country, integrity, stability, sacrifice.

Millennials’ values include social networks and wide relationships (but superficial ones), speed, constant change and stimulation, use of technology to do everything, ambition, self development, authenticity.

When these two generations are contrasted in their historical setting, thinking, values, etc., the question arises: what difference has Christ made in both generations? The Scriptures tell us that ‘we are new creatures in Christ (II Cor 5:17), our minds should be renewed (Romans 12:2 and Col 3:10), our goal should be to follow Christ, and follow those who are following Christ (I Cor 11:1). The Scriptures also are replete with injunctions about togetherness, mutual understanding and upbuilding. Ideally, a Builder and a Millennial will not display the same characteristics and values as a person living without Christ. When an older person comes to Christ and a millennial comes to Christ, one is likely to see grounds for mutual understanding that make a cross-generational mentoring relationship quite possible and even fruitful.

Obviously, there must be a great deal of humility and understanding to bring these two disparate generations together in a productive relationship such as mentoring. Amanda and Laura Mae committed themselves to humbly building this unusual relationship across four generations.

Mentoring is a relational mechanism for intergenerational learning—“shining a light in the dark” are words used by Dr. Steve Hoke. Our definition of mentoring is “Mentoring is an intentional, relational growth experience between disparate individuals.”

Qualities necessary to make a mentoring relationship work include:

<u>Mentor:</u>	<u>Protogee:</u>
Humility	Commitment to grow, learn
Mutuality; reciprocity	Health and energy
High ego strength	High ego strength
Communication skills	diligence
Vulnerability	Vulnerability
Self confidence, assurance	Willing to be taught
Willing to risk	Willing to risk
Commitment to lifelong learning	Willing to be accountable
Models growth	
Knows how to plan growth	Responsiveness
Honest desire to make growth happen	Honest desire to grow in healthy way
Has something to give	Realistic expectations
Can set healthy boundaries	Respects boundaries
Accurate self awareness	Humility
Kindness, tact	

**Values:** together Amanda and Laura Mae identified seven values that must be present: humility, reciprocity, integrity, intentionality, respect, appreciation, vulnerability. These values must be adhered to by both mentor and protogee.

We identified four cautions:

Both mentor and protogee must avoid stereotyping the other. Stereotypes are seldom accurate. Another caution is not to see the protogee as a ‘project.’ He or she is a person, not a project. And top-down authority expressed in lecturing, non-listening, scolding—these will kill a mentoring relationship. In addition there is positive self-attribution coupled with negative other attribution. I.e., if I do well on an exam, it is because I am a good student and studied hard. If you do well, most likely it is because the exam was easy. In other words, the ‘flaw’ is to see ourselves positively and the other person negatively.

Getting started means discussing such matters as time of day or week, length of time, setting goals, identifying the mechanisms that will be used.

We decided together to meet once a week on Tuesday evening for about an hour. This arrangement was flexible. Sometimes the meeting lasted longer, sometimes we missed a week, sometimes we had an agenda, sometimes we simply caught up on each other’s activities. Always though, we prayed together.

The mechanisms used include questions, working together, reading a book and discussing it, identifying and discussing articles or topics, using an Idea Book, and a Journal, and real case studies.

We began by gathering as much information as possible—i.e., Myers Briggs Type Inventory, Strengths Finders, spiritual gifts, and then by doing a SWOT analysis (Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, tools).

The general mentoring questions might include:

- Why did you do that?
- Why do you do what you do?
- How did you know what to do?
- What options are there?

- Why did you choose that one?
- What do you regret?
- When you blew it, what did you do next?
- What would you do differently the next time?

Some of the topics we explored together are: (The purpose of an agenda is to be intentional, so that the time together does not turn into a venting session, or merely visiting. It is purposeful.)

1. Contrasts in Proverbs—wise and foolish people. How does a fool think? Feel? Plan? Make decisions? How does a wise person do these things? How can I choose wise people as friends? Am I a wise person or becoming one? How do I know? How wise should a ten year old, a 15 year old, a 20 year old be? Of the three kinds of fool (simple or naïve, scoffer or mocker, and a wicked person who repudiates God) which am I most likely to emulate? What areas of life might I be naïve in?
2. Are academic excellence and faith mutually exclusive? Or, can I be a Christian and a highly skilled, thinking professional in any field?
3. How does one deal with dissonance—two different realities, both legitimate?
4. How can one maintain focus, yet discriminate among competing voices and ideas?
5. What is success in ministry and how should it be defined and pursued?
6. What kind of friends do I need and what kind do I not need?
7. How can I keep from making that one big mistake? (A big mistake is one that will affect the rest of your life. For example, working too late, and driving home tired, hitting a fire hydrant or parking meter and damaging your vehicle—this doesn't define you or affect your life. But drinking too much, driving home, hitting and killing a small child—you'll pay for that emotionally for the rest of your life. Or marrying the wrong person, or promiscuous sex and giving birth to a child out of wedlock—that will stay with you the rest of your life. These are big mistakes.)

