

LIONS MENTORING – PASSING THE TORCH

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The dictionary defines *mentor* as “a wise, loyal adviser” and “teacher or coach.” The word mentor first appeared in the Greek poet Homer’s *The Odyssey*. Mentor was the trusted friend of King Odysseus and tutor of his son Telemachus who was heir to the throne. Since those ancient times, the word mentoring has come to epitomize relationships that provide for the exchange of information and knowledge, and which are built on a foundation of trust, truth and compassion.

It’s probably easy for you to recall someone who has had a significant impact on your life. A teacher who gave you skills to solve mathematical problems or to write an essay – a coach who corrected your swimming stroke or cheered when you finished a race and inspired your lifelong love of sport. It is this type of relationship that is the essence of mentoring. The term mentoring also encompasses the idea of apprenticeship, strengthened by a relationship between teacher and student which provides a mutually beneficial relationship where the teacher, *mentor*, and the student, *protégé*, can learn, grow and reach their potential together.

For Lions, however, mentoring is taking on a new, updated meaning. In the association’s newly established mentoring program, the Lion member who is a *mentor*, is defined as a counselor, guide and catalyst who interacts directly on an individual basis with a “*protégé*” Lion, who may be a new Lion or one who wants to develop their leadership skills, and helps this protégé Lion to learn skills, gain knowledge and grow in competency as a leader.

Experience tells us that quality leaders are a direct product of quality recruitment followed by quality training. Most management trainers agree that the very best leaders, the top 1%, are those individuals that have been mentored and trained to reach their fullest potential. These are the ones who are often referred to as the 5% who will rise to the top in any organization. These are also the ones who have been nurtured, had their individual skills developed and have been given opportunities to perform and succeed.

It would be surprising if mentoring is not already taking place on an informal basis within Lions clubs today. Members with common goals or interests are likely to make contacts and form friendships that allow for an exchange of information and support. The Lions Mentoring Program formalizes this process, outlines and illuminates the steps of successful mentoring, offers ideas and ways to build on these already significant relationships and rewards participants. The results will be seen in stronger relationships and in stronger clubs. History confirms that associations, organizations, and businesses that take the step of establishing mentoring programs benefit by developing members who are prepared – just as Telemachus was trained – to become effective leaders.

Since the Mentoring Lion and the Protégé Lion have an enormous impact on the resulting partnership, each mentoring partnership will evolve in its own unique way. However, there are some common characteristics to be found in each successful partnership. Chief among the characteristics for a successful and satisfying mentor-protégé relationship is the dedication and enthusiasm of each partner. In addition, the following have been found to be essential for success:

- **Mutual Respect:** Both parties in a mentoring partnership must show respect for themselves and for their partner. The protégé lion should acknowledge and accept the knowledge and abilities the mentoring Lion possess from years of experience. Simultaneously, the mentoring Lion must recognize and appreciate the protégé Lion’s desire to develop his or her commitment to the association.

- **Trust:** Trust is essential between the mentoring Lion and the protégé Lion. Those working together with the benefit of open and honest communication, reliability, consistency and a sense of loyalty will experience the greatest degree of success.
- **Relationship Building:** The mentoring process is a journey of knowledge and growth, and as such, there may be some obstacles along the way. In order to minimize these obstacles, both the mentoring Lion and the protégé Lion must communicate clearly and frequently to develop a firm, reliable comprehension of goals and expectations. As problems arise, they should be addressed immediately and handled appropriately. The partnership's decision-making should be thoughtfully considered before proceeding.
- **Realistic Self-Assessment:** Realistic assessment of abilities and expectations of the relationship are other keys to success in a mentoring connection. The mentoring Lion should encourage the protégé Lion to make an honest analysis of his or her current capabilities, the amount of time and energy he or she expects the mentoring Lion to commit to the partnership, and what the protégé must contribute to further his or her own development. In turn, the mentoring Lion should provide honest, constructive feedback to the protégé's analysis. At the conclusion of this step, both the mentor and the protégé will have a firm understanding of the boundaries and requirements of the relationship.
- **Time:** A successful mentoring partnership requires time and attention. It is essential to schedule a regular, uninterrupted block of time for meetings, conversations, or e-mails. It is also an excellent idea for both partners to "check in" informally between scheduled meetings or conversations.

The Lions Mentoring Program is divided into four levels, each composed of specific goals that need to be reached within a defined time. At each level, the protégé Lion is challenged to increase his or her knowledge, level of commitment, and leadership skills under the guidance of an appropriate, experienced, Mentoring Lion. To direct and begin this process there is a Lions Mentoring Guide, which is a comprehensive publication that details the concepts and objectives of the Lions Mentoring Program. This helpful guide explains the principles of mentoring and applies them to the Lions Mentoring Program. It is the essential reference for this dynamic program. Each Level has its own Planner that outlines the specific goals, timeframes, and strategies for successfully completing the program. The Planners include forms for the mentor and protégé to plot their steps for that level and report the results to International Headquarters.

