

John Shaw / Geri Wolf

The Influence

Do you have a mentor? Before you answer, think about all the different kinds of mentors: teachers, parents, bosses, peers, more experienced colleagues, fellow association members, famous idols and many others.

By Amanda Fretheim Gates / Portraits by Todd Buchanan

While some mentors may be admired from afar, a mentor is usually someone you know who believes in you, helps you along the way and celebrates in your success. Depending on the situation, this person can be a part of your personal life, your professional life, or can slide back and forth between both.

Are you a mentor? Perhaps you seek out younger co-workers, take them under your wing and show them the way. Maybe you and another person from your local association chapter meet regularly for coffee and you share with her your years of experience. Or, maybe you mentor lots of people at once, sending encouraging words via e-mail and phone calls to all the people in your division or small business.

Whatever the role, mentor or mentee, both sides of these relationships make a difference to the other. In their book *Power Mentoring: How Successful Mentors and Protégés Get the Most out of Their Relationships*, authors Ellen Ensher and

Susan Murphy write that in “power mentoring” relationships both the mentor and mentee benefit mutually in career growth and development. For example, those with mentors have been found to earn higher salaries, receive more promotions and have greater career satisfaction, while those who mentor acquire new knowledge, build supportive networks and maintain an overall feeling of pride and satisfaction.

Because of the variety of roles in the hospitality industry, the changes the industry goes through and because so many meeting professionals come upon their careers by happenstance, mentoring plays a huge role. And because thousands of local professionals own a wide range of knowledge to share in an industry of competition and strong personalities, it’s important for them to find those meaningful personal relationships. For this reason, and many others, the Minnesota chapter of Meeting Planners International (MPI) started The Power of 2, a mentoring program that matches up MPI members searching for a mentor or a mentee.

The Power of 2 started in fall 2007 under the leadership arm of MPI. Members looking for mentors fill out a form listing three goals they’d like to take away from the pairing, while those wanting to be mentors fill out a worksheet explaining their backgrounds and strengths. Devie Hagen, owner of Elan Speakers Agency, an MPI member and former chair and current volunteer for The Power of 2, reviews the applications and matches up the two people she thinks would benefit the most from each other. Once matched, the pair can meet as often as they like (MPI suggests, but doesn’t limit it to, a couple times a month for three months), wherever they like, to work on goals. The first year the program had six pairings, last year 13 pairs were matched and the goal for 2009-2010 is 20.

“The whole point of the program is with 500 members in the Minnesota chapter, we have all levels of strengths that people can share, whether it’s a student or somebody that’s been in the industry as a meeting planner or a supplier for 30 years,” says Hagen. “And how do we share that knowledge and

give that vision that we're a small community even though we're a large one?"

When Hagen was a new meeting planner more than 30 years ago, she learned everything by doing, and most of the time doing it wrong, she says. To have someone to ask questions of would've been priceless to her. The Power of 2 gives MPI members the option to find that person. "People really care for each other and want each other to succeed," she says. "It's a strong industry of honesty and integrity. I think sharing that knowledge and supporting each other really is what the industry is all about."

The Power of 2 instigates one avenue that works well for mentoring relationships: putting the mentees in the driver's seat. According to Ensher and Murphy, mentees who play a bigger role in determining who their mentor is, and who help guide the relationship (by setting goals for themselves and the relationship), are more satisfied in the end. MPI members have to want a mentor before one will be provided for them.

But a mentoring relationship doesn't have to stem from a program as formal as The Power of 2. It doesn't have to be goal-oriented and it doesn't have to consist of a series of "tests" given by the mentor à la *The Apprentice* (an extreme example). Mentoring relationships don't have to take place between bosses and employees (though they might), and they don't have to happen between two people in the same professional field.

While mentoring relationships may take many forms, it's the similar strategies and characteristics in all that help matches remain successful. According to John C. Maxwell, author of *Mentoring 101: What Every Leader Needs to Know*, as a good mentor you make your mentee's development a top priority, let her fly beside you, create a personal relationship with her, offer help unconditionally and offer encouragement. On the other hand, according to Ensher and Murphy, good mentees should be ambitious, open to feedback, trustworthy and emotionally intelligent.

Meetings: Minnesota's Hospitality Journal met with four local mentor/mentee pairs to learn what makes their relationships

successful. What qualities do they possess? How often do they meet? What do they provide and receive from one another? What do they talk about? Two different matches began as part of MPI's The Power of 2, each with different sets of goals. Another pair started by working together in the same city, but now promote cities on opposite sides of the Mississippi. And the final pair has continued a long-term relationship that's fluctuated and changed in focus over 20 years time. Each participant talks about the importance of mentoring in the hospitality industry, how relationships change over time and the true value they hold in one another.

