

MENTORING IN MISSIONS

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INTRODUCTION

In preparation for my anticipated departure as National Director of International Student Ministry (ISM) of InterVarsity/USA, I wrote down my Four Loves. They were my four passions that I had hoped to express and utilize after my 14-year stint as ISM Director (2000-2014) and a combined 45 years of missionary work in the Philippines and the USA up to that point. They are: Consultant in Missions, Coach/Mentor/Bless Others, Teacher/Trainer, and Speaker. For 2 years, these Four Loves became my guiding document as I prayed and imagined life after a career with InterVarsity/USA.

It was during a meal conversation with one of the young leaders in the organization that helped chart my specific future course. He said, *Don't leave, stay with InterVarsity as a coach and mentor. You have so much to offer. We can use your experience to help us with our work.* It was an encouraging conversation. The only catch was there was no department to house coaches and mentors. Also, there was no job description for such a person. In the end I remained in InterVarsity, working part-time as a Development Coach, for lack of a better title. I began to coach a Regional Director for a few years, other department heads and rising leaders in the movement. Four years later the Leadership Resource Team was formed under the Learning and Talent Department. It was the official group of InterVarsity mentors composed of 5 senior leaders, including the President Emeritus. Together with other mentors we mentored about 80 mid-managers.

I have 16 years of experience in mentoring. Seven of those years as a mentor with The Daniel Project, InterVarsity's elite Leadership Training Course. In the past 9 years I have mentored leaders in InterVarsity as well as leaders of other mission organizations, a church, and a non-profit group.

What about my 3 other loves? They all found expressions through various projects (in partnership with Leiton Chinn, my husband) and invitations that relate to missions at large and in reaching international students.

This article covers what I have learned as I mentored a group of women, men, ethnic minority leaders, Asian- Americans, Africans and Caucasians in their various call to carry the Gospel around the world.

MENTORING IN MISSIONS

One of my leadership mentees from Cameroon working among international students in the United States reminded me of an African proverb that goes:

Standing, a younger person cannot see what an older person sees, seated. There are limitations to what a young energetic leader sees compared to what an older person has seen over many years of experience. The young leader may be confident but without the insight of someone who has gone before, this leader will lack the perspective and wisdom that age and experience provide.

Another mentee puts it this way. *Learning can come from peers and those less experienced as well, so our hearts should always be open to that. But, having someone who has journeyed before us brings a type of wisdom unlike that of our peers and those less experienced. It provides a perspective that can sift through what often feels 'urgently important' and see beyond it to what truly is important.*

From that experience I define mentoring in missions as an intentional, voluntary, temporary and confidential relationship between someone more mature and experienced in life and cross-cultural ministry and someone who is younger or new in mission work for a specific and agreed goal and purpose.

MENTORING IS INTENTIONAL

I have discovered in my context (an Asian-American female leader in the United States mentoring leaders from various organizations, diverse cultural and ministry experiences) that the younger generation is very open to have mentors in their lives, in fact, they are looking for them. As I shared in the introduction, it was a younger leader who welcomed the idea of someone like me to speak into their lives.

When mentoring is mentee-driven it carries with it a seriousness of intent and an eagerness to grow. Mentees know that they need help, perhaps not always clear where or in what area, but they are humble enough to express that need. When mentees seek mentors, they are also owning their own growth and development.

One mentee intentionally looked for a mentor because *I was feeling isolated as a woman in ministry and do not have women in my church that have served long term in ministry. I wanted to spend time and receive insight from a woman who had experienced ministry but also who has thrived and enjoyed serving in the Kingdom in this way. I also was hitting big questions in my professional life and needed someone to talk them through with and receive wisdom and direction.*

Perhaps in some Asian setting, it may be too presumptuous for a younger person to approach an older and more mature leader for mentorship. In these cases, we will need the advocacy and sponsorship of

other older folks to open the way for them to access mentorship opportunities.

MENTORING IS VOLUNTARY

Because it is not required, the mentoring relationship takes on a natural and more relaxed atmosphere. No one is requiring it. No one is checking on it. Both mentor and mentee are free to explore what is best for the mentee.

Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship/USA where I served, is committed to mentorship. Our potential mentees were given the names and qualifications of available mentors and they had the opportunity to volunteer to be mentored.

MENTORING IS TEMPORARY

Mentoring is not for life. Although there are those who keep a mentoring relationship beyond the agreed time. It is understood that this mentoring relationship has an end point. This does not, however, take away the opportunity for this long-term relationship to continue, as appropriate.

My mentoring over zoom for sixty minutes seems short, but I was always impressed by what happened during that period. With helpful questions and focused listening, a lot can be covered.