- **Level One** is about *responsibility*. Since leadership is about influencing others, the responsibility level will be devoted to developing an understanding of who the Lions are, their vision of humanitarian service, traditions, organizational structure, and the responsibility of being a Lion member. This phase will focus on a thorough and proper orientation of the new member, and should be completed in the first three months of membership. This orientation conveys the association's history to participating Lions along with knowledge about programs and services offered by the association. Normally, at this level, the protégé's sponsor takes on the role of mentoring Lion. If this is not possible, the club president appoints a designated mentor.
- **Level Two** is about *relationships*. The requirements at this mentoring phase are to develop relationships and organizational skills in preparation for leadership at the club level. The emphasis is on teamwork. During this level, the protégé Lion and mentoring Lion will accomplish the following goals of the Proud Lion/Proud Sponsor program:

1. Attend a club board meeting.
2. Participate in a club service or fund-raising activity.
3. Introduce a new prospective member to the club.
4. Make a visit to another club and secure a visitation slip.
5. Attend a zone or region meeting; district, multiple district or international convention and report back to the club.

Here, too, the protégé's sponsor may take on the role of mentoring. If the sponsor is unable to act as mentor, the club president appoints a Mentoring Lion who, ideally, has been a Proud Sponsor awardee and who holds a Membership Key.

- Level Three is about *results*. The third level of mentoring will concentrate on leader-manager skills. Failure to produce results in completing a task usually is because individuals do not know what they are supposed to do, they don't know how to do the assigned task, or they don't know why they should do the task. This phase will demonstrate not only what and how, but why. The results level will focus on community projects and programs that provide useful and needed humanitarian service. Completion of Level Three will provide a stepping-stone for a Regional Lions Leadership Institute and for accepting a leadership role within the club. The emphasis is upon developing accountability for results.

Again, the sponsor may fill the role of Mentoring Lion, if qualified. The sponsor, or assigned mentor, must meet the requirements of Level One and Two plus have had the added experience of successfully chaired a club committee, held a club office, or completed the Certified Guiding Lion program. If the sponsor does not act as mentor, the club president appoints the designated Mentoring Lion with advice from the Club Membership Chair. The mentor and the protégé determine the rate of completion. Goal attainment for Level Three may require one to three years.

- Level Four is about *replication*. The final level concentrates on the protégé Lion's role in developing others. This phase of mentoring is based on a commitment to develop leaders who will provide ongoing growth for the association and for humanitarian service. Level Four ensures long-range growth and can serve as a basis for leadership within the district structure and for participation in the Senior Lions Leadership Institute by the protégé Lion. This phase can be augmented with additional training at district-level and at area Forums. The emphasis at this level is to develop and expose key leaders to growth opportunities and advanced leadership positions.

In this phase, the protégé Lion may seek a mentor from within his or her own club, or from another club within the member's zone if necessary. The mentoring Lion in this case, in addition to meeting the qualifications for prior Levels, should have been a guiding Lion or a Rebuilding Lion, hold an advanced Membership Key or an Extension Award, and have been a club president and a district office as well. Also the Mentoring Lion must have attended a Constitutional Area Leadership Forum, a Lions Leadership Institute or an international convention. The mentor and protégé determine completion rate. Goal attainment for Level Four may require two to four years.

As indicated in each Level Planner, records are kept and submitted for completion of each Level. After Level One is completed, verbal recognition is made at a club meeting. Upon completion of Level Two, both the protégé and mentoring lion are recognized with lapel pins. The protégé receives a Proud Lion lapel pin and the mentor receives the Proud Sponsor lapel pin at a proper occasion. These lapel pins will be forwarded from the Membership Operations Department upon club request. At Level Three and Four the protégé's club must sign a completion form to the Membership Operations Department. Upon receipt of completion, the information will be entered in to the Lions Mentoring Program database, and personalized certificates of completion will be sent to each participant. In

addition, upon completion of Level Four the protégé and mentor will receive a beautiful lapel pin signifying the completion this advanced Level.

The Lions Mentoring Program is open to everyone on a voluntary basis. Normally, a new member would request involvement in the program and would progress through each level in sequential order (Level One, Level Two, etc.). Existing members, who have been Lions for a year or more, may begin mentoring at Level Three providing they are able to claim equivalent knowledge and experience as specified for Level One (“Responsibility”) and Level Two (“Relationships”). All mentoring material may be obtained from the Membership Operations Department at Lions Clubs International by writing to: 300 W. 22nd Street, Oak Brook, IL 60523-8842; or by calling telephone number (630) 571-5466, ext. 355.

“All of the certificates of recognition we receive in life will fade. The monuments we build will crumble. The trophies will corrode. But what we do for others will make a lasting impact on our world. True success comes only when every generation continues to develop the next generation, teaching them the value and the method of developing the next group of leaders.”

John C. Maxwell from “Developing The Leader Within You”

The Lions Mentoring Program provides four Levels of mentoring, each with specific tasks and goals and a defined time during which they are to be reached. These Levels require the protégé Lion to achieve observable, measurable goals. All four Levels are positioned in the Lions Mentoring Program as depicted in the diagram (next page). The diagram shows the general relationship between each Level, the time required, and the progression of activity.