

## Teaching – and learning

*Mentors help other professionals realize their potential, and gain knowledge for themselves*

BY MARTI BENEDETTI

SPECIAL TO CRAIN'S DETROIT BUSINESS

**M**entoring other business professionals is second nature to Wes Arrington.

In the past nine years, the 58-year-old president of **RFD Insight Inc.** has mentored eight woman executives.

"I took a year off in 1999 while I was doing a lot of international travel," he said.

Arrington said the skills he uses in running his Ann Arbor company, which specializes in turning around and expanding technology companies, translate well to mentoring. Both allow him to help people solve problems.

"I'm interested in finding situations that mentees are dealing with and helping them

with approaches to solve their issues," he said. "I get to know the (mentees) and won't give them standard answers about what would work for me. I think about what will work for them. There is more than one way to solve a problem."

People need mentoring during their careers, Arrington said, and that's why he became a mentor — and why he has encouraged others to become mentors.

"We're not born knowing these things. There's a universal need for people to have coaching in their careers," he said.

Arrington started mentoring through Minneapolis-based **Menttium Corp.**'s Mentttium 100 program in 1998 while working for **EDS** as president of **Delphi**'s small-business unit.

Mentttium 100 is a cross-company mentoring program for high-potential, high-performing women.

Arrington said he also got involved in mentoring to learn about other people's work issues and why they do what they do.

"I did not have to deal with issues like work-life balance, even though I have a wife and children. So hearing about this issue is interesting for me," he said.

Mentttium Vice President Michelle Fanroy said those are among the reasons Mentttium was founded in 1991, a time when women were having trouble breaking through the glass ceiling.

"We wanted to give people tools to get a seat at the (corporate) table," Fanroy said.

Arrington also helped get about a dozen of **EDS**' women executives involved in mentoring.

"Everyone can benefit from mentoring," he said. "The most important part of the routine is establishing a routine. I always meet with my mentee once a month."

The issues he deals with the most include office politics, work-life balance and getting bosses to notice job accomplishments. He also helped a mentee with how to hire employees — not a task that comes naturally for most people, Arrington said.

"I try to be a good listener and not be (quick to give advice). I ask a lot of questions," he said.

His yearlong mentorship with his current mentee, Stephanie LeCureaux, a vice president at **Comerica Bank** in Detroit, started in December.

"Each mentee is different, and sometimes what we set out to do early on changes during



REBECCA COOK

**Wes Arrington has been mentoring Stephanie LeCureaux, a vice president of Comerica Bank, since December. Arrington says there is a universal need for people to have coaching in their careers.**

the course of the year," said Arrington, adding that LeCureaux is relatively new to her leadership position and is working on delegation and performance management.

LeCureaux, 49, said the timing of her mentorship with Arrington could not be better.

She took a new position at the bank four months ago that requires her to manage 14 managers and analysts.

"Wes has been very helpful with providing information on how to manage managers. He's also a strategic planner, so he's giving me guidance on how to handle strategic planning, which is required in my new job," she said. "With all his experience, he gives me perspectives I never had before. I know this mentoring is really going to be beneficial. It's going to be a very good year."

Laurene Horiszny, chief compliance officer at **BorgWarner Inc.** in Auburn Hills, had such a positive experience last year mentoring a **Ford Motor Co.** attorney, she has started her second mentoring relationship, this time with a bank executive.

"I like being part of coaching promising female executives," she said.

Both Arrington and Horiszny said mentoring is not as time-consuming as it might sound. Typically, they meet mentees for an early breakfast or lunch once a month. They might talk on the phone a couple of times a month as well.

Even though the formal mentorship between Horiszny and her first mentee, Paula Campbell Kelly, is over, they keep in touch.

"Our relationship is ongoing. I understand it is not uncommon," Kelly said. "She's now a friend."

### MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR TIME WITH YOUR MENTOR

Denise Michaels, a Detroit native and author of *Testosterone-Free Marketing*, has mentored hundreds of entrepreneurs. Here are some of her tips on having a good mentorship experience:

- **Take an interest in your mentor as a human being.** Ask him or her about what is going on in his or her life.
  - **Don't say, "I'd like to pick your brain."** Say, "I would really value your opinion." It's much gentler and more conversational.
  - **Don't try to monopolize a lot of your mentor's time at first.** Connect in a way that's quick and easy. Don't invite him or her to a dinner that will be a two-hour time commitment.
  - **Be clear about what you're doing and what you need.** Think about one or two specific questions you need answered and think about how to ask those questions clearly.
  - **Listen, listen, listen to what they say.** Don't think about all the reasons why you can't do what they are saying.
  - **Thank the person for their time.** Tell them what you're going to do and then when you take action, be sure to let them know what you're doing.
  - **Reciprocate once in awhile.** If you see a great article that you think he or she would enjoy — send it with a quick note.
  - **Learn to make the link between cause and effect.** Don't put your mentor in a position where he or she has to figure it all out for you.
- Source: About.com



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