MENTORING IS CONFIDENTIAL

Offering a confidential mentoring session frees the mentee to share honestly and openly. As a mentor, I feel this is a sacred trust. I keep their stories of victory and pain in confidence. Their supervisors know that our sessions are confidential. There is no expectation of a report from the mentor to the supervisor.

FOR AN AGREED GOAL AND PURPOSE

Usually, the mentee begins with a desire to grow in a particular area of leadership e.g. understanding the organizational culture, growing in self-awareness, gaining cross-cultural insights, increased confidence in decision making, or navigating diversity on the team.

It is helpful to begin with a common understanding of the goal or purpose of the mentoring relationship. At the outset, it is important to be honest about expectations. Mentors are not gods. They have their limitations and an initial conversation in a mentoring relationship should clear out what the mentor is able to offer and what the mentee desires.

I begin my mentoring session with an analogy of my mentees being in the driver's seat and I seated next to them. They tell me where they want to go and we pursue it, unless I see a different and better road along the way which I offer as an option. I remind them that the mentoring time is their hour, not mine. It reiterates their responsibility to own their own development. They have the choice to maximize it or to squander it.

Sometimes as a mentor, I act like a Tour Guide, creating excitement for what is ahead. Other times,

I am like a Mirror, reflecting back what I have heard from them. Often, I encourage my mentees to stay in the truth, to discern what narrative they are choosing to believe about who God is and who they are. This is especially true with the pandemic and the changing landscape of ministry.

My hope is that when they "drop me off" they would have seen something they had not considered before or they are more encouraged and equipped to tackle the tasks ahead.

Mentoring is not a one-way street. I want the mentees to also know that they teach and bless me as well.

MUTUALITY IN MENTORING

Both mentors and mentees have a lot to offer to one another

Mentors offer:	Mentees offer:
Their focused presence	Their presence- eagerness to listen and learn
Their ears to listen	Their questions
Their questions	Their doubts, struggles and fears
Their unfinished stories, mistakes, fears, insecurities	Their young, and unfinished stories
Their experience of God and His faithfulness,	Their courage and faith
Their expertise and wisdom	Creativity and innovation

Although drawn and initiated by a need of the mentee, I have discovered that as a mentor I also have needs that are met by the mentee.

Mentors need:	Mentees need:
To continue to learn from younger leaders	Companionship because "Leadership is lonely."
To be encouraged about the future of mission.	Encouragement and assurance
Their faith to grow as they entrust others to grow	People who believe in them
An opportunity to be "a friend on the journey."	Examples of honest and vulnerable leaders
Understand their place in this season of life and ministry	Acceptance
The opportunity to invest in others	Direction

QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS, AND MORE QUESTIONS

Mentees often come with questions which some send ahead of time. Other mentees come with a case study, a situation that arouse between mentoring sessions that caused them to wonder about their confidence, their cross-cultural skills or their own call to mission. With sensitivity to the Spirit of God, sympathetic listening and incisive questions, the mentees often feel understood and able to see the way forward. Not every mentoring session, however, leads to an immediate solution, but at least the mentee has been heard and options have been offered for consideration.

Along the way, I ask my mentee how the mentoring is coming along. Is this what you are looking for?

How is this session helping reach your leadership goal? This way we can make any corrections or amendments as we proceed. Also, after a discussion on an issue, I ask, what leadership muscles were used in your recent experience? What did you learn about missions and your place in it? When a mentee reaches out for mentoring, I send him these preliminary questions to help me gauge where he is in his journey or call to mission.

1. What questions are you asking in this season of life and ministry?
2. What are your longings?
3. Where has God met you in recent years? Where and when are you most receptive to the voice of God?
4. What has been life-giving for you? Why? What drains your energy?
5. What gifts do you have which are waiting to be used and expressed? (Or, "if I had the time, space, money, structure, or permission, I would love to...")
6. Who are the best influencers in your organization? How did they get there? What can you learn from them?
7. How are decisions made in your organization? Who has a powerful voice in your organization?
8. Who are the other ethnic minority leaders in your organization? How are they stewarding their position?
9. What is political savviness? How have you experienced it?
10. Who has your back? How have you experienced support from your supervisor, peers or colleagues?

As the mentoring relationship progresses, the following additional questions may also be asked:

1. What decisions are you most proud of?
2. How are you growing in respect and appreciation of the local people?
3. When do you feel most successful, most satisfied, and fruitful?
4. Where has God shown up?
5. How are you taking care of yourself?
6. What baffles you about the people or culture? How are you navigating cultural differences?
7. Where are the places of frustration, distraction, confusion, barrenness, or lack of effectiveness?
8. What keeps you hopeful?

