

# Mentor Tool Kit

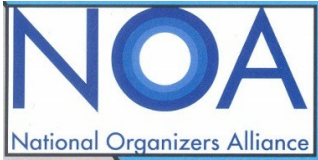
*For Social Justice Organizers*

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&  
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***National Organizers Alliance***

This community organizing “mentor tool-kit” is designed to help experienced community and labor organizers better mentor organizers and to help younger organizers find an appropriate mentor and design a good mentoring relationship.



# Mentor Tool Kit for Social Justice Organizers

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**Where does an organizer go for help?** Obstacles arise as we move through our work, and solutions are seldom found in a textbook. You are an organizer who has worked with tenant groups and now you are organizing young people. Where do you go for advice? You are a new director with years of experience in organizing but you have replaced a long-term director. Who has had that kind of transitional experience?

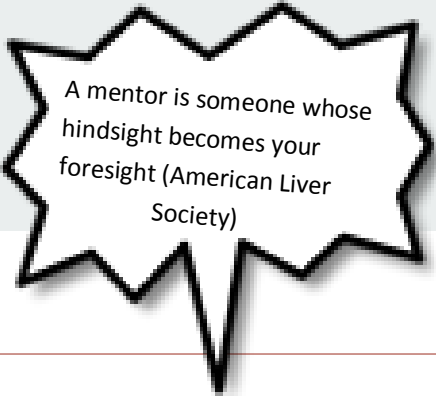
This is a time of change in social justice organizing. In many communities, a new generation of leadership is stepping up. Long time directors are stepping into new roles and new directors take their place.

In the midst of change, mentorship is often in short supply. In times of economic difficulty, groups do exemplary work but face “a key missing element” to support the work. It is essential to assist organizers on the job in order for them to be there for the long haul. It takes skilled and experienced organizers to build organizations. Talented people come into the work of organizing for social change. Too often, however, organizers leave after three to five years because they lack the support and mentoring that could sustain them in this challenging work. They have often tried to find help first but it came too late. Community organizing Infrastructure is inadequate.

In this publication, we hope to offer some ideas about mentoring. The words that appear here are not final. We want to add more in the future from your suggestions and experience.

**Thanks to Ron Bell, Michael Jacoby Brown, Nurys Camargo, Caesar McDowell. For Boston mentorship project info, contact Michael Brown at [Mjbrown246@gmail.com](mailto:Mjbrown246@gmail.com). In Los Angeles and Long Beach, thanks to the Filipino Migrant Center for co-hosting the training with NOA.**

The NOA mentorship planning committee:  
Mary Ochs, Walter Davis, Sarah McKenzie,  
Michael Jacoby Brown, Roger Newell and Cathy Howell.



A mentor is someone whose  
hindsight becomes your  
foresight (American Liver  
Society)

## ***Introduction:*** Mentor Tool Kit for Social Justice Organizers

This community organizing “mentor tool-kit” is designed to help experienced community and labor organizers better mentor organizers and to help younger organizers find an appropriate mentor and design a good mentoring relationship. It was put together by Michael Jacoby Brown (and co-editing with Walter Davis) for the National Organizers Alliance, with the help over several years of Mary Ochs, Sarah McKenzie, Roger Newell, and Cathy Howell. I use the words “put together” since it weaves together strands from several sources and comments from many. It is, like all of us, a work in progress. We hope it will help give you some guidance and perspective on how to mentor or to find a useful mentoring relationship that works for YOU. **Michael Brown**



*Michael Jacoby Brown speaking to Boston area mentoring cohort March, 2012*

### **How We Came to This:**

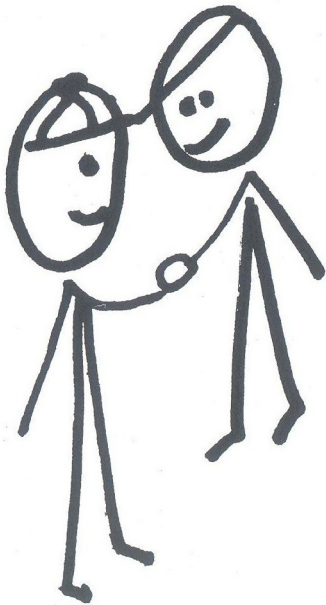
This tool kit arose from the observation of many experienced social justice organizers that talented people were leaving the field, especially after 3 to 5 years. Organizers leave the field for many reasons. Some leave because they want to pursue other interests or feel they are not a fit with organizing. Others leave because they feel isolated or can’t see what their future might hold. Others are discouraged by a culture that often does not recognize that organizers also have and want a life outside of their work. Some get discouraged by the low pay, long hours and little professional development opportunities or opportunities for new learning. These are reasons we can do something about We thought mentoring would be an effective intervention to keep organizers in the work and improve their skills and develop their effectiveness.



# What is Mentoring?

## Mentoring is, personal.

It differs from training which imparts understanding and skills. Mentoring is meant to develop someone through a personal, face-to-face relationship. It often includes personal and career development. It is geared to the specific needs and development of that individual. Since it is personal, the relationships and needs will vary. We include some stories of mentoring in hope that the various stories will provide a fuller understanding of what mentors do and to help you be or find a mentor.



We have found that organizers rarely speak to people outside our own circles or “silos” and therefore don’t develop the relationships that can nurture a broad movement for social justice. Rather than examine the things that divide us, let’s understand and learn from one another.

### **Organizers share pressures of the work: Boston Organizers Gathering January 18, 2012**

**A glimpse of a meeting to discuss the needs of labor organizers and others** with 3 to 5 years experience: The organizers described in their organizations:

- A culture of overwork
- Lack of time for reflection and learning
- Lack of recognition of differences of culture, race, class, gender, ethnicity, etc.
- Lack of clear leadership development and careers ladders
- Pay (not to mention hours expected) is often inadequate for families
- They also mentioned that the older organizers don’t move on, so it is harder for the younger folks to move up. (One said, “they have nowhere to go.”)

#### **Issues:**

Many spoke about the lack of mentoring within their own organizations, the culture in their organizations of over-work, and expectations of working long hours. One person, who said she would like to have children, said she had no idea how she could do that and remain an organizer.

