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The Life-Changing Power of Mentorship

AS I NOTED in my last column, IIBEC is opening applications this fall for our new mentorship program, which will launch in 2024. From personal experience, I know that mentor-mentee relationships can be critical to career success, and I believe that IIBEC's program will be an excellent way to build these relationships.

My first mentor was Jerry Abendroth. I was working for WJE and was several years into my career when he joined the firm. Immediately, I noticed that we both prioritized critical thinking and problem solving, but his "big picture" approach was remarkable. I also noticed that clients specifically sought *his* expertise, and not just that of the firm. Initially, I went to Jerry for guidance on projects. Soon, I also looked to him for guidance about my career, and a lifelong relationship was formed.

Some may have been surprised that Jerry and I built a successful mentor-mentee relationship because there were certain obvious differences between us. He was not an engineer and did not have a STEM-based college degree. He was not a female. He was not a single mother. However, Jerry was actually a great mentor for me specifically *because* of our differences. His diverse background and experience taught me new perspectives, additional priorities and considerations, and an overall inclusive approach to projects. I learned so much from him because he had real field experience managing, estimating, and performing the work that I and other engineers designed.

I also admired Jerry for leading a life of service both professionally and personally. He always considered projects from not only the client's viewpoint but also from the perspectives of all the team members. His diverse background informed his comprehensive and inclusive project approach, which was a key aspect of what drove his clients to seek him out. That service-based, client-focused,

comprehensive, team approach was what I wanted to emulate in my career (and in my life).

When other leaders mentored me, the relationships did not extend much beyond a single project or company initiative. These professionals had similar backgrounds to mine and worked in my division, but their focus was often on the project, the firm, or their own goals, not my career development. In contrast, in Jerry, I found a counterpart who respected me as an equal, a peer who truly listened to me, and an advocate who was invested in supporting my career development.

My commitment to IIBEC is the result of Jerry's mentorship feedback. To help me achieve my goal to become a more well-rounded building enclosure consultant, Jerry suggested that I take IIBEC education courses on roofing and waterproofing. As my knowledge and skills grew, Jerry encouraged me to obtain IIBEC (and other industry) credentials. To help me grow my network and become a leader in our profession, Jerry encouraged me to volunteer within IIBEC (and other industry organizations) at the local chapter and national level. Jerry gave me guidance and challenged me throughout my career, and his support is a large part of who and where I am in my career today.

I think everyone should have the opportunity to have a mentor as amazing as Jerry. IIBEC's mentorship program will facilitate connections between mentors and mentees so they can build mentoring relationships that are truly fulfilling. I hope many of you will participate. I'm also eager to hear from you how IIBEC can help ensure that the mentoring relationships between IIBEC members are successful.

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