

# From the Editor-in-Chief

*“Mentoring is a brain to pick, an ear to listen and a push in the right direction.”*

– John Crosby

## **A Serendipitous Mentor**

Originating in Greek mythology – specifically, Homer’s *Odyssey* – the aged and wise Mentor was entrusted with the care of Odysseus’ palace and his son Telemachus when Odysseus left for the Trojan War. As such, Mentor served in the role of teacher and trusted counsel.

Whether early or late in your career, hopefully you have vivid recollections of your own mentors: individuals who have influenced your career decisions, experiences and perspectives. Whether as an impressionable student nurse, a newcomer, a novice staff nurse or newly minted nurse manager or senior executive, throughout our career evolution we seek the wisdom, experience and knowledge of others to shape our emerging self. For some, the pursuit of a mentor is purposeful, while for others mentors appear by chance. Some of us have had the benefit of many mentors, including those whose influence was fleeting but impactful and others whose counsel has endured over the course of many years.

Much has been written about mentors, formal and informal, including descriptions of their roles and characteristics. As per the original Mentor, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a mentor as “an experienced and trusted adviser.” Pulce (2005) has suggested that to be an effective mentor one needs to be a good role model and possess competency and currency in one’s chosen area of work or specialization. Further, she describes the most effective mentors as individuals who, among other things:

- take a personal interest in the career development of others
- offer support, challenge, patience and enthusiasm in their guidance
- share their knowledge, skills and experience
- expose protégés to novel ideas and views
- help reframe perspective and point the way

On a personal note, I view the activities of mentoring as not only rewarding but also a way to “pay it forward.” Passing the torch, shaping innovation, rethinking the present and influencing the future are all ways in which our professional contributions and achievements can be a powerful legacy for those who follow. My own career has been impelled by an array of superb nurse and non-nurse mentors, formal and informal. In their own way, each has left an indelible mark on my hard drive; to each of them I express my infinite gratitude. The “mentor in the moment” is often someone we do not recognize or appreciate until well after a specific situation has passed. But whenever possible, it is important to acknowledge the impact of such individuals. As with most things in life, it means a lot to know that your efforts have been appreciated.

Call it chance, good fortune or serendipity, sometimes the best mentors just happen in life. In this issue, I share an interview with one of my most influential and long-standing mentors, Dr. Judith Shamian. I first happened upon her while in my first year of the Master of Nursing Science program at the University of Toronto. Over time, I have frequently related our first meeting to my colleagues. Without a doubt it was initially a matter of serendipity, but over the years Judith’s wise counsel and friendship have repeatedly and intentionally influenced my career. I am happy to tell the whole story to anyone interested: More than 30 years ago, I had the great fortune to be one of those who received, as Crosby said, “a push in the right direction.” Although many have been beneficiaries of Judith’s mentoring, today nurses worldwide are realizing positive impacts from her tireless leadership, courage and tenacity in her new role as president of the International Council of Nurses.

In this issue’s Emerging Leaders column, Rose and Lachie discuss the need to move to authentic collaboration within and beyond nursing. Reflecting on lessons learned from their experiences, colleagues and mentors, they identify eight important steps to effect authentic collaboration. Among those steps is a recommendation not only to seek out but to act as role models and mentors, and not only within nursing. I would add that there is significant value to be derived from having mentoring relationships outside of healthcare. Mentors and protégés from other areas of business and industry can bring great insights to our work. Take our leveraging of the expertise of those in aviation (human factors and safety in design) and manufacturing (process and efficiency improvements) as cases in point.

We never know the ways in which we influence the individuals who practise beside us, report to us, sit in our classrooms, listen to our presentations or read our writings. But for what it's worth, know that whether positive or negative, your words and actions leave a mark on those in your presence. In sum, if we are patient and generous with our time, experience and expertise, that which we leave behind can substantially shape that which lies ahead.



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## References

Pulce, R. 2005. "What Is a Mentor?" *Nurse Leader* 3(4): 9–10. doi: 10.1016/j.mnl.2005.06.002.