



## Today's Mentoring: Learning from each other

The role of mentors is critical to the development of the next generation of leaders, says Bret Hodne, chair of APWA's leadership and management committee, which has recruited senior members of the organization to become mentors.

"Our membership is turning to a new generation," he says. "It's important that we don't regurgitate the old way of doing things. There are generational differences among the up-and-coming leadership. We can help move them up and keep them engaged and vibrant in the future."

Hodne, who is the public works director for West Des Moines, Iowa, was very pleased with his personal experience as a mentor of an aspiring candidate for a PWM credential. His own path to leadership began as an

equipment operator and moved ahead through a combination of regular promotions and academic training. He was eager to help a young, aspiring leader in a very different community learn from his own experience, by long-distance Internet video connection.

"This was a learning experience for me as well," he says. "We shared experiences, his ideas on what he wanted to implement, how he wanted to use technology."

For his part, Hodne emphasized the elements of leadership. "I conveyed that it's OK to make mistakes if you're moving ahead," he says. "I counseled that it's important that employees become involved in the decision-making, letting employees excel, be part of the process."

Hodne said that he and his mentee scheduled weekly Skype sessions to discuss current issues and challenges.

"We discussed options when approaching issues," he says. "We would step through when trying to come to solutions. It was multi-faceted. We shared stories, shared challenges."

Sometimes, he says, the mentee would say a certain process had not

worked well. "I would say, 'Let me talk you through why it happened,'" he says. "If you were going to do it differently, how would the end result be better?" We talked about what things he might want to consider so he didn't wind up in a similar situation in the future."

As part of his program, the mentee was working on a major project, a marketing plan for a new 311 call-in system. Hodne says he worked with the mentee on the project, discussed how he could move it through his community's governance system and how to write a report that would advance the project.

Now that the mentee has completed his manager's program, he has to select a mentor for his program to acquire an executive credential. "I would like to continue, but maybe a new mentor would be advantageous with new perspectives, fresh ideas, a new relationship," he says.

If his current mentee doesn't continue with him, Hodne says he will be available the next time a candidate calls.

"It was a two-way opportunity," he says. "It was a very good use of my time."