Someone spoke about how she felt she was often doing the work in a rote way, and felt privileged to do this work, but felt she might be doing it without really thinking about if the methods she was using were the best.

Someone spoke about having new responsibilities for training within the organization, but felt little or no support or guidance about how to do this.

Someone spoke about how our organizations espouse working for justice but do little internally to allow personal time. “We talk about justice, but don’t practice it in our own organizations.”



## What do mentors really do?

The following ideas surfaced out of National Organizers Alliance board brainstorming about the role of mentoring:

### *Some themes of good mentors:*

- Mentor approached me, offered help, interest
- Listens well: Really hears me
- Knows the players and context of the world in which I work. Has had similar experience and lots of experience
- Asks clarifying questions, but usually does not give the answers. Helps me come with my own decisions
- Is "real" with me
- Challenges and supports me
- There for me
- Pushes me to try new things, and be bold
- Deeply respects me (especially for the youth leaders)
- Helps put things in perspective

**Comments from Heather Booth:**  
Mentoring/  
partnering is surely something we need to nurture and support.



A few additions to the fine outlines and pieces you have:

- 1. Self confidence is a trait that I think needs to be specifically supported**--and based on honesty, confronting problems and finding ways to address them. Lack of confidence limits so much of what people do and who they can become.
- 2. Encourage the "mentee" to write a short plan** (you indicate this in the bottom worksheets, might raise it up a bit): what to work on organizationally, personally and then for future plans/growth.  
Look at the plans and what they hope to accomplish in the regular sessions to evaluate where you are.
- 3. Mutual review of the relationship**-- what is working and what is not.



**Nurys Camargo introducing "speed mentoring" format at Boston meeting in March, 2012**

**SPEED MENTORING** We took time for organizers who want to mentor others and for organizers looking for mentors to connect.

Sponsored by the National Organizers Alliance and an organizing committee (in formation). Thanks to Ron Bell, Nurys Camargo, Caesar McDowell. For Boston mentorship project info, contact Michael Brown at [Mjbrown246@gmail.com](mailto:Mjbrown246@gmail.com)



*Mentoring is often about more than training. Sometimes, as a mentor, you will encounter very personal and difficult stories and history. A good mentor will be able to deal with all the issues that come up with someone, as this story illustrates.*

## A Story Illustrating How Mentoring is More Than Training

### Kamau Marcharia's story:

In 1998 I was hired as the Assistant Director of Union Summer by the AFL-CIO to do training and direct action. They had hired about 4,000 young people across the country.

I was doing a training, called "Race, Class, Gender and Sexual Orientation" in Sacramento. One question we asked in the training was about the first time you could remember one of those things: that you were male, female, rich, poor, etc.

This young man talked about when he was first aware of race, and did not understand why he could not be friends with Blacks and Hispanics, Right after we broke up and people had given their stories, I happened to notice that he was in the corner crying.

When I have done this training and I have seen some people have an emotional outburst, I think it is not good to leave them in that emotional space. So, I went to talk to him.

When he talked to me, he revealed to me that when he was 9 and his sister was 6 or 7, years old, his next door neighbor would invite them over and have them act out sex, and the neighbor would make this little boy have sex with his sister. It stopped after a while. So, he told me about this, and he told me that this had happened, but and he did not mean to rape his sister and he did not mean to do this.

I said to him that his neighbor, an adult, had brought this about. This was not his fault. He was only a child. He was really upset that he had never apologized to his sister. He felt he had raped and violated her, and he was trying to find a way to apologize to her.

I said to him, "Well, you were not responsible for that. You should not feel guilty for that. You are not to blame for that." And he was really stuck at that point.

After that, he seemed to do a whole lot better. And two or three years after, he sent me a card thanking me for what I had said to him. He said that from that moment, what I had said allowed him to deal with that situation. He did not elaborate more. I felt really good when I got the card.

I learned some of this when I worked at Grassroots Leadership. We used to do this exercise, the Cross Over exercise, and I had many questions to ask, like:

Has anyone in this group been fired unjustly from your job?

If you related to the question, you would walk over here, 'cross over'.

Out of 20 people, maybe 7 people walk across. So you would know are not the only one that happened to.

When is the first time you met someone Jewish?

How many of you have someone in your family die by violence?

With this question, just about all the African-Americans came across and none of the Whites did.

One time a lady was crying, about a death in her family, and one of my co-trainers went over to sit with her.

From this training, I noticed that it was important to learn not to leave people alone when they were in an emotional state. **You should not leave people there.**

# What Makes a Good Mentor?

A cursory review of the literature suggests a variety of answers such as “A satisfied mentee.” “A strong sense of self”; “a good listener”; someone “offering support, encouragement and listening”; “a person who is willing to share of themselves;” “mentors try to unite the head and the heart”; “shares knowledge and wisdom and draws out the possibilities;” “it's vision, voice and vocation - building a relationship;” or “someone who can offer advice to me on issues besides academic matters.”

## WHAT MAKES A GOOD MENTOR?

Many people feel that being a mentor requires special skills, but mentors are simply people who have the qualities of good role models.

Mentors listen.	They maintain eye contact and give mentees their full attention.
Mentors guide.	Mentors are there to help their mentees find life direction, never to push them.
Mentors are practical.	They give insights about keeping on task and setting goals and priorities.
Mentors educate.	Mentors educate about life and their own careers.
Mentors provide insight.	Mentors use their personal experience to help their mentees avoid mistakes and learn from good decisions.
Mentors are accessible.	Mentors are available as a resource and a sounding board.
Mentors criticize constructively.	When necessary, mentors point out areas that need improvement, always focusing on the mentee's behavior, never his/her character.
Mentors are supportive.	No matter how painful the mentee's experience, mentors continue to encourage them to learn and improve.
Mentors are specific.	Mentors give specific advice on what was done well or could be corrected, what was achieved and the benefits of various actions.
Mentors care.	Mentors care about their mentees' progress in school and career planning, as well as their personal development.
Mentors succeed.	Mentors not only are successful themselves, but they also foster success in others.
Mentors are admirable.	Mentors are usually well respected in their organizations and in the community.