Sharing of Themselves /

The nice thing about MPI's Power of 2 program is that if the three-month time frame doesn't work for you, no problem. Two years ago Stephanie Ripley asked Sue Daly, who sat with her on MPI's education committee, to be her mentor. The two came up through The Power of 2 during its inaugural year. But because of differing schedules, they couldn't meet enough in just three months. Instead they just continued to meet as frequently as they could over the next two years. And they still meet to this day.

Ripley, a meeting planner with Thomson Reuters, has a variety of experience in the industry, including working in association management, destination management and corporate meeting planning. "My wanting a mentor stemmed from wanting to learn how I could grow and work on my goals and objectives at work," Ripley says. "I was interested in finding someone outside of work, but in my field, and I thought of Sue right away."

Authors Ensher and Murphy mention this type of mentoring relationship in their book, writing that having a mentor outside of her organization can provide the mentee with different perspectives on her career as well as her organization. "Being too entrenched in one organization can lead to less innovative decision making, possibly

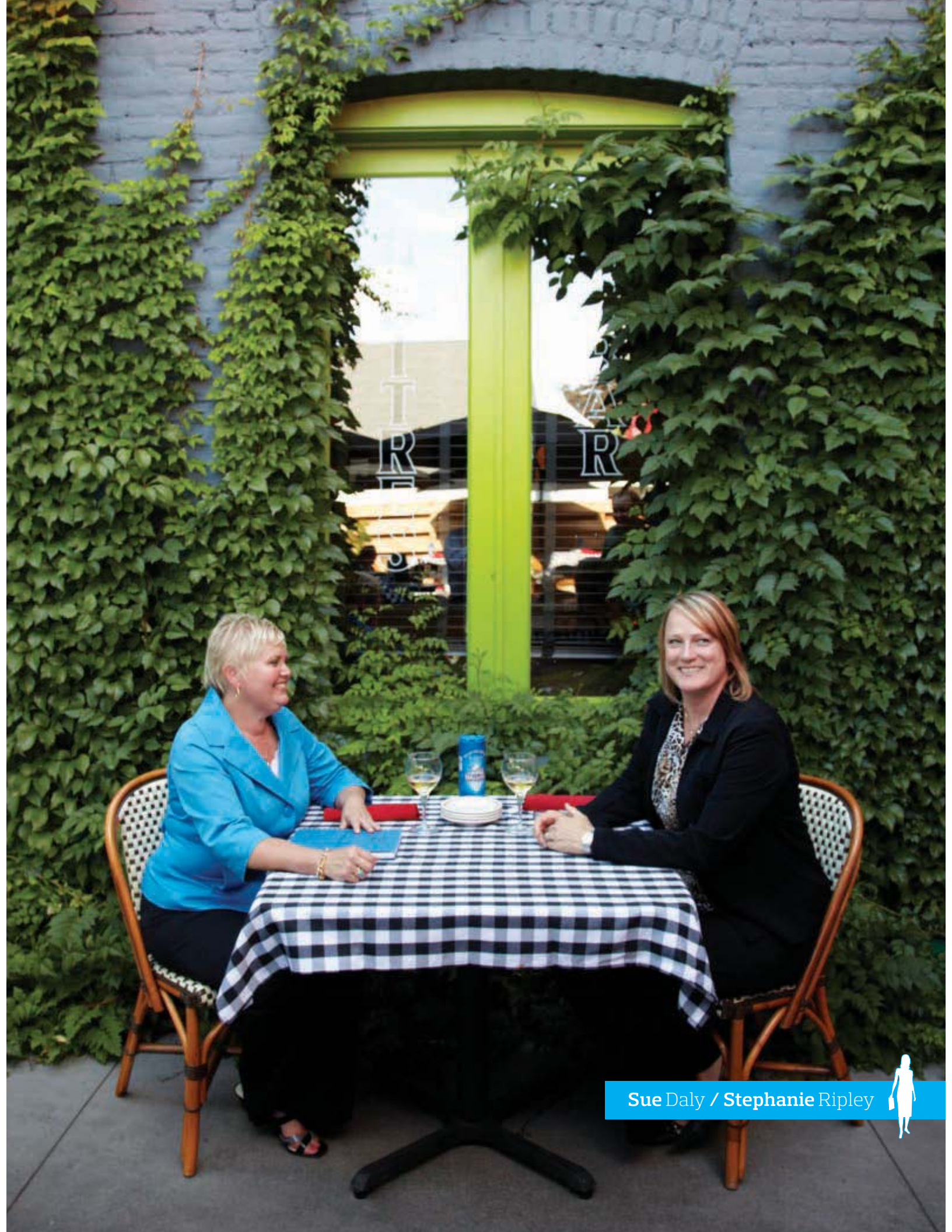
embracing only a particular style of management, and finally an inability to imagine a career outside of that organization," the authors say. "Individuals involved in power mentoring realize the benefits of external mentors and use them to their advantage throughout their career."

