

Anthony Aramburo Presentation

Translation provided by Kathryn Bennett, MA, CI

1. Mentoring Relationships

Hi, my name is Anthony Aramburo. Today, my topic deals with mentoring individuals who are African American. My presentation will focus on three areas: mentoring relationships, functioning as a mentor, and phases of mentoring relationships. What exactly is the mentoring relationship? I've heard people say they want to become a mentor or that they need a mentor. How exactly do we get to become one of those mentors? Let's look at the word 'mentor'. It's taken from a Greek word used in mythology and the word itself means a relationship between a younger and an older individual. The older person has more experience and helps the younger person through learning, working or navigating their way through a particular field.

Now I'd like to talk about mentoring in our field of interpreting. The first thing I want to talk about is the development of a mentoring relationship. Mentoring is important for success within the African American community. Many African Americans come into the profession of interpreting and often we recognize that many of them are not certified or lack an understanding of what it really means to be an interpreter. And we want some way to help them understand and help them navigate in order to understand how to become successful in the field of interpreting. Keep in mind that there are many variables for determining how successful an African American becomes in an ITP, in pursuing certification or as an interpreter. There are some things that you need to become aware of regarding the African American community. First, there is a lot of pressure coming not only from society in general, but also from institutional racism.

Let me talk first about societal pressures. Societal pressures within the African American community relate to individuals who have to work and go to school to get a degree in order to attain certification. Also, there are cultural differences within the black or African American community. Those kinds of societal pressures are not necessarily present in all communities. The idea is that first there is family. Learning styles is something that can also become more strained in a relationship. Also, my reference base as an African American individual is different from another person who is coming from a different culture.

Now, I'd like to focus on institutional racism. Institutional racism relates to how black or African Americans are treated when they go into an ITP, for instance. When working with several black students at an ITP, I feel there are more pressures for them in school. For example, a teacher might tell them that they may not be successful at this and ask if they have considered another profession. Or, the student may experience disbelief on the part of others that the student wants to become an interpreter. Things like that... And those interpreters who are successful in graduating from the program go out and work in the field for, let's say, a referral agency. The agency won't hire them, or won't call them or will not refer them for specific jobs. We in the black interpreting community have noticed that there is a lot of interpreting for us in February, and the reason for that is because it is Black History Month. Interpreters want to feel that they can go out and work and will be called for a variety of jobs throughout the year, not just for February. We can see more sensitivity in terms of interpreter referral and also the agencies themselves in how they contact black and African American interpreters.

When we talk about the development of relationships, something to consider is having two people working together who are similar in age. And that is so that there is too much disparity in the relationship, but rather they can look at each other as somewhat of equals. That similarity in age doesn't always happen all the time, though. Knowing some of the cultural things in the African American culture that relate to age is relevant. For example, respect for one's elders. If I am a younger interpreter, I will look up to an older interpreter. If the positions are reversed, however, and a younger person is mentoring and older person, there is a need to understand how that will effect and influence the dynamics. Age, therefore, is an important consideration when working with the African American community. Ideally, we want to have people of the same race working together in a mentorship relationship, so that an African American is mentoring another African American. That would be perfect. But, there is the difficulty of not having enough African Americans who can serve as mentors for the number of African Americans coming into the field. There is also the consideration of gender and if the mentor and mentee are of the same sex. One

thing to keep in mind is that when we talk about the different sexes, a male point of view will be different from a female point of view. The idea is that it will not always be a male-male mentorship or a female-female mentorship, but men and women working together both as either mentors or mentees. Personal relationships with role models, such as mentors, are necessary for African Americans entering the field. Not only do we see the mentor as a role model, but that person is also taking on the additional responsibility of helping encourage that mentee in the profession.

The mentoring relationship itself involves several things. In the African American community, confidentiality is really important. So, I see the mentoring relationship as becoming a confidential relationship. Confidentiality is a foundation which I can't risk. The last thing a mentee wants to hear about is their own experiences from other people within the community. The hope is that the mentor keeps everything that occurs in that relationship confidential. The confidential relationship is a big priority. The second thing about a mentoring relationship is that both people who are partaking in the relationship, that is the mentor and the mentee, have a mutual desire for development. It's important that they both want to grow within the relationship. If the mentor says that they are involved because of their agency, or someone asked and they didn't want to say no, then their heart is really not there. When that happens the person feels very sensitive to the issue of making the relationship more and more valuable for both individuals. If that kind of mutual desire is not there, then the mentee will feel that and then negative things may happen as a result. Individuals may feel as if they really don't want to be there.