Courtesy: The Connecticut Mentoring Partnership and the Business and Legal Reports, Inc. — *Best Practices in Human Resources*, Issue 653, and September 30, 1999.  
 Compiled: Dr. John V. Richardson Jr., Associate Dean, UCLA Graduate Division, and August 2005.

# The Mentor – Mentee Relationship

## Is One of Mutual Benefit by Mary Ochs

This story illustrates:

### What's In It For the Mentor?

#### Isabel and Jill's Story

A good mentoring relationship is one in which both mentor and mentee benefit from the interaction, as is the case with any good relationship. It is important to understand the importance of reciprocity. Isabel, an organizer and Associate Director of the Florida Immigrant Coalition, and her mentor Jill Hanson have been in a mentoring relationship for just over 2 years. Although they live about 100 miles apart, they have been meeting at least monthly, usually in person. Jill is not monetarily compensated for her role as Isabel's mentor. I asked if we could interview them separately as a possible case study for this tool kit and they both enthusiastically agreed) So, when I told Isabel how much Jill said she benefited from being Isabel's mentor, Isabel was really (pleasantly) surprised. Here's what Isabel said, "We had great chemistry together from day one, and that continues, but I had not really asked Jill what she was getting out of this," commented Isabel. 'I just know that I feel supported, not isolated and that the trust and depth of our relationship has really grown...we can go really deep."

"Jill has been there for me to talk about organizing strategy but also helped me when I was stressed, unfocused, or down." "She has been a huge support for me." 'Jill's experiences (as a former civil rights and anti-war activist, union leader/organizer and labor lawyer) are so rich that she can always understand, listen and offer some wisdom, often from her own experience and life."

Jill described feeling flattered when Isabel asked her to be her mentor. Jill and Isabel had met at events related to immigrant rights. When the Florida Immigrant Coalition\* urged its staff to each find a mentor Isabel reached out to Jill. As they began their monthly meetings focusing each time on something key that Isabel was working on or struggling with, Jill quickly began to realize that her past experiences were of value to younger organizers and that she found Isabel to be interested and interesting. Jill stated, "I love reflecting back my own experiences and sharing what might have some value to others." "The mentor experience also helps me to re-think things and keeps me fresh." I found have valuable lessons for my own life from some of the stories and struggle that Isabel shares with me."

Isabel adds, "Even though we are from different generations and cultures we share strong faith values, a strong social justice perspective and we are both married women without children." "Our relationship is one of equals and mutuality--Jill does not act like she is lofty and knows more than me."

"And our relationship is pleasurable, otherwise neither of us busy women would make the time."

*\* In late 2009 the Florida Immigrant Coalition asked each of their staff and especially those based away from the Miami office, to find a mentor with the guidance that they should start by thinking about people they admire and who they feel they are not in competition with.*





## Clarity and Accountability in a Mentoring Relationship

By Walter Davis, former Executive Director and currently President, National Organizers Alliance.

*(Note: Walter Davis describes some details of how to develop a specific mentoring relationship, based on his extensive experience. Just as Walter points out here that no one person is the right person for everyone, who makes a mentor will likely be as varied as people (even community and labor organizers are varied.) None of us are automatons, and our needs and styles of mentors will vary.)*



### 1. Terms of the relationship

- a. **Be clear from the outset what the purpose of the mentoring is.** Frame it to be clear about the boundaries. (Know yourself what your boundaries are – e.g. don't want multiple phone calls at home.)
- b. **Be sure both parties are clear what mentoring is** and discuss how each understands that term.
- c. Set a fixed time frame, **what is the commitment of both mentor and mentee?**

### 2. Write it down

- a. Between the mentor and the mentee, **write down what is agreed** in hard copy documents or emails, before the mentorship begins. Define times of meetings, mutual obligations of the two parties, the confidentiality of the process, a general expression of how the process works (i.e. the mentor will not reveal content of discussion to employers).
- b. **Be clear on limits and boundaries.** By setting a limit of hours required and an end date for the relationship, efforts should not be intrusive to the mentor and mentee nor should it be open-ended to the point where it erodes participation. Have agreement for either mentee or mentor to end the mentorship (preferably after an exit discussion).
- c. **If an employer is involved** releasing time for the mentorship, you may need a contractual agreement of the purpose and confidentiality of the process with the employer. If the employer feels ownership of the time and believes the mentorship has value, it is fine to ask for expenses and even a fee payment to the mentor. The employer must also agree to allow the times necessary for discussions between mentor and mentee and to include such in staff planning.

**3. Time is not a deadline.** Setting time limits for the mentorship enables the mentor and mentee to know how long they have to make good use of the relationship. It should be realistic in terms of the issues discussed. Don't just casually extend the time – do so because of clearly defined reasons.

**4. Right Mentor for the Mentee.** Decide if you (mentor) are the right person. Don't be afraid to talk with the mentee about a different mentor for the needs that have arisen. The mentee can also raise this topic and you should not feel dismissed. By asking the question, the mentee is seeking real help from you.

**5. Be clear: this is not about friendship.** A mentor is not the mentee's "BFF" (Best Friend Forever). Nor are you an agent of management or in a supervisor role. That is why it is important to honestly consider whether a mentor can be found inside an organization where there are defined lines of authority and power.

**6. Evaluation.** Along the way, have a **mutual check-in** to reflect on the benefit of the mentoring. The mentor and mentee can exchange feedback about what is of value and, perhaps, what is falling short of expectations. In that way, you can determine if there is a better arrangement is necessary. One thing that can be suggested in an evaluation is whether a new mentoring relationship with someone else is appropriate. Have ideas in place.

**7. Trust and Respect.** Time is mentioned above several times. One point to underline about time is **mutual respect**. When calls or visits are planned, then cancelled, especially if done so frequently, it is disrespectful of the other person and the process itself. It reflects a different set of problems involving time management and accountability. If appointments fail frequently, define the consequences, draw a line where the situation must improve or will end.

## HOW TO FIND A MENTOR?

Finding a mentor for yourself as an organizer is part of your job, just like finding and developing leaders is an important part of your job – and these two tasks have more than a little bit in common. It will take time and effort. You will likely have to talk to many people, and the relationship will take time and effort. Although there is no one way that will always work, we make the following suggestions for finding a mentor.



