The Accidental Mentor

You may be someone's mentor right now and be totally unaware of it. Someone may be looking up to you because you're a seasoned member or have a managerial title at the office. It might be that you have answered their questions or helped them find a solution to a problem. Maybe it's because you served in a leadership position at your local association. Whether you know it or not, someone could be modeling their personal and professional development right now on the example you set.

You may not feel that you have the time or energy to commit to being in a formal mentoring relationship but you have the opportunity to be someone's mentor everyday just by being a good role model. Whether you are at the office, at a local association meeting or attending the IAIP Convention, your words and actions are how others measure your value as a person and as a role model. If you are seen to have positive attributes like being approachable, helpful or knowledgeable, others will want to emulate your behavior. You are helping them with their development without realizing it.

Since we all have the potential to be an 'accidental mentor', it is imperative that we conduct ourselves in a positive and professional manner whenever we are in the public. Exhibiting unprofessional behavior like chatting or texting while a speaker is doing a presentation, spreading rumors, bullying or complaining about everything, can have various negative impacts. If you are already in a position of leadership, others may interpret your unprofessional behavior as being acceptable and possibly the vehicle you used to obtain that leadership position. This is definitely not the message a mentor should be projecting. Another possible result is that others will view you in a negative light and they are likely to share that view with their peers. This could hamper your own progress at the office or in the association.

Being someone's mentor is an extraordinary opportunity whether it is in a formal arrangement or by simply being a good role model. Every time you conduct yourself in a friendly and professional manner you are providing others with an example of how to model their own behavior in a positive way. When you make a conscious decision to consistently act as a positive role model, you can evolve from being just an accidental mentor to becoming a deliberate mentor. You will then be an even more effective role model and will be enhancing your own future prospects by being viewed in a positive light by everyone you come into contact with. This is the beauty of mentoring; both parties gain from the experience. It is what makes mentoring, accidentally, deliberately or formally, a truly a 'win-win' relationship.