

## **Mentor as...Sponsor**

*By Gloria M. McMillan, Barrister*

Mentors play the role of provider of emotional support, teacher, adviser, counselor, and as advocate and career sponsor. Ideally, both a mentor and a protégé will have several significant mentoring experiences in their careers. I did as a teacher. Late in my career as an administrator, one of my most significant experiences as a mentor exemplified the role of mentor as sponsor.

An experienced, knowledgeable, competent, and respected colleague in my department invited me to lunch one week after I assumed my new title and moved into my new office. She opened our conversation with a request that I be her mentor. I was flattered, surprised, and appreciative of the directness of her approach and the clarity with which she delineated her expectations of what my mentorship and her role as a protégé would entail. When I retired she wanted my job.

Although desiring the position to which I had been assigned, my would-be protégé did not enter the competition for the position because she lacked the administrative credential and the skills required. However, she sought my future support because we both shared a strong commitment to the goals and mission of the program. The necessary chemistry of trust, respect, and commitment to a larger goal were already well established.

I was impressed by my protégé's personal courage in her direct request and the clarity of her expectations of me as a mentor. She understood what she had to do as a protégé to achieve her goal. My protégé had stepped up to the plate and was already enrolled in an administrative credentialing program at a local university. We could focus on her personal and professional development. She eagerly accepted additional leadership assignments to broaden her skills and knowledge. While adept at networking, she needed encouragement to really see herself in the broader administrative role of staff manager and she needed the skills necessary to evaluate programs, curriculum, and student achievement; prepare board reports; establish new programs; develop community outreach programs; and to direct a myriad of other activities.

My task as mentor was to provide continuing leadership and learning opportunities. The meetings we attended jointly exposed her to others who could, also, help her in her professional development and preparation to be an outstanding administrator.

Prior to and after my retirement I wrote letters of recommendation in support of her application and advocated to the district leadership and to the board of education for her appointment to my position. Interim administrators, also, valued her leadership skills. Ultimately, she was appointed as interim program manager of Gifted and Talented Education and after a national search and a competitive application process she earned the appointment. She presently serves as Director of the Gifted and Talented Education Department. My protégé was well prepared to be the best candidate for the job because she had the courage to define her goals and state them clearly three years before her opportunity arose. Having such a protégé made it easy for me to retire.