Self-assessment?  
Do I have to...?



1. **Make it a priority.** Put it in your work-plan, along with everything else you have to do. Don't put it down at the bottom of the list. You know what happens to those things!
2. **Conduct a self-assessment.** What are your strengths and weaknesses? What do you want to learn? Where do you want to grow?
3. **Think about whom you admire.** Look around, who impresses you or gives you some idea that they have something to teach you or know something you would like to know, or just "be" in a way you would like to be. Who is in a position you would like to be in?
4. **Cast a wide net.** Ask everyone you know. If you are an organizer, you know that relationships matter. Ask people you trust: who do you think would be a good mentor for me? Who knows how to do X? Look at ALL your networks, your personal, family and professional networks. What you want to learn may be more personal than technically "professional" – like how do I maintain a family life and a professional career as a mother with a young child?

**5. Then ask someone to be your mentor.** You will likely be surprised that the person you ask will be delighted to help – especially if you are clear about what you are asking for.

6. *Some questions to ask of a potential mentor:*

- What do you think you could offer me as a mentor?
- It seems to me that you have learned something about \_\_\_\_\_. Is that true?
- The issue(s)/ subjects I think I am looking for mentoring are \_\_\_\_\_. Do you think you could be helpful with this?
- I have learned that the best relationships are ones that have reciprocal benefits and clear expectations. What would you as my potential mentor want to get from our relationship?
- What would be some of your expectations of me?
- What is your time availability? (See Model Mentor Agreement in Appendix for more details on this)

7. You will likely need numerous mentors for different purposes at various times in your life and career. Your needs and circumstances will change.

8. Contact Michael Brown (Mjbrown246@gmail.com) to discuss seasoned organizers who may be a good match for you in various part of the country. If we don't have someone where you live, we might know someone who does. Keep at it. Take it easy, but take it.



# Stories

## *Michael Jacoby Brown—My mentors:*

I see mentoring as personal. My mentors as a community organizer were often not community organizers, but showed me a broader context within I do this work. In some cases, they just believed in me, or gave me an intellectual framework that enabled me to think more critically and be more reflective. These are three people, among others, who have been mentors for me.

### **Arnold Langberg**

My first mentor, although I did not have the language at the time, was a high school teacher, Arnold Langberg, in Lynbrook, NY, where I grew up. He was never my class room teacher. I met him for the first time, when, I, who stuttered very badly, tried out for the sophomore play. Arnold was the Director. Somehow I got the lead role in a short play. (My Geometry teacher was incredulous: “How can you try out for a play? You can’t talk.”)

Arnold had also grown up in Lynbrook, a close in suburb of New York on Long Island. He was different from the other teachers. He had attended MIT (instead of the local Catholic college where most of our teachers had gone) and returned to his high school to teach math. Along with his colleague, Dick Powell, who had also grown up in Lynbrook, and also gone to MIT and returned to teach physics, they started an after school club called IOTA. They recruited certain students for an after school and evening program of music, art, literature, movie and discussion.

IOTA, was an oasis of beauty, camaraderie, appreciation, exploration and learning apart from the drab boring high school classes, where most of the teaching was rote. (One social studies teacher read the text book to us during class, all year long, or asked us to do the same. We were tested on our ability memorize facts from the same boring text books.)

As a math teacher, Arnold insisted on teaching math to the “stupid” kids every year, and always enabled them to succeed. He believed that everyone could learn. He never had to tell me this. He lived it.

IOTA was a world apart, and I became intensely loyal to Arnold, Dick and the other IOTA students, which included students from other high school grades. (This was unusual, since we were normally totally separate from students above or below us.) IOTA organized trips to foreign films in New York City, sessions where we listened in the dark to Beethoven, introduced us to poems by Rilke, a book by Victor Frankl, IOTA opened up a world vastly different from the normal Lynbrook High School fare.

When it came time for me to practice my lines in the sophomore play, Arnold invited me to his home, fed me a bologna sandwich and some soup for lunch, while his wife nursed his first-born son in the other room. I had never had a teacher invite me to his home before, and this kind of intimacy, showed me he was a person too, with a home, a wife and a child, and a life outside of school. He was real and willing to share with me what he had.

Arnold also paid me personal attention. When he realized I was too shy to ask anyone out for the junior prom, he asked Jane Platt, another IOTA member who did not have a date, to be my date. Then Arnold and his wife, Dagnija, arranged a double date with me and Jane. He and his wife drove to my house, picked me up, and then drove to Jane’s house. I think he also bought a corsage for me to give to Jane, me. Being too dumb to know I was supposed to do this.

I have now known Arnold for almost 50 years. He went on to lead an alternative school elsewhere in Long Island, then in Evergreen, Colorado, and now lives in Denver. He has been an educator for 60 years, and is listed as one of 30 visionary educators in the USA in a book about education in America. When I call him now, he is always excited to convey his enthusiasm for learning and fixing what is wrong with America's schools and most everything else.

Although I have not become a teacher or worked much with school systems professionally, (except as a public school parent and organizer) his vision and commitment has always been an example for me.

As mentor, as I reflect upon what he did that mentored me. They included:

- He was an older, caring adult who treated me with respect, although I was a kid. He paid attention to me as a person, what I needed in my personal life
- Thru IOTA, he showed me a lot about how to develop the power of community. IOTA has in many ways been my model of a powerful small group, a cohort of like-minded people. Arnold and IOTA showed me how to develop loyalty among a small group, especially when their mission is contrary to the surrounding norms and culture. This is an important lesson for a community organizer or anyone who wants to know how to build an effective team to work for justice, which goes against the powers that be. People who work for social change will always be working against the tide, whether that is a mind-numbing high school or a system that does not value justice, racial equality, or economic security.

Arnold has lived and is living a life of passionate commitment: commitment to learning and believing that anyone can learn. He was also critical of our school system. He has thought critically about how we educate our young and has a critique of the system itself. He saw graduation requirements, testing, teachers having so many students to teach, as antithetic to real learning. And he modeled that one could change this, and he has worked throughout his life to change this in practical ways that work for real people.