While I mention that the mentor must have a desire to be there in the relationship, the same thing goes for the mentee. That person must be willing themselves to participate in this kind of program. In all cultures, and especially in the African American culture, we see a need for some kind of mentoring program. When we have that mutual desire and understanding, we can see the potential for success and achievement. Both the mentor and the mentee must have goals that they are working towards in terms of professional development. The mentor needs to allow the mentee opportunities to think and to use critical thinking skills in developing specific goals or particular areas that they want to work on. They need to challenge the mentee and let that person have the opportunity to see things and do things in a different way. Oftentimes, we see that people have only one way of thinking. But, it's important to let that mentee engage in different kinds of thinking. The end result is that the goals are satisfied, both the mentor and mentee will have an opportunity for dialogue and discussion, and to see how we can achieve success as a team.

There is also the need to encourage the mentee to do things their own way. I'm talking about how there is more than one way to do something. That person needs to develop their own ideas and strategies that allow them to accomplish the goals that they want in order to become successful. Within the African American community, attitude goes a long way. If an African American person feels as if they are actively involved and participating, as opposed to a person who is ousted, that very much impacts their ability to achieve something. In my own personal experience, when I am on a team and I'm encouraging participation from the mentees, I myself feel more motivated and willing to participate and more creative. I become a fully valued member of the team.

2. Functioning as a Mentor

The mentoring relationship functions in two ways: career functions and psychosocial functions. I'd like to talk first about career functions of mentoring. Kathy Kram talks about these two functions in her research in a few different ways. One part of career functions is sponsorship. Sponsorship is really finding the ideal mentor, which would be the pairing of individuals in terms of age, race, and gender. Finding that person who can sponsor is really important. As you go into an area of mentoring, you want to become more familiar with people who come from different cultures and the variety of languages and backgrounds that are there. Also, one needs to have an acceptance, an understanding and a willingness to work with people and sponsor them in mentorships. The environment in which that takes place is really important. When you take someone under your wing, so to speak, nurturing and sponsoring that individual, allowing that person to take those things and integrate them into themselves is really helpful in a lot of different situations. You are sponsoring that person as a mentor when you go with the individual to conferences, workshops, meetings and so forth. Also, both of those individuals, the mentor and mentee, join different organizations such as RID or the local affiliate agency that relates to interpreting, as well as some that may not necessarily be interpreting related. That could mean, for example, going with your mentee to an urban league banquet, or attending NAACP functions, an NAOBI conference, or an

NBDA event or functions. They can focus on interpreting, but they may also be valuable ways of learning about cultures, too.

Under the category of career functions, there is the component of exposure and visibility. The mentor is responsible for allowing that mentee to be in control of their own development within the profession. The mentor provides opportunities for the individual to show their skills. Also, the mentor serves as a socializing force. A mentee can go out into the community - socializing, going to meetings and so forth - accompanied by the mentor. Not only can the mentor look out for that person, but they can also serve as a conduit for meeting other people, and as a support in terms of providing opportunities for both of them to work together. They can become a part of some event that benefits not only the mentor, but also the mentee. Coaching is another aspect of career functioning. Coaching involves teaching the mentee how to navigate within a profession. Our profession of interpreting has really taken off. That individual needs to know what to do when you go to an interpreting job or a meeting, and all of the things that can vary so widely with the different types of interpreting whether it be legal, medical, educational, or just interpreting within the community. All of those parts of our field need a certain level of learning and understanding by the mentee. The function of the mentor is to help them and coach them along in providing information as much as possible.

In relationships with African American individuals, we need to look at how that information can be transmitted. In terms of a mentor and mentee, my style may be very different from another person's style. When I talk about my reference base, that is using things that "belong to me" and that are culturally related. When you are the coach, that person understands that each person has a reference base that is the basis for who they are. The mentor also provides advice or counseling about better ways to handle something or we might talk about institutional racism. It's about being the kind of coach who would embrace differences, understanding that a person may need support from you. They may need to hear that there are possible negative things that will affect one's role in the profession. It's also a matter of talking about your own experiences. As a coach, the mentee will need to have someone to talk to who will understand the profession, who will listen to them and provide support through listening. Not just listening, though, but actually hearing what they have to say.