8. Learning from mistakes. We all make mistakes—buying a car without advice because we like the color, and finding out too late that the car needs major costly repairs. Not keeping good records and forgetting to pay a bill is likely to impact your credit record. Do you learn from it? Do I?
9. What about discernment? What is it? How do we get it? What is the opposite of discernment? How can we develop discernment? How is it related to the wisdom of Proverbs?
10. Some millennials need awareness of and training in life management skills such as budgeting and money management, communication, relational skills, developing emotional intelligence, time management, home safety and cleanliness, vehicle costs including maintenance, insurance and repair, and much more. What life management skills do I lack?

Self assessment is essential for both mentor and protogee.

At one point in my career, as I was ending my role as International Vice President For Personnel, (Laura Mae speaking) I was asked for advice for leaders like myself. My advice was two-fold: Practice stringent self-assessment and welcome feedback. Without accurate self awareness based on robust self analysis and continuous feedback, and the prompting of the Holy Spirit, the likelihood that we will change and intentionally grow and develop maturity and wisdom is small.

This paper focuses primarily on growth in the protogee, therefore we may think this self assessment is necessary only for the protogee. However, both mentor and protogee must be committed to growth. How can a Builder be encouraged to assess himself or herself, to examine his or her attitudes and become more tolerant, to invest time and interest in a millennial and build a relationship with that person? How are we growing and changing? What have we learned lately? Are we willing to learn from a millennial? (They are probably miles ahead of us with regard to use of technology—are we willing to ask them for help?)

Based on this conviction—that both parties need to examine themselves, we suggest the following mechanisms a protogee might use for self assessment: personality type (Myers-Briggs Type Inventory), spiritual gifts, life experiences, SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, tools), and the Strength Finders test. The DISC instrument has also been helpful to many. The impact

awareness article is helpful to examining the degree of emotional intelligence one displays.

In addition we suggest soliciting feedback, engaging in accountability relationships and mentoring relationships. If married, it is helpful to involve one's spouse in this process from time to time.

Additionally, the function of God's Word must be active in our lives in response to regular time in the Scriptures (remember that it is the living and active discerner of the thoughts and intents of our hearts, Hebrews 4:12).

Our supervisor would also probably be happy to be involved in our growth, at least to the extent of giving us professional feedback.

To begin a mentoring program one needs a model and a plan. The model will hopefully be the mentor. The pattern can be a growth plan. Following is Amanda's growth plan, which could be adapted to serve anyone.

It belongs to the protogee. It must fit that person. It must reflect his or her convictions and desires and dreams. So what is presented here is merely a suggested outline.

### GROWTH PLAN

What kind of person (man/woman) do I want to be?

\_\_\_\_\_

What will help me in that process?\_\_\_\_\_

What will hinder me?\_\_\_\_\_

My mission statement

\_\_\_\_\_

Strengths I want to enhance

\_\_\_\_\_

Means for doing that

\_\_\_\_\_

Weaknesses I want to eliminate or control

---

Resources I will rely on

---

Specifically, I want to grow...

Physically \_\_\_\_\_

Spiritually

---

Intellectually

---

Emotionally

---

Relationally

---

Accountability: I will be accountable to

---

Prayer Partner: I will ask \_\_\_\_\_ to pray with me about these matters.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Dated:

---

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Harvard Business Essentials: Coaching and Mentoring. 2004. Harvard BusinessSchool Publishing Corporation.



- Baker, Philip. 1998. *Wisdom: The Forgotten Factor of Success*. South Perth, Western Australia: Authentic Lifestyle.
- Bradberry, Travis and Jean Greaves. 2009. *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*. Talent Smart: San Diego, CA.
- Cordeiro, Wayne. 2007. *The Divine Mentor*. Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers.
- Hughes, Bryn. 2003. *Discipling, Coaching, Mentoring*. Eastbourne, UK: Kingsway Publications.
- Lancaster, Lynne C. and David Stillman. 2010. *The M-Factor: How the Millennial Generation is Rocking the Workplace*. New York: Harper Collins.
- McAllister, Dawson. *Saving the Millennial Generation*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.
- Petroski, Henry. 2006. *Success Through Failure: the paradox of design*. Princeton, New Jersey: The Princeton University Press.
- Rath, Tom. 2007. *Strengths Finder 2.0*. New York, NY: Gallup Press.
- Roper, David. 2008. *A Heart of Wisdom: Reflections on Maturity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers.
- Smith, Christian with Patricia Snell. 2009. *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Smith, Christian et al. 2011. *Lost in Transition: the dark side of emerging Adulthood*. New York: Oxford University Press.