MENTORS TRUST GOD FOR WISDOM

God promises to give wisdom to those who ask for it (James 1:5) and from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding (Proverbs 2:6)

What may wisdom look like in a mentoring relationship? Wisdom may come when the mentor's life and ministry experiences are harnessed to address a current situation, decision, or direction.

A MENTOR'S PRAYER

Preparing for a mentoring session may include prior time to think, pray, and study to address questions they may have sent ahead of time. I find this prayer, that came out of my sabbatical, helpful to set my attitude and expectation for the session.

I welcome you, Holy Spirit, to this mentoring space.

Listen with me.

Listen for me.

Speak through me.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

SOME QUALIFICATIONS OF A MENTOR IN MISSIONS

First is character. These qualities as mostly the same qualities one looks for in any mentor. Does the potential mentor have a deep and growing love for God, His word, work and His world? Is he grounded in God's unconditional and everlasting love? Is he a learner and a listener? Does he display dependence on God in prayer?

Cultural IQ How has the mentor exhibited respect and appreciation of other cultures? Does he have a proven ability to navigate differences (cultures, values, perspectives)? Is he skilled or growing in reading between cultural lines? Is he comfortable in his own cultural skin? In what ways has he experienced the tension or conflict between cultural values and Kingdom values?

Competence Does he understand the privileges, benefits, and costs of missionary life and service? Has he lived and worked in another culture? Does he understand organizational culture and complexities? Does he understand spiritual warfare? Is he fluent in another language? Is he aware of his own gifts, challenges, and limitations?

Chemistry Not every mentor-mentee match is made in heaven. Personalities differ and if the mentoring relationship is not working, there should be some freedom to express it (directly or indirectly).

WHAT MENTEES SAY

Mentees are grateful people. They express their gratitude during and after the mentoring sessions. Some see the positive change in the attitude they started with compared to the feelings they had at the end of the mentoring time. Others come away with a new direction and much needed hope.

what others said:

My mentoring time was a spring of life and perspective.

Mentoring has shaped me into someone who leads with hope, patience, and grace.

I gained more confidence in myself and in the reality that God was on the move in my life and my ministry.

My mentoring relationship provided a sense of support and encouragement.

I am a better son, spouse, friend, sibling, and minister

because of mentorship.

You speak with honesty, even giving the most challenging admonition but you do so with such elegance and grace.

Your mentorship is helping to grow both grace and truth inside me.

SOME ISSUES IN MENTORING IN A POST-COVID WORLD

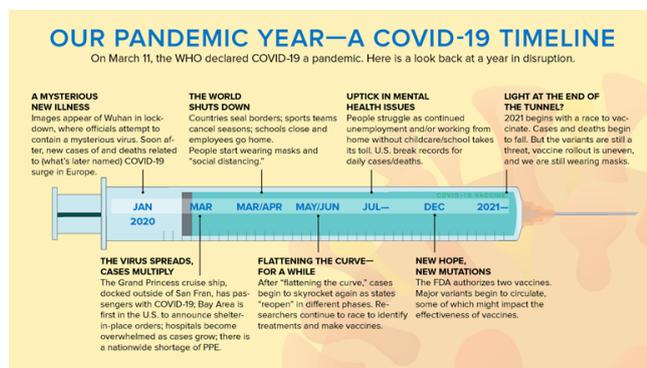
A PORTAL

The Indian writer, Arundhati Roy captures the impact of Covid-19 and eloquently paints a way forward. She writes,

Whatever it is, coronavirus has made the mighty kneel and brought the world to a halt like nothing else could. Our minds are still racing back and forth, longing for a return to “normality”, trying to stitch our future to our past and refusing to acknowledge the rupture. But the rupture exists. And in the midst of this terrible despair, it offers us a chance to rethink the doomsday machine we have built for ourselves. Nothing could be worse than a return to normality. Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.¹

LOOKING BACK

Below is the best attempt I have found at giving us a clear timeline². It may be through a western lens but it still reflects what the past was like in other parts of the world. The pace and intensity may differ but the reality is the same.



This may be a good exercise to work with a mentee in

1. Arundhati Roy, The Pandemic is a Portal, The Financial Times, April 3, 2020,

2. Written by Kathy Katella, Senior Clinical Writer Yale-Medicine. March 9, 2021. <https://www.yalemedicine.org/news/covid-timeline>

missions.

- What has the mentee learned?
- Where has the mentee grown?
- What lessons has the organization learned?
- What “dead carcasses” do you and/or the organization need to leave behind?
- What does traveling light into a post-Covid world look like?

LOSS, LAMENT AND GRIEF

One can plot the emotional responses and losses through the timeline and the corresponding impact on leaders and their organizations, Christian and secular alike. As one traces the impact, a wise mentor will help the mentee to visit or revisit their responses and gauge any lingering or unresolved issues which are carried into the post-Covid world. Lament, grief are natural responses to loss. What losses did the mentee experience? Has my mentee given himself enough time for healthy grieving? Is he experiencing a delayed grief? Was there time for corporate grief and lament? Is it necessary? Why?