Role modeling falls under the second category that I want to talk about, which is psychosocial functions. Role modeling is an attitude. As I said earlier, in the African American community your attitude is very important. We know that when it is time to select mentors, we don't always put people together who are the same race, gender or age. We know that we will have a variety of identities. So, when we have an African American as a mentee, that individual will see what the mentor's attitude is. And there is a long process in developing a relationship between a mentor and mentee. Values are another part of psychosocial functioning. My values as an African American may be different from your values.

Something to keep in mind is that we are not trying to change a mentor's or mentee's beliefs, but rather there is an understanding that we might have different values. Ethics of an individual in a profession is another component. Our behaviors as people, that is, how we behave, may be different from one another. If I am from a minority culture and I go into a situation which is comprised of the majority culture, my behavior will change. I may not be as comfortable, first of all. Maybe I'll be a little bit more rigid than when I am in my own culture and that can show through in my style, body language and so forth. They would reflect a higher comfort level because I would be in my environment, within my culture. So, that's just something to keep in mind, that all of us as individuals leave our culture at some point and enter into another culture. At these times, there can be slight differences and we can expect behaviors to change in those situations.

The second part of psychosocial functioning is acceptance and confirmation, which deals with the sense of self, or who we feel we are as individuals. As an African American individual... The point is that the process is not there in order to change the individual. Instead, it is there for that individual to learn and apply that information to their way of dealing, working within and functioning with other people within the profession. The mentor is not there to change the mentee, but rather to know that both the mentor and mentee have a certain sense of self and a feeling of who they are and what they want to get from the experience. Positive relations is a part of acceptance and confirmation. This relates to the fact that both the mentor and mentee have a

positive relationship with each other. Support is another component. We've talked about support that is both within and outside of the profession. Also, encouragement is aspect of acceptance and confirmation. Counseling is another component of the psychosocial functioning of mentoring. This is a matter of exploring personal concerns that may interfere with the positive sense of self in the profession. The mentor may feel that the mentee has some concerns that are related to school, or home or personal issues. You might recall that we talked about the mentoring experience becoming private and confidential. The mentee needs to be allowed to engage in a conversation and talk about what might be a barrier or things that would interfere with their success. Both the mentee and mentor need opportunities to be open and talk freely, allowing the mentee to know that the mentor is willing to listen to things that may be hindering their progress, or creating fears or perhaps that they are just not getting the full experience. Knowing that the mentee doesn't want to fail, there may be some things just in the back of their mind that with the mentor's counseling and advice may get to the heart of it. The result is the creation of a better environment for learning. Friendship is another aspect of psychosocial functions. Both the mentor and mentee agree that they like each other. They have the understanding that what they are engaged in is not always a formal, rigid process. Rather, there is joking and teasing involved. It does not always have to be about busily working towards goals. There is time for both of them to really talk about anything. They can go over to each other's homes and really share those aspects of each other's lives in ways that are not always work related. There is time for both people to develop not only a mentorship relationship, but a friendship as well.

3. Phases of Mentoring

The third part of the presentation today relates to the phases of a mentoring relationship. The first phase is called initiation. A person has made a big decision that they want to become a mentor or a mentee. When you make that decision as a mentee...Excuse me. When you make that decision as a mentor, and you decide to work with a mentee who is African American, there has to be an understanding and a willingness to know and learn their background, along with an appreciation of their culture. One has to have an understanding that their background is not the same as yours.

The same thing goes on the flip side when a mentor is African American. The mentee who has decided to become a part of that program will have a different culture and background than the mentor. So, it works both ways. For both individuals, there is an agreement and a recognition that each person has differences in their backgrounds and values and that's alright.

The second phase is cultivation. Both the mentor and mentee know that for both parties there is a benefit from the relationship. There is a chance for both people to be involved in really significant ways. You'll start to see progress. And, hopefully, when they reach the end of that experience there will have been ever increasing opportunities that will have occurred, allowing both parties to reach the goals that we will talk about later. Within the relationship, both the mentor and mentee will have changed. But for now, we'll just consider it a process of cultivation. As individuals there is a lot involved in dealing with people from other cultures. That culture is a part of the interaction process that will have taken place. When dealing with someone from another culture, the culture is integrally tied to the process. So, it's not only that we see differences in terms of perspectives, but that that is all integrated as a whole into the process.

