

## PASS IT ON: THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING A MENTOR

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In October, while speaking at WEFTEC 07 (Water Environment Federation Technical Exposition and Conference) in San Diego on "Preparing Tomorrow's Workforce: The Personal Side of Mentoring", I asked for a show of hands from the baby boomers. Out of approximately 200 people in the room, I would guess that more than two-thirds raised their hands. It was like a sea of awareness, waving the reality that is facing the water and wastewater utility industry in the next 5 years.

An article titled "Building and Sustaining Human Capital," written by Arlene Post and Sean Breen and published in the June 2005 (which is now approaching 3 years old) issue of *Journal AWWA*, stated that "half of today's utility workers are over age 45; nearly 25% of current water utility workers will be eligible for retirement in 5 years, and nearly 40% will be eligible in 10 years; through retirement or transfer, utilities can anticipate that more than 50% of their current employees will no longer be there 10 years from now." It went on to say, "Not only will these employees be leaving, they will take with them centuries of 'inherent expertise' and 'work legacy,' of processes, equipment, and systems."

Succession planning is a must now as baby boomers reach retirement age. Utilizing the talents, knowledge and expertise of this retiring force is necessary and smart in order to bridge the gap left by its absence. This wealth of information is meant to be tapped and shared with younger staff. There is a moral requirement of anyone holding the knowledge to pass it on - to be a mentor. *The American Heritage Dictionary* defines *mentor* as "a wise and trusted counselor or teacher."

This is who you are: You are the mentors of tomorrow.

It is time to realize how valuable we are as human beings, and, therefore, acknowledge that we have a lot to offer others. It is part of our legacy to pass on what we know. It is unconscionable of the retiring population to think, "I won't be here, so why should I care." It is our duty to curb our motives and intentions for holding back knowledge and vital expertise and avoid being possessive, jealous, or competitive in unhealthy ways, which can stop the flow of information and learning in the workplace.

It is time to be collaborative and cooperative with those replacing us. We must know when to let go. If we do it with grace and dignity, we will probably enjoy retirement a lot more. It is important to honor and celebrate how wise we are and be willing to share it with those taking our place. Be willing to pass the baton.



The single most important relationship you have is the relationship you have with yourself. *The American Heritage Dictionary* defines *retired* as "Withdrawn, secluded. To go away. To take out of circulation." That's pretty harsh. It seems to me it is a time to fulfill our dreams. It isn't where our dreams take us; it's really where we take our dreams. And by closing the chapter on our career, we open the door to the rest of our future.

Accept your value and worth as a human being. Honor and share your knowledge and wisdom with others whom you may think see you as outdated and disinterested. Know that you are the master of your destiny, that you are the leader in your life. See yourself as youthful, even if not so young. Allow your mind and heart to be open, yielding to the purpose for which you are here. And remember, your life is a reflection of what you think. Look in the mirror. Who do you see? Maybe it's time to "rethink" yourself.

### An Idea to Capture the Knowledge

Given that a lot of the people holding essential knowledge often aren't very interested in writing it all down or attending mundane meetings, here's an idea. Put to use the talents of an intern or media staff who may have aspirations of being a news reporter and ask him or her to interview some of the veteran employees with critical knowledge who are approaching retirement. Let them tell their work stories. Make capturing the knowledge fun.

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