Arnold is also a consummate networker. He knows thousands of people and stays in touch with all of them, and helps them stay in touch with each other. After our high school graduation, he organized reunions for our high school class, inviting many of us to have dinner with his family. He has always made us feel special. He was our connector. In later years, if I expressed interest in any topic at all, Arnold would know someone personally who was involved, and likely had been at their home last week, no matter where on the planet it was. All these qualities were a model for me of how I might be a mentor to others. His enthusiasm and passion never wavers. His commitment to people, real people (not some mythical "the people") to connecting people, to practical solutions has always been a model to me.

### **Heather Booth**

I attended the week long training in Chicago of the Midwest Academy about 1979. I had been working as a volunteer activist for many years by this time but had never had any formal training. Here I got the Midwest Academy's fundamentals of classical community organizing. The trainers were good and I enjoyed the company of the other trainees. Heather stood out mostly because she took a personal interest in me. It was not so much that she told me anything specific, but more that she seemed to think I was worth spending time with, and was available to me when I had questions.

Her being available whenever I had a question made her, in my mind, a mentor. Heather is always thinking about how to move the work for justice forward. Anyone in the field of community or labor organizing who knows Heather, and many do, know she is intense, intelligent and always ready to listen, help, and show up when asked. What I most remember, and made her a mentor rather than an instructor, was just that she took an interest in me and was willing to take the time to talk, even though she was obviously very busy. One time during that training week, I had something I wanted to talk to her about, and she had to go to the Chicago airport to pick up William Winpingsinger, the President of the Machinists Union. She suggested I come along in the cab ride to the airport, since that was the only time she had, and of course I did. Over the 30 plus years since then, whenever I have called her to ask her about something, she would get back to me right away. When I was thinking of doing some leadership training with a colleague, she invited my colleague and me to breakfast to her home in DC to talk about it and encouraged us. She was always encouraging.

Heather modeled for me how to be a community organizer: to be available, to take the time to listen and encourage others, to believe in people, to not be “too busy” for anyone who has a question or an idea they want to talk about. Heather’s commitment, thoughtfulness, interest in learning, willingness to work with others, fight for what she believed in, work hard, get up early and stay up late to get the work done, were a model for me. That made her a mentor. We never had any specific agreement, but reflecting back on what she did, I know I learned a lot from Heather Booth.

### **Chris Argyris**

Chris was a well-known senior professor of organizational behavior at the Harvard Business School, more than twenty years ago, when I took a year off to attend Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government. A friend who had studied extensively with Argyris encouraged me to take whatever class he was teaching. He was teaching a doctoral seminar at the Business School and I enrolled in that. I don’t think I took the class officially, but went to see him and asked permission to attend. He quickly agreed to let me attend. I stayed in the seminar for about 3 years doing all the work, until he told me, reluctantly; I could no longer attend because I was not a HBS student.

Chris was not a community organizer, but he had developed and taught theories about organizations, how they learn, and how to communicate effectively. He opened up a whole world of the science and theories of organizational behavior – some of which I had vaguely intuited from my years as a community organizer. But Chris helped put those impressions into a solid theoretical framework.

He was also a great teacher, who challenged people directly and was always intellectually honest and would never agree to some idea without testing it. He always wanted what he called “the directly observable data” to back up any idea or theory. He always challenged me to think critically about the sacred cows of organizing, or any other assumptions for that matter. He taught me never to assume people would think or behave in a certain way, but always test my assumptions and make my “theories in action” explicit. I loved the rigor of his thinking and teaching.

In his teaching he always would challenge us to examine our specific behavior and speech. We often spent days in sessions, tape-recording our dialogues, playing them back, and criticizing how we “crafted the dialogue.” I remember one time when a woman in the seminar, who had worked for a corporation in South Africa during apartheid, asked a *question* to her boss about how Blacks were treated in the company. She thought they were being mistreated. Chris asked her why she asked the question instead of expressing her

own opinion and asking her boss what he thought. (He calls this “advocacy with inquiry.” Part of his “Model II” form of discourse that endeavors to treat ourselves and others with respect and intellectual honesty) and he did it in a calm way, just asking the question. He showed me how we often dis-empower ourselves unnecessarily. He also showed me that we can express our opinion (advocacy) while respecting the opinions of others (inquiry). His relentless quest for honest and direct dialogue taught me so much about how to speak and how to teach others. He showed me how to use exactly what people say in a class, workshop or session to make a powerful teachable moment. He taught me the power of understanding our own thinking and theories, examining them and questioning our assumptions.

Too often in our organizing work, we hold on to certain theories or tactics when they clearly are not effective. Maybe they worked in the past, but need examination now. Chris taught me to be dispassionate about our action while being passionate about our effectiveness.

He taught me never to assume people will think or behave a certain way, to listen to understand people’s assumptions and their “theories in action.” This intellectual foundation has helped me to think critically and be more reflective. Chris also has always been personally available. Although he was a famous chaired professor who consulted with Fortune 50 companies and heads of state, he had time for me. I will never forget one time when I had a phone appointment at 9 a.m. I waited until 9:02 to call him, thinking he might need a minute or two to settle into his office at HBS. At 9:01 he called me to ask me where my phone call was. Of course I was mortified that I had kept him waiting. He taught me to always return my phone calls and make time for people who ask for it. When people tell me they are too busy (a prevalent Boston disease) to answer phone calls, I think of Chris Argyris, who was sought after by CEO’s of major corporations but was not too busy to be on time for me.

Years later, when I was writing a book, I sent the first chapter to Chris, especially because it had a chapter on the theory of organizations. Chris was always ready and willing to read and comment on anything I wrote. “I am a reader,” he said to me. He quickly commented that he thought my comments were inaccurate. I deleted those pages, even though I had spent days working on them. Chris would always tell the truth and assume this was what people wanted to hear. (Many do not.) But my book is a lot stronger because of the stuff Chris suggested I delete. Chris’ honesty saved me from embarrassing myself.