The pair struggled with direction at first, not quite knowing where to take a mentoring relationship that didn't take place in the office. But once the pair started meeting (oftentimes at T.G.I. Fridays for an hour or an hour and a half), they realized all the valuable information they could learn from each other and they built a relationship around trust, camaraderie and similar experiences.

Daly, a planner at Aon Corporation, says that because she works alone in her home office, she lacks that network of internal resources. "You may have a million people you work with in your company, but not anyone who does exactly what you do," she says. The most rewarding part comes from getting to know someone who really understands what you do for a living. The two talk about meeting planning and brainstorm ideas, but they also discuss relationships with co-workers and bosses—things that factor in to the work environment at any company. Daly helped Ripley with areas of meeting planning in which she didn't feel strong, such as negotiating contracts. They also worked on Ripley's self review and setting measurable career goals for the next year, goals that could be easily recognized by a supervisor.

Trust is one of the most crucial aspects in mentoring relationships, write authors Ensher and Murphy. "Mentors and protégés share secrets of their success, stories about their failures, and often reveal many details of their lives," the authors say. "Not only must protégés learn to trust someone else, they in turn must be trustworthy."

"I really *know* Stephanie," Daly says. "I trust what I say is staying there and what she says is staying here. What I say to her has her best interest in mind. Those relationships hold a special spot for you because they're different than a lot of relationships. And that's what life's about."



Sue Daly / Stephanie Ripley





Michael Hernandez / Bill Deef

Matched For Life /

For Geri Wolf and John Shaw, their relationship started nearly 20 years ago. A shy young woman from the Minnesota country, Wolf was working as a receptionist at Edina Realty when Shaw, a Realtor with a dynamic personality that Wolf says people are just attracted to, asked her to step out from behind the desk and come work with him. Over the next two decades, the relationship evolved and sustained even as Wolf moved from real estate to the textile business as a regional sales manager and eventually to starting her own event design and planning company, The Style Laboratory, in 2003.

“At one point he was sitting on a pedestal,” Wolf says of Shaw. “He could basically do no wrong and he was so wise. I think that he’s not necessarily on a pedestal anymore and it’s a much more realistic perspective that I have. But I like that I can go to him and bounce ideas off of him.”

Even though Wolf moved away from real estate, she finds it’s more Shaw’s general business sense that helped her through the years. Wolf learned a lot about sales while working with Shaw, and that in business, you never really sell products and services, but you sell a solution. “That applies to event planning in the biggest way,” she says. “From the start of your planning process all you’re doing is addressing problems and finding solutions. My sales background has probably been the most influential in what I do now.”

Why did Shaw decide to take Wolf under his wing? He saw she had potential, and he gets frustrated when he see people not working up to their potential. “I think that’s a rare trait these days with how egocentric people are, to really take yourself out of what’s going on in your own world and try to have an impact on people, not by doing things for them but helping them do things for themselves,” Wolf says.

In their book, authors Ensher and Murphy write about this type of “generativity” (a need to nurture and guide younger generations) and its role and mutual ben-

efit in mentor/mentee relationships. They write, “Acting on one’s motivation to mentor early on enables the mentor to relish accomplishments of others throughout their careers.”

Shaw is just as quick to say wonderful things about Wolf and explain how he’s enjoyed watching her grow professionally. “You run into few people who can enter into any arena and develop a skill level that’s expert level that quickly,” says Shaw, who currently manages Edina Realty’s corporate office in Edina. “And she’s been able to do that in just about everything she chooses to do.” But it was when she started The Style Laboratory that Wolf really demonstrated to Shaw what she could accomplish. The pair laughs when they remember how Shaw was hesitant about Wolf starting her own business. At the beginning, he couldn’t see a successful business model.

“I was in a real cush job and a successful career and he couldn’t see where [the new business] could go,” Wolf says. “He said it was the dumbest idea he ever heard. For three weeks after that conversation, I decided I wasn’t going to do it. But, you kind of break away, and I decided I needed to make a move.”

Wolf used the lessons she learned from Shaw to market her company differently than her competitors. Through fun events to which everyday people could relate, she brought in traffic and, more importantly, she brought in the press. “John goes into [business] saying, ‘What do I have to do with marketing in real estate to own this neighborhood?’” Wolf says. “It was really the same mindset [with The Style Laboratory]. I have to market this so I can be considered the expert, the leader of the pack or the trendsetter.”

