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- Great mentorships can literally change the course of a career and life.
- Formal programs must recognize the personality factor in pairings, clashing personalities will kill a pairing before its even begun.



Spencer Jaskiewicz, AIA
NCARB LEED Green Associate, is a Project Architect and Associate at Stantec Architecture in Berkley. He graduated with his Masters from the University of Detroit Mercy in 2015. Spencer specializes in taking projects from conception through completion, having worked with clients such as Carhartt, Little Caesars, Olympia Development, and Disney, among others. Spencer regularly volunteers his time as a member of the AIA Emerging Professionals Committee, as Past Chair of Construction Detroit, and as President of the UDM Architecture Alumni Council.

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The Value of Mentorship

Spencer Jaskiewicz, AIA, NCARB; Stantec

“Raise your hand if you have been able to succeed solely through your own knowledge, skill, and work ethic.” Imagine sitting in Ford Field during a sold-out crowd and a speaker made this request; I doubt there would be a single hand raised in the stadium. No one comes out of high school, college, trade school, or an apprenticeship knowing how to do everything they do today. The fact of the matter is we are where we are because of the people around us who have shared their knowledge, gave encouragement, and pushed us to be the best version of ourselves!

The word mentorship is a common one in any business. It is one of the “business buzzwords” that many preach but fail to practice. In today’s world mentorship can be viewed as a drain on both personal and business time. In many situations where mentors and mentees are paired the connection fails to materialize or grab hold due to conflicting personalities, lack of preparedness by one or both parties, and lack of an overarching goal for the pairing. With so many things that can go wrong it’s easy to be discouraged as a mentor or mentee, but the benefits from a great mentorship far outweigh the potential negatives.

Great mentorships can literally change the course of a career and life. Personally, mentorship has been immensely impactful in helping me achieve the success I have. I would be nowhere close to where I am today without mentors, both official and informal, helping guide, council, and encourage me. I’ve picked my mentors brains on everything from how to draw a detail, to contract negotiations and client management, to handling a mistake that will undoubtedly cost my employer some money. I know my story on mentorship is not unique—far from it actually—which speaks volumes to the importance that mentorship plays in our lives.

The best mentorship pairings are where both parties benefit from the relationship. In these pairings the mentor and mentee will each begin to recognize their own abilities and limitations, pushing each other to exceed expectations in both. In some cases, the script may be flipped, and the mentee might excel in an area where the mentor is limited, becoming the mentor for that certain item. One great example of this in the AEC industry would be the immense knowledge of construction and design technology platforms younger staff typically have in comparison to a more seasoned professional. Studies have shown that through recognizing their weaknesses mentors and mentees have pushed each other to better themselves at a higher rate than those without a support system. Other studies have shown an increase in communication skills and increases in productivity. In some cases when mentors and mentees share a workplace an increase in advocacy by the mentor for the mentee as



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well as by the mentee for the mentor has been shown! These are just some of the benefits of a great mentorship. The list of benefits individually to mentors, mentees, and businesses could fill the pages of a book the size of the Harry Potter series combined.

With all these benefits, how can we make sure pairings succeed? Formal programs must recognize the personality factor in pairings, clashing personalities will kill a pairing before its even begun. Formal programs must also have a way to recognize similar goals between potential mentors and mentees since these goals will be the bedrock of the relationship. Pairings that are within 10 years of age also have a tendency to be successful where there is a linear career progression. In architecture, pairings such as new grad with recently licensed architect, or a firm associate with a principal, generally have a higher rate of success. Informal mentor pairings tend to take the above into account as a baseline. As human beings we naturally gravitate towards people who we get along with and have similar goals or have achieved a level of success we are working towards. Due of the natural way informal mentorships form they have been shown to have a higher satisfaction rate and tend to create long lasting relationships between mentor and mentee.

It's been said that in architecture that there is only one new architecture professional for every two retirements. We've heard for years, if not decades now, how we need more people to go into the construction trades. Lack of tradespeople is such as problem that popular tv programs are working to promote these fields. PBS program This Old House now regularly showcases their young apprentices, and TV personality Mike Rowe has established the Mike Rowe Works Foundation which promotes and provides scholarship for those going into the trades. This lack of new blood is causing labor shortages and skill gaps that will continue to be issues into the future. In the AEC industry we can use mentorship to pass along our skill and knowledge to current young professionals as well as use it to build future generations.

We can build our future by promoting, supporting, and mentoring in programs for K-12 education. Donating our time by regularly going to elementary schools to give talks and to get kids excited by promoting or running programs with hands on activities. We can also encourage young people to shadow us for a day or a week to see what we do on a day to day basis. We can also promote and support programs such as drafting, art, and building trades classes which are being squeezed out as school budgets and curriculums get ever more restrictive. More visibility and knowledge of our craft will further our causes and produce a greater number of students who want to go into our professions.



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With the benefits mentorship provides to our personal growth, professional growth, and to the future of our professions, we all must actively participate as a mentor or mentee. Sign up today if your office has program or join one of the many professional and industry programs available. AIA Michigan's student mentorship program is always looking for more mentors to pair with the large numbers of college student mentees they have. If your passion is K-12 become a mentor in your local ACE (Architecture, Construction, Engineering) Program. If you don't have access to a formal program at your office or organization take the lead and create one or form an informal pairing with someone you look up to!