20 years later, when he is still consulting and writing at 85 years of age, I called him to ask his advice about a fund-raising question, and he set a time quickly to meet me at the Harvard Business School. I had not seen or talked to him for many years. He remembered me and was ready to meet. We walked together around the Harvard Business School

He was in great physical shape, still mowing his lawn with an old push mower he told me, getting exercise every day, still trim and fit. His mind was as quick and sharp as it was 20 years before. His advice, as usual, was sharp and to the point. Don’t make untested assumptions. Go for the data. Find people who are good informants about what I looking for uncover. All good advice, direct and straight-forward.

I asked him, how he stays interested and active all these years. “Find something you love and stick with it,” he told me. It was good advice, what Chris would call “usable knowledge.” His ability to communicate in this way made him a great teacher to me. I try to follow his advice, and sometimes suggest it to others.

## What my mentors have in common/Michael Jacoby Brown

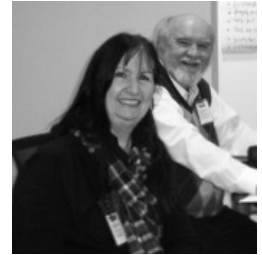


When I think of what all these mentors above had in common, I see they:

- All made time for me and were easily available when I wanted to ask them something.
- They modeled behavior that I respected: working hard, being intellectually honest, not following the crowd in a rote manner, thinking critically.
- Being in good physical shape, paying attention to the bodies as well as their minds
- They all paid attention to me as a person, an individual, and seemed to believe in me, that I had worth.

## Mary Ochs Shares Some Thoughts on Mentoring:

When I started out I did not receive any training or mentoring. Eventually I learned about and got connected to the (IAF) Industrial areas Foundation), but there were not many women, I had a mentor, Peter Martinez, who was on the staff of the IAF. He was enormously helpful. He would challenge me, and also be sensitive and supportive. He would agitate me and push me. He was great on helping me think bigger on strategy and tactics.



Once when our organization was having trouble getting a meeting with the Mayor of Indianapolis, Peter suggested a brazen idea. The mayors were having a conference in Miami. Peter suggested we call the hotel, tell them it was urgent that we talk to him and to have him paged. It worked! One of our leaders got him on the phone and set up a meeting I learned a lot from Peter. He also said to me that I brought in a whole different side to organizing because I really went deep with leaders and told me that I was good in many ways. We would have regular talks which really advanced by skill and confidence.

I see the benefit of how mentoring helped me. The pivotal moment for me was when I worked the Center for Community Change and was asked to do a basic training in organizing for immigrant rights groups in LA. 101 staff and organizers showed up for an introductory organizer training session we offered. During the training, I asked who had had some training in organizing before. I mentioned some of the training programs that are out there. Not one hand went up. No one had had any training. It felt all too familiar to my first years as an organizer. The organizers were hungry to learn and to talk but usually had no one with experience to talk to.

I think this “sink or swim” attitude is common. I often hear it. It stuck with me. I felt that the training was just a start and that if some of these folks did not get more help and mentoring, we would likely lose them as organizers. So I decided to bring together a subset of the group into a cohort for further training and peer learning and support. We met monthly, they had opportunities to observe other experienced organizers at work and to be observed in their work and I helped them find a mentor. All but one of the cohort members is still an organizer.

Mary also said that mentoring keeps her on her toes. “It makes you question every assumption. Made me re-think things. I get questions back to me that are really hard.” Mary said that some networks provide supervision, with maybe some mentoring. They will mentor you in their way they currently do things. That makes sense. Great organizations should mentor their staff. But there is also great value in having additional mentor(s) and role models from outside the immediate organization. external mentors will bring an independent view or exposure to approaches different from how the network approaches base building, leadership development, action, strategy etc. It’s valuable to have a mentor that outside the organization or network.



Sarah McKenzie & Mary Ochs



**Roger Newell:** In high school, our faculty advisor was singled out. The principal tried to withdraw his draft deferment. We supported the teacher, shut the school down. We worked closely with the teachers' union; there was a representative from the International who was assigned to work with the teachers, who also took an interest in the students. They moved to remove the principal from the school. It was the first victory that the Washington DC teachers union had won.



We students decided to set up our own school and demand that we get academic credit for it. We worked with the rep from the AFT to design the curriculum, and used the teachers' union contract as our guide. This rep took a leave of absence from the AFT to teach community organizing. She helped me to formulate the idea of organizing as a means of social change. We got a lot of help from DC-based civil rights veterans.

Now, years later, I have put together a collaborative of mentors for me. They have expertise in vary areas, and I use them as a sounding board, and to help me to make sure I am on solid footing regarding various issues. So now there are people I touch base with, so the strategy and tactics make sense and won't piss off people.

Why me now as a mentor? I think it is important that young people get some protective armor so their enthusiasm isn't ruined by the people in charge of unions who try to stomp out the creativity in young people. Mentoring also makes sure to see that the mentor remains relevant, so you don't become obsolete, a movement dinosaur. In terms of me, it keeps my approach to practice alive. Mentoring helps organizers who will push the envelope, who will be, as Shirley Chisholm used to say "unbought and unbossed." What Harry Reid (Senator, D-Nevada) said about Obama ("light skinned", "no Negro accent"), was not a slip of the lip; it is a part of his mental process. It defined Reid's comfort zone when dealing with African Americans. It defined who was worthy of Reid's outreach and cooperation. It is important to keep your mental process open to include the world view of the person who you are mentoring and be ready to learn from his or her experience. This process will help you sort through your own ideas and notions, casting the biased and incorrect item into the dust bin. It is reflected in policy and legislation. Important not to lose your ideas - it is important not lose the importance of addressing issues of people of color and women.

Roger added, "For me, my parents played an important role. In Drylongso, the ordinariness, the day to day realities of life, are important to me. My parents were always a litmus test for me. And when they gave their stamp of approval to the hell raising, that mattered, and later they would come to me. And when there were problems in the neighborhoods, they might say, "Come see my son."

*AFT=American Federation of Teachers*



*Small group discussion at Highlander Research and Education Center, 75th Anniversary, 2007*



**Sarah McKenzie** (Director of Trade Union Strengthening Department at American Center for International Labor Solidarity, former Director, AFL-CIO Organizing Institute)

Vernon Watkins\* has been my mentor for a long time. It is good that with changes in the AFL-CIO, he knows the players has experience with the players, he let me know when there are problems, "it is not just you." He asks me questions about what is going on. He does not just give me the answers, but helps me to come up with the answers. He checks me. I was talking about leaving once, and he said, "Just don't do that." Once he said, "A budget is a statement of intent." So, when I don't see something in his budget, I know that that is important.