Individuals grieve differently. Cultures have different ways to express grief. Those differences need to be respected.

Another diagram³ that circulated in the internet during the pandemic shows where we may have been in the weeks and months of the pandemic.

The three zones may depict the past. But there may be continuing learning and growing happening to this day. What innovations and practices which were applicable then can be considered or utilized in a Post-Covid world?



RESILIENCE AND COMPASSION

What was it like to mentor leaders of various

3. Attributed to Dr. Monika Langeh and/or Ken Seidu, Godfrey Okumu from Nigeria and Dr. Anna Mwangi from Kenya

organization in the US, Asia, and Mexico who were trying to lead in a changing and unpredictable setting? What do you say when the rules keep changing? How do you help them navigate the balance between resilience and compassion and still move the mission forward? What does “good enough” look for the leaders and those they supervise? What happens when leaders realize that self-care should be a top priority for themselves and the people they lead?

There was no guidebook on how to lead during a pandemic. Neither was there a script for mentors to follow. However, I found myself reminding my mentees of the following:

1. Stay with the truth. God is still in control, that’s true. The rules are changing, that’s also true.
2. What is God calling you to be at this time?
3. Be content with “good enough” outcomes for this season.
4. Resilience is the ability to sway with the changes without losing your core values.
5. You are human and it is okay to be tired.
6. What is the compassionate thing to do? Your supervisor, staff and supervisees are human too. They need to be kind to themselves and to each other.
7. Rest and take care of yourself.

One of the strategic and compassionate moves InterVarsity/USA did during the pandemic was to grant the staff across the country additional paid leave days for rest and recovery. A department in another organization declared a common sabbatical day when staff were given time to rest and recuperate.

WHEN CHANGE IS OUT OF CONTROL

As we look back, we can see the future better. As we harness the lessons of Covid-19, we should be able to bring our best into the new normal of the post-Covid world. We will continue to be tested, individually and corporately. Our mission may continue to go through more sifting. As we look at Covid-19 through the rearview mirror, we face the present and future confident in the God who has called us and will continue to go before and with us.

In 2002, Margaret Wheatley wrote, *...there is a great paradox that points to the hopeful path ahead. It is possible to prepare for the future without knowing what it will be. The primary way to prepare for the unknown is to attend to the quality of our relationships, to how well we know and trust one another.*⁴ (my underline)

Yes. Let us attend to the quality of our relationships. Mentoring in missions strengthen that bond. Mentoring in missions deepen that trust. Mentoring enhances the quality of our generational relationships.

CONCLUSION

Carolyn Carney, the National Director of Christian

4. When Change is Out of Our Control by Margaret Wheatley©2002. Published in Human Resources for the 21st Century (Wiley, 2003)

Formation in InterVarsity/USA uses Kintsugi as a metaphor for our post-Covid world in her Post-Covid Reentry Retreat Guide⁵

Kintsugi also known as **kintsukuroi** (“golden repair”), is the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery by mending the areas of breakage with lacquer dusted or mixed with powdered gold, silver, or platinum. It traces its roots to the 15th century.

She says *not to think of Kintsugi as repairing something so it’s ‘as good as new’ or returning it back to how it was, but rather, it is about making a different vessel altogether. We should never go back to “normal.” We yearn for something different.*

Some people refer to Kintsugi as the Art of Breathing New Life, others call it the Art of Healing.

We have all been broken and impacted in one way or another because of the global pandemic. But God is in the business of repairing and healing. He wants to display His power through a vessel made new. The marks in the vessel are obvious but the vessel has been transformed to be usable and even more beautiful than the broken one.

Mentoring in missions is one place where the broken places can be repaired and healed. It is that relationship that brings the young and the older generation of missionaries together for the Kingdom’s sake. Like a Master Potter, God is working in us so that we can be a beautiful, global display of Kintsugis for His glory among the nations.

OTHER RESOURCES

1. The Mentoring Tree by Todd Hahn and Jim Osterhaus. Leighton Ford Ministries. 2006
2. The Mentoring Community by Leighton Ford. Leighton Ford Ministries. 2011
3. Great Mentoring by Douglas C. Ward and Sharon Simmonds. Arrow Leadership. 2019
4. The Mentor’s Guide: Facilitating Effective Learning Relationships by Lois J. Zachary. Pfeiffer-A Wiley Imprint. 2000

5. From the Devastating Wilderness to a Different World, A Reentry Retreat for 2021 https://staff.intervarsity.org/sites/staff/files/Re-entry_retreatFINAL_1.pdf



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