

Where have all the mentors gone?

If we share time with the next generation of lubricant professionals, they will share with us their vision for the future.

Anyone who has shopped at a consignment store knows retro is cool—everything old eventually becomes new again, it seems. Thinking back to the days of bell bottom pants and lava lamps, I have fond memories of days gone by and some of the people from back then.

I remember two people in particular who had the most influence on me and my introduction to STLE. These two people were my friends, my colleagues, my customers and my mentors. I can't help but think that I owe many of my successes to their patience and foresight.

What has happened to the act of mentoring? Has it landed in the dumpster, or is it on the shelf in the consignment shop waiting for another chance in this brave new world? Perhaps a modernized label for mentoring could be "social networking guide." Whatever it is called, does it still happen?

As a pup sales rep, I often was so caught up in getting the sale that I lost sight of the real prize—the customer. My two mentors met me at meetings and introduced me to various decision-makers from a variety of companies. They spent time educating me on these people and their companies.

Thus, when I actually made a sales call to these people, I already knew them and their companies, and the networking was well underway. My mentors taught me that people buy from people and not from companies. Networking was the key that actually opened doors to the business.

I know that the generation coming behind us is very different than ours. We used books and libraries to search out information; they retrieve information from massive electronic sources with the click of a computer key.

Information is readily available to these digital masters, but is anyone helping translate their information into an application? Is someone there to make them aware of the real prize—the customer? Is this new generation lost in a sea of information with no way to figure out its real market value? Where have all the mentors gone?

I recently read an article in the *Wall Street Journal* that alerted me to the fact that this new techie generation also is very interested in social networking. The article suggests that they want to spend as much time having human contact as they spend in their digital cocoons. We will be passing our batons to them within the next 5-10 years. Has our generation allowed them to take their eye off the customer?

I have never seen information make a sale; I have only seen it expedite a sale. The real decisions are made by people who know other people. The young people we see every day at work really want to be a part of this world, so let's do something novel by inviting them to join us at a local meeting where we can be their social networking guides. How about we take the time to share our knowledge with them and maybe, just maybe, they will share with us a vision of their future. Retro is cool!

PERSONAL COMMITMENT

So far I have talked about what was and what can be. Now I want to talk about what is—personal commitment. The act of mentoring is not free to the student or the mentor. Each is paying with their time, which is a valuable resource. Time is no longer a commodity but rather a necessity that is

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spent with miserly portions for anything outside our normal circles.

Mentors are to be celebrated for the contributions they are making to the future. Students should not pursue being mentored solely for their own self interests but see it as the gift it is. This sounds so altruistic, and it is intended to sound that way because “paying it forward” is very responsible.

During the past two years, STLE has spent time reinventing itself. Data have shown that membership in most national societies is falling. Rumors have spread that members of this next generation are not joiners but Internet junkies with a thirst for online relationships that require no commitment or time constraint.

I'm not sure about any of this except their love of the Internet and their thirst for instant information. That should be a good thing! Maybe future STLE meetings will be online or in video form with information sharing across the country from an office, a coffee shop or poolside. Where or how the meetings are conducted is really secondary to the fact that membership is the life's blood of STLE. Members are the ones who will design and define the future. We must adapt to meet the members' wants and needs.

If future meetings take on this new look, mentoring too will take on a new look. We could mentor 6-7 members at the same time. We could establish online conversations/relationships with our younger members and mentor from our own homes, offices or poolside. The development of the relationship fosters the ultimate goal, which is a face-to-face meeting at the national meeting. Networking there would be easier and more natural because it would be friend to friend.

Remembering the good old days when life was simpler is fun. We really do need each other to pass knowledge forward and to build off of each other.

John F. Kennedy said, “No American is ever made better off by pulling a fellow American down, and all of us are better off whenever any one of us is made better off...a rising tide raises all boats.” Retro is soooo cool! 

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