

PASSING IT ON

Exploring the mentor-protégé relationship

BY JANET WALKER, SR/WA, R/W-NAC

Over the years, I have enjoyed many different roles with IRWA—from serving on International committees to developing new courses. However, the opportunity to serve as a mentor to a younger professional had not presented itself. That all changed a few years ago, when I had the good fortune to be matched with Trevor Martens, a relative newcomer who was working to become an IRWA instructor.

At first, I wasn't sure how to get the ball rolling. But once I realized that the mentor's role depends on the needs of the protégé, everything fell into place. I was impressed to see Trevor dive head first into the mentorship program. He told me how much he respected my instruction style and looked forward to learning new teaching strategies. And he made it easy for me by identifying his ultimate goals. Having already taken the IRWA Instructors Clinic, he was ready to co-instruct a class, and he wanted to learn which techniques were most effective in the classroom. Not only was he clear about his interests, he listened and asked questions.

Tap Into Your Strengths

I appreciated Trevor's ability to really hone in on his objectives. He created an agenda for each of our discussions, and he pushed me to think about professional

development and adult education in different ways. This led me to analyze some of my teaching practices. Sometimes you don't realize how much you know until someone asks for your guidance and perspective. As I began sharing some of my past teaching experiences, it became easier to explain the strategies behind my instruction methods.

When I asked Trevor what he gained from our relationship, he told me that he learned the importance of listening. He had come into the relationship with very little instructor experience, and even though he was anxious to learn quickly, he knew that if he just sat back and listened, he would pick up the tools he needed. By watching closely and taking notes, he was able to see how other instructors tapped into their own particular style and leveraged their talents.

Trevor said, "The most beneficial thing I learned was to be yourself. Everyone has a different style and the key is to utilize your strengths. Janet explained numerous teaching strategies that would have been hard for me to identify on my own. She encouraged me to take the CLIMB Instructor Development program, which she helped to develop, and I'm so glad I did. I gained new insight into course instruction, and with Janet's guidance,

I am feeling more confident about my abilities. She has become a friend, and I can lean on her when I need to talk through an issue. I appreciate her candor in all situations."

Guiding the Next Generation

I feel a great sense of pride in Trevor's growth and have a vested interest in his future. I consider him a peer, and I am thrilled to watch as he excels in his IRWA leadership and instructor roles. Trevor and I still keep in touch. We don't often get to see each other in person, but when we do connect, we share our different adventures in instructing—and life in general.

As we welcome younger professionals into the Association, it's becoming increasingly important for us to help them grow in their careers, while preparing them to become the next generation of instructors and leaders. I thoroughly enjoyed the mentoring experience, and I encourage others to give it a try. 🌟



Janet has over 25 years experience in the industry, and previously worked for ConocoPhillips Canada and the National Energy Board. She is the Vice Chair for IRWA's Partnership for Infrastructure Professional Education and a past Chair of the International Professional Development Committee.