He has been my mentor for about 10 years. He picked me to mentor. One day, he called me to his office.. He said, "Look it, you are a really smart young lady, and I want you to know that if you need anything just come see me." He would start checking in with me. If I saw him at a convention, he would ask me to lunch. He would call me over the holidays, and say: "Go shopping, I know you are really cheap. Go shopping."

For a long time he was Bill Lucy's\*\* right hand man and I didn't think I could just hang with him.

Why do I want to do this? I have been doing this for 15 years, I started out at SEIU, then they started this mentoring program, they just gave us mentors. When I became a lead, I used to have breakfast at my house for the organizers. I think this made a world of difference to them. Now I see more and more people who are going in and out of organizing, don't' have mentors.

\*Vernon Watkins, Director American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)

\*\*William Lucy, International Secretary-Treasurer, AFSCME, AFL-CIO Executive Council, former president of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists



**Walter Davis:** A key mentor was Georgia Powers Davis, an African-American community leader in Louisville when I was in high school. She saw that the Democratic party would not give African-Americans many opportunities, so we started a reform group, and I was part of a bi-racial teen group. There were few integrated teen groups at the time. Georgia hired me, at 15, to organize the kids. She treated me with respect, as a person, She trained me and trusted me to do the things I

could do. She taught me that we could work together, black and white, and called me out if I made mistakes. We did not talk much about the fact that we were such an unusual thing, being black and white. We turned out hundreds and hundreds of new voters and did voter education together. It was a clear issue of justice. We organized and changed the party boss structure in two years. As a mentor, she did not treat me as a child. She treated me as a person with reasonable views who could receive constructive criticism. She introduced me to creative tactics such as the voter registration drives when we got a fire truck and drove around. People came to us to find out what was up. Personal relationships are absolutely critical. That was the core of what she taught me. Even though we had differences later, over the war in Vietnam, I have always owed her for the gifts she shared with me.

Georgia became the first African-American and first woman state Senator in the Kentucky legislature.

\*IAF = Industrial Areas Foundation

# Model Mentor Agreement

This is a tool designed to assist mentors and mentees in brainstorming options for collaboration. The activities are based on the best practices outlined in this monograph.

Supervisors or informal mentors may also find this exercise helpful.

For the quarter beginning and ending:

A. Identify three ways you can improve or supplement the employee's orientation to the field, community, organization, etc.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

B. Using a self-assessment, 360-degree inventory, or a previous performance review, identify three traits or intrinsic strengths of the mentee to leverage and three weaknesses or areas for development.

Strengths:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Weaknesses:

- 1.

C. Identify three competencies (knowledge areas or skills) to develop over the upcoming year.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

D. Identify three topics of mutual interest (issues, ideas, events, problems/challenges, etc.) for discussion.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

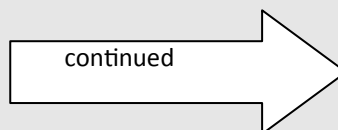
E. Brainstorm three possible developmental or stretch assignments.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

F. Networking: Identify contacts to make, informational interviews to conduct, shadowing opportunities, meetings in which to include the mentee, and other networking opportunities.

Contacts to make/informational interviews:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



Shadowing opportunities:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Meetings or strategy sessions in which to include mentee:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Other networking opportunities:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

G. Generate a list of opportunities or resources for each category below.

1. Conferences, workshops, seminars, courses:
2. Professional memberships, peer groups:
3. Books, articles, reports, subscriptions:
4. Web sites:
5. Listservs:

H. Identify three dangers or situations where caution and care are needed.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

I. Formulate together a long-term career objective or goal and the next three steps toward accomplishing it.

Objective:

Next steps:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

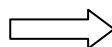
J. Identify three ways the mentor will benefit from the relationship.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

K. List other possible mentors for the employee and what the possible foci for learning and support will be:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Review the ideas you have generated together through brainstorming, and decide which ones you will use in your Learning and Mentoring Plan (LAMP) for the upcoming quarter of your relationship. Brainstorm again and revise your plan at the end of each quarter.



Date:  
Employee's Name:  
Proposed Mentor(s):  
Learning Objectives/Anticipated Outcomes:  
Learning Strategies, Activities, and Opportunities:  
Format, Frequency, and Duration of Interactions:  
Employee's Signature:  
Mentor's(s') Signature(s):

Please attach a curriculum vitae, resume, or short bio for the mentor(s).

We the undersigned agree to meet regularly to undertake the mentoring activities described in the attached plan and to allocate at least \_\_\_\_\_ hours per \_\_\_\_\_ to the mentoring relationship.

We will typically meet on the \_\_\_\_\_ of each month.

When there is a scheduling conflict, we will follow this protocol or process:

- ◆ We agree to respect each other's confidentiality and reputations in our work together.
- ◆ We will interface with the employee's direct supervisor in the following ways:

Mentor:

Mentee:

Other terms of our agreement are:

We will review and revise our learning and mentoring plan every three months.

Should the mentoring relationship not be working out for any reason, either party may withdraw. This is a "no fault" exit. The employee may identify an alternative mentor.