Then we reach the point when the mentor and the mentee will separate. Now I just said that we begin with ever increasing opportunities and when we've maxed out on those opportunities, it's pretty significant. The mentor and mentee can identify or recognize what they've learned and what they've achieved from the experience, whether it is certification or what have you. The goals have been achieved within that relationship. That's a point in time when they are ready to part ways. That is something that will happen. So, keep in mind that throughout the process when goals have been established we don't just set one big goal. For example, if I were to join an interpreter training program, my goal would not be to reach the end of it. We start with a small goal, and upon reaching it we are able to feel a sense of accomplishment. We can see this happen in a series of steps, or a series of goals, until we reach the more far reaching, long term end goal. That's how the process is completed.

The final phase is Redefinition. That's when we talk about the relationship changing. The mentor and mentee have finished their work and now they are peers, or equals. They have both reached the same place. What happens when they become peers? When we reach this point, there is

mutual respect and acceptance of each other. The relationship is not the “end all, be all,” so to speak, or the final thing. The relationship, however, is redefined. Because it is over does not mean they never see each other again. What it does mean, though, is that the individuals have now grown, they continue to have interaction, but now they are on the same level. They go to a convention or workshop together, for example, and they share information. Or they both go to an organization and share information. Hopefully, it becomes part of their personal life. And that process is very rich and rewarding, for both parties involved. When we're working with African American individuals it should be no different. But there is one thing to know about and keep in mind. And this is that the culture and those inner qualities that make up the individual will enter into the whole picture. That, in essence, is the idea of seeing the big picture and focusing on guiding, leading and helping that individual until they achieve success.

Thank you.

4. NAOBI

Hello, my name is Anthony Aramburo and I'd like to talk with you about a project that two organizations have worked on jointly related to mentoring. The organizations are the NAOBI, the National Association of Black Interpreters, and the NBDA, the National Black Deaf Advocacy. Every year NBDA has a conference and of course, there are interpreters needed for their conference. I serve with three individuals on a committee within the NBDA whose purpose is to coordinate the interpreting services for that convention. At that conference, we have interpreters who are certified and those who are not. However, the latter have the skills for interpreting at a conference level. NBDA recruits through NAOBI and the black and African American community for interpreters who are willing to become certified and act as a mentor or mentee.

Those individuals who apply and are accepted on the team, must be under a mentoring program. And by that I mean individuals who serve as mentors with another person sit down together and they identify specific goals they want to work on. A mentee meets with their mentor and they identify just one or two goals that they want to work on. For example, voicing skills, shadowing, working as a team member are all possibilities. Once that person has decided which goals they want to focus on, then they discuss them with their mentor. They decide what the best environment would be for achieving the goals. This determines the setting, whether it be a meeting or a workshop, a tour of the city, in the hotel, what have you. The mentor and mentee agree on the best environment for achieving the goals that they particularly want to focus on.

During the convention, both of the individuals have time, outside of their obligations and work, to discuss their focus and goals. Between the conventions, they should have time to engage in observations and to establish ideas prior to coming. The mentor and mentee should have already had time to determine what it is they want to focus on and how they could use the experience at the convention to further their goals. By the end of the conference, which is normally about three or four days in length, they sit down to have discussions and reach conclusions. The mentee now should have a very clear idea as to how those goals will be accomplished. Oftentimes, we try to give that individual opportunities to put those goals into practice that they have learned. When that person goes out into the community, we ask that they use those goals they have in mind to go out and work on them and practice them more in real life situations that they are involved in. Hopefully, by the next year, when that individual comes back to NBDA...And we do get a lot of individuals returning who have served as mentees. They may have been a mentee for one or two years, and by the third year they return having achieved their certification and now serve as mentor. At that point, they have become peers with those interpreters they worked with before. The relationship between the NBDA and NAOBI has really been enriching for both. Interpreters in NAOBI look to NBDA as supporters; that is, people who have similar cultural backgrounds and ideas. They can educate us as interpreters and we at the NAOBI can educate them about interpreting. So really, it's a matter of mutual respect. We can talk about mentoring in terms of individuals, but also in a larger sense as organizational mentors.

Both groups can mentor each other. Our organization is very new. We have annual meetings, but NBDA has been meeting for a very long time. We can look to them to give us guidance, teaching and showing us how to proceed as an organization. Both groups are looking for funding. The NAOBI has members who are very skilled in the area of fundraising. Members from our organization serve as mentors to assist the NBDA in developing ideas and strategies for

fundraising. Both of the organizations have selected goals that they want to work towards and accomplish. And then we start that process all over again. The NAOBI and the NBDA, therefore, are not only working to support individuals with mentors, but also as organizations in mentoring each other.

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