

Editorial | SEI's New Mentoring Program

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The newly (2016) established SEI Mentoring Committee aims to develop a formal mentoring program for SEI members and ultimately utilize the lessons learned to formulate a program which can be used to advance the profession. The genesis of this movement was the result of the recently conducted Firm Leader Survey, and also the desire to achieve the goals indicated within the SEI *Vision for the Future*.

The survey was developed and deployed to structural engineering firm leaders and senior staff/managers. The online survey was designed to test hypotheses of some of the current practices and assumptions about: internships, mentoring, training, licensing exams, organizational membership, academic curriculum, post-academic training, and hiring trend expectations for change in the next 10-30 years.

The overall survey results were not surprising. Formal mentoring is not common in structural engineering firms. Additionally, about half of the respondents agreed that improvements in mentoring are necessary. For those firms who do implement a mentoring program, the most common training is in-house but lacks a defined budget.

To this end, SEI believes it is essential to establish a readily identifiable professional development mechanism that seamlessly progresses from formal education to professional employment to leadership, and includes authentic mentoring at all levels.

Benefits and Goals of Mentoring Programs

The goal of mentoring programs is to better prepare the next generation of engineers in their career while providing a platform for seasoned engineers to contribute positively to our profession. This will:

- Assist in developing necessary technical and non-technical competencies;
- Broaden mentee's network;
- Provide professional guidance; and
- Champion the mentee's professional career.

How do we do it? Our first step is to recruit ten pairs of senior mentors and eager mentees who are willing to commit to a two-year program starting in late 2017. SEI is looking for volunteers to join our mentoring program who meet the minimum requirements below:

Mentors:

- Technical expert;
- Minimum of 15 years of experience;
- Active on an SEI technical committee; and
- A commitment to 2 hours per month and travel once per year is anticipated.

Mentee:

- Interested in becoming a technical expert and advancing their network;
- 5-10 years of experience; and
- A commitment to 2 hours per month and travel once per year is anticipated.

What makes a good mentor? A good mentoring relationship is a two-way street. A mentor is someone who, through knowledge and experience, can offer career and professional guidance to a mentee. The mentor provides guidance, knowledge, expertise, encouragement, and motivation to help the mentee grow. A good mentor should possess the following characteristics:

- Willingness to share knowledge, skills, and experience;
- Dedicated to the time and commitment required;
- Has a positive attitude and acts as a positive role model;
- Enthusiastic, encouraging, genuine, and supportive;
- Excellent communication skills, including being an active listener;
- Values continuous learning and encourages long-term development;
- Ability to motivate others by setting a good example;
- Achievement of a level of technical competence; and
- Ability to act as a resource and provide information about the profession.

What makes a good mentee? The mentee should be willing to receive the guidance, encouragement, knowledge, and expertise from the mentor. The mentee needs to be committed to the relationship for it to be successful. A good mentee should possess the following characteristics:

- Willingness to ask questions;
- Dedicated to the time and commitment required;
- Accepts responsibility for career goals and personal development;
- Demonstrates a positive attitude;
- Honest, respectful, and flexible;
- Accepts constructive criticism graciously and learns from mistakes;
- Excellent communication skills, including being an active listener;
- Values continuous learning and enthusiastic about long-term development;
- Accepting of differing points of view; and
- Is open about their needs to the mentor and provides feedback.

Why should you become an active mentor or mentee? The future of engineering will require excellent technical and managerial knowledge and problem-solving skills. Clients are demanding more advanced projects in less time. Mid-level engineers are expected to be at the forefront of building codes and technology.

The hope of SEI is that the Mentoring Program will help the younger generation stand on the shoulders of giants even more effectively than their predecessors. If you are a seasoned engineer, you have an opportunity to impart your wisdom to the younger generation to help pass down your legacy. Moreover, a mentee will have a chance to connect with a senior leader who will help guide you in creating your legacy. ■



How to Get Involved

The SEI Mentoring Program is for members with all experience levels. Participation in this program can include being a mentor, mentee, program coordinator, contributor to program publications, or just offering your input based on your past successful experience in a mentoring program in which you participated. Your participation is vital to ensure that the launch of this program will be successful. Please contact Donna Friis at friisd1@cdmsmith.com or Suzanne Fisher at sfisher@asce.org to become involved.