Deputy Commandant's Corner

CW5 Stephen Napoli, Deputy Commandant, USAWOCC

When you climb a tree, you reach for the strongest branches. You do not necessarily reach for the biggest branches or the ones with the most leaves. Even if it looks "strong enough," grabbing the wrong branch can have predictably poor outcomes. Reaching out to quality mentors is similar to reaching out to a strong branch to elevate your personal and professional growth.

Picture: CW5 Stephen Napoli

FM 6-22: Leader Development (2022) describes mentorship as "a voluntary developmental relationship that exists between a person of greater experience and a person of lesser experience characterized by mutual trust and respect" (p. 2-23). Mentorship is not an Army requirement, although it feels like it should be. Word search "mentor" in FM 6-22, and you will see 160 returns. Therefore, it must be important to develop others through the mentorship process.

As a senior (old) warrant officer in a few organizations, I have had amazing opportunities to share what I hope is wisdom with officers and Soldiers of all ranks. As a Deputy Commandant, I have had a unique opportunity to be challenged by, learn from, and share wisdom with the sponges we call "Warrant Officer Candidates." They are thirsty for information about their new adventure as they enter the W-Ranks. They are anxious and intimidated. They are also energized, inspired, and excited to convert their professional goals into professional accomplishments. This is no different from us older folks when we were in their position. To help navigate the deep waters, they want mentors.

They want mentors now but sometimes fail to realize they already have a bench of potential mentors. Someone encouraged them to apply to become a warrant officer. Someone wrote their letter of recommendation. Someone has given an uncomfortable correction to stimulate a behavior change. Someone offered a different perspective that reveals how misinformed people can be. Someone has pushed and encouraged them to be more—whatever "more" means in a specific situation. Someone has already been the strong branch in the tree. Then, the person becomes a candidate, and the mentorship opportunities fade because life gets busy, and the candidate forgets.

Some candidates want simple conversations of encouragement, some want a checklist of what to do and when to do it, and some only want to be told how amazing they are. All candidates want more understanding of what to expect at different points in their careers. Of course, that is difficult to provide in a "one-size-fits-all" format during their time as candidates. Hopefully, we recognize that candidates are the examples here, but the application goes far beyond them.

What specifically leads to success as a warrant officer (however, one might define "success")? I was asked that question several years ago. The answer is not as unique to the warrant officer profession as we might think. The answer applies to every role in life—from parenting to leading small teams and ministering to Soldiering. And that answer also answers the question of what qualities we should see in potential mentors. We will explore that answer together in the next edition of *Strength in Knowledge*. And we will do so through plain language that we can all relate to.

Great Mentors

"Great mentors have great mentors."
(attributed to several people)

"Sometimes great mentors become great mentors by overcoming the influence of bad mentors."
CW5 Stephen Napoli

Figure 1: Great Mentorship

In the meantime, I encourage us all (including myself) to continue growing into stronger branches to better serve those we mean to lead, advise, and mentor.

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Graphic: Tree of Mentorship with Stong Branches created by ChatGPT 4o