Either party may seek advice on improving the effectiveness of his or her mentoring relationship from: (name, phone number, e-mail address).\*

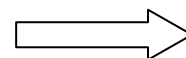
Mentor's Signature: Date:

Mentee's Signature: Date:

*\*This person should not be the mentee's direct supervisor.*

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*Organizers from Los Angeles and Long Beach came together for 2 day Basic Organizer training. 9/16-17/2011. The Filipino Migrant Center co-hosted the training with NOA. For info about mentoring cohort there, contact Mary Ochs via [info@noacentral.org](mailto:info@noacentral.org).*

## NEED FOR RENEWAL

“The social change community needs to make certain that its institutions provide the resources and supports necessary to keep this important synergy between work and personal growth alive and active. With these two in balance, the work of social change will prosper. If, however, funders and nonprofit organizations sanction self-sacrifice and victimize their own with unrealistic expectations and too little support, the flip side of working from core values will take over. When activists have only their passion to fuel their work, the endpoint is martyrdom or, in today’s parlance, burnout. Both refer to a commitment that turns in on itself and devours the individual.” Page 133, Susan Wells, *Changing Course: Windcall and the Art of Renewal*. Heydey Books, Berkeley CA 2007



**Attica Scott, left, in role play as a public official. Ashland, KY 2007 Organizing Training of Southern Empowerment Project and Kentucky Jobs With Justice (the latter of which Scott was director). Scott became a Louisville Metro Council official in 2011.**



**Icebreaker at NOA Gathering 2007**



## Isn't Mentoring Just Another Form of Coaching?

We hear questions about the difference between coaching and mentoring. There is a lot of overlap between the two and yet at the same time I see them as very distinct things. From my view, mentoring comes from a place of experience and wisdom. Mentors often are in the same field as the individual and can share their own personal and professional experiences in a way that the individual can relate to and gain something to inform their own situation. Mentors also may use their own personal connections and professional networks to help open doors for the individual. Often mentors will use coaching type skills in their relationship with the individual.



Coaches don't necessarily have to have direct experience in the field of the individual. A coach tries to focus entirely on the individual without bringing his/her own experience or perspective into the relationship with the individual. If a coach happens to have some experience that may pertain to the individual's situation at hand, they should share that information but we suggest that they tell the individual that they are taking off their coach hat and putting on their mentor hat.

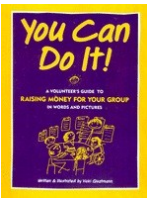
***Janet Nami McIntyre, certified coach, and Mary Ochs, consultant/mentor***



## **ONLINE AND OTHER RESOURCES:**

1. **What's Next? Baby Boom-Age Leaders in Social Change Nonprofits**/Author: Building Movement Project [http://www.buildingmovement.org/artman/uploads/what\\_s\\_next\\_001.pdf](http://www.buildingmovement.org/artman/uploads/what_s_next_001.pdf)
2. **Ready to Lead? Next Generation Leaders Speak Out** Author (s): CompassPoint Nonprofit Services, Annie E. Casey Foundation, and Meyer Foundation [www.meyerfoundation.org/downloads/ready\\_to\\_lead/ReadytoLead2008.pdf](http://www.meyerfoundation.org/downloads/ready_to_lead/ReadytoLead2008.pdf)
3. **Supporting Next-Generation Leadership**/Author: Grantmakers for Effective Organizations  
URL: <http://www.geofunders.org/geopublications.aspx>
4. **Investing in Leadership: A Grantmaker's Framework for Understanding Nonprofit Leadership Development** Author: Grantmakers for Effective Organizations  
<http://www.geofunders.org/geopublications.aspx>
5. **Building Movement: Inspiring Activism in the Nonprofit Community: Generational Leadership Listening Sessions** Author: The Building Movement Project  
[http://www.buildingmovement.org/artman/uploads/glls\\_report.pdf](http://www.buildingmovement.org/artman/uploads/glls_report.pdf)
6. **Elements of Effective Practice**/Author: Mentor, National Mentoring Partnership  
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10. **Mentoring for gender equality and organizational change** Author: Jennifer de Vries and Claire Webb  
URL: [www.emeraldinsight.com/0142-5455](http://www.emeraldinsight.com/0142-5455)
11. **Evaluating Outcomes and Impacts: A Scan of 55 Leadership Development Programs**, Author: W.K. Kellogg Foundation [http://leadershiplearning.org/system/files/Evaluating+Outcomes+and+Impacts\\_0.pdf](http://leadershiplearning.org/system/files/Evaluating+Outcomes+and+Impacts_0.pdf)
12. **Ready...Set...MENTOR! A Speed Mentoring Toolkit** University of Kentucky President's Commission on Women <http://www.uky.edu/PCW/Speed%20Mentoring%20Toolkitfinal.pdf>

*Typos and other corrections: If you see a mistake, mistyping, messed up copy, etc., drop us a line at [info@noacentral.org](mailto:info@noacentral.org)*

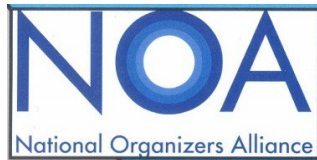
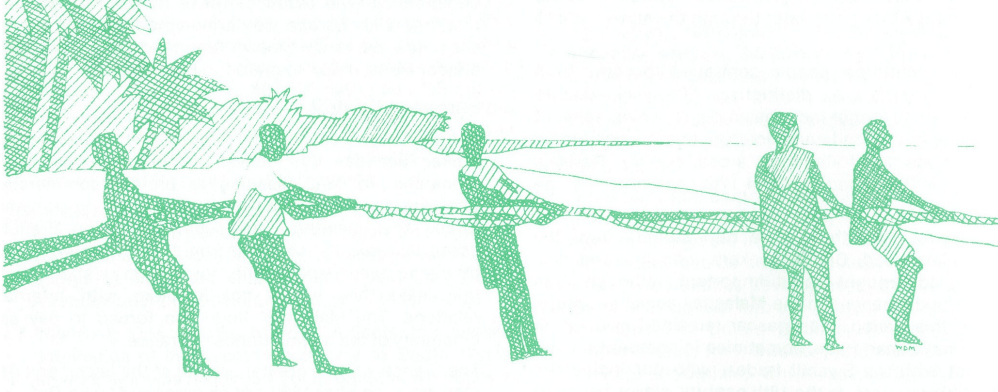


*Graphics: most line graphics in this publication originally appeared in the grassroots fundraising book *You Can Do It!* edited by Vicki Quatmann and published by the Southern Empowerment Project. You can order *You Can Do It!* or its Spanish language version *Si, Todos Podemos!* from the Appalachian Community Fund <http://www.appalachiancommunityfund.org/html/pubs.html>*

*The fishing graphic on back cover is from the book *An African Abstract* (used by permission of the authors Susan White and Dennis Lewycky. Artist Wendy (nee Mcintosh) Manning, publisher Manitoba Council for International Cooperation.)*

# Mentor Tool Kit

## for Social Justice Organizers



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