Like a good mentor, Shaw sat back and let Wolf fly on her own. It didn’t matter if they disagreed. He was just happy to see her blossom as she created a business concept he was unfamiliar with and make it work. And as the years go on, their relationship continues to reach a new, more equal level. “I’ve come to learn that one of my favorite parts about our relationship is when we don’t agree,” Shaw says. “Because she always

used to agree with me and then she evolved into this person who said, ‘Well, I have a thought, too.’ It took me by surprise how valuable her opinion ended up being. I was able to step back and understand where she was coming from and what she wanted to get done.”

Now, Shaw sees a shift in their relationship. With the heightened use of social media, he looks for education from Wolf, who through blogging and tweeting keeps The Style Laboratory accessible to her clients and the press. Some days the mentor becomes the mentee, and that’s just fine with them.

Mentoring Across the River /

Twenty-five years ago, when Bill Deef, vice president of international relations at Meet Minneapolis, studied journalism at the University of Minnesota, looking to be the next Woodward or Bernstein, he took an internship with the city of Minneapolis. “It was supposed to be for a semester and I stayed for two years,” he says. “I worked in all sorts of different departments and really got a well-rounded experience.” He’s now been with Meet Minneapolis, and its past variations, full time for 23 years.

Since Deef knows what it means to get your foot in the door by (literally, in his case) working your way up from the mailroom, he’s always been hot on helping interns. For the past 15 years, he was involved with Washburn High School, which offered an Academy of Hospitality (the program ended this year). It was the only high school in the state to prepare high school students for an education in the industry. It was through this avenue that Bill Deef met Michael Hernandez. When Hernandez was a junior, he job-shadowed Deef during his workday at Meet Minneapolis.

That day turned out to be an important one in Hernandez’s life, because when Meet Minneapolis was looking for summer interns in 2002, Deef thought of him. “At the time I was working at Cub Foods, pushing carts and stocking, and I would prob-

ably still be there," Hernandez says. "I was right out of high school and I had no idea what I was going to do and this was a way into the industry."

After his internship was over, Hernandez took a part-time job Meet Minneapolis had open as a visitor information specialist, answering visitor phone calls and taking questions about the city. Hernandez held this position for a couple years and then it became full time. During Hernandez's stint at Meet Minneapolis, Deef encouraged him to apply to Normandale Community College's hospitality program. In 2005, Hernandez graduated from Normandale, and Deef was at the ceremony.

"He's been at all of my life-changing events," Hernandez says, mentioning not only his college graduation but also his wedding. "Bill guided me along to college. Otherwise I would've probably just gone along the way and said, 'Oh, I got a couple credits left, but I have a full-time job already, so why should I keep going?'"

In 2006, another opportunity came calling, and it came from across the river. Hernandez accepted a position in group sales and convention services at the St. Paul Convention & Visitors Authority. And, boy, was he nervous to tell Deef. "Frankly, when the St. Paul job came open, I didn't push him out the door, but I knew he was looking for growth and at that time there wasn't a lot of movement in our association," says Deef. Now Hernandez attends tradeshows, conferences, gives board presentations and has really broadened his horizons in the world of CVBs. And, in turn, he works to inspire other students thinking about travel and tourism, either at the high school or college level.

"As soon as he left Washburn, we put him up in front of the kids to say, 'Here's what you can do,'" says Deef. "He used to be kind of the quiet kid in the back of the class. Now these kids were sitting there looking at someone who went to school there, got an internship, got a job—it was pretty inspirational to watch."

Hernandez is also an inspirational figure to his family. His younger brother has written goals for school that say he wants to be

just like his big brother. And his parents are quite proud. "My parents are immigrants from Mexico," he says. "My dad was from a large family in a small village and was forced to help out the family and not go to school. He could barely read and write, so for me to come home in a suit ... I swear, everyday my mom would say, 'Oh, you look so dressed up,' and I was like, 'Mom, I only went to work.'"

Goal Specific /

As Julie Ann Schmidt earned her CMP certification and began forming her own business, Lithium Logistics Group, she decided to make her membership with the Minnesota chapter of MPI a key component of her business plan. She met Tracey Smith, of Garrett Speakers International, through the chapter's leadership development committee and decided that because Smith was an MPI veteran of 18 years, she would make a great mentor. The two were formally matched through The Power of 2 this past spring and got off to a running start.

"I had very refined goals for what I was looking for," Schmidt says. "I wanted to learn more about MPI and how I could be more involved—how to chart the right path for myself within MPI. With all the experience Tracey had, especially at the international level, I learned a lot and I'm not sure how else I would've found out that information. I wouldn't have found it searching the Web site."

In his book *Mentoring 101*, Maxwell stresses the importance and value in mentee goal setting. "People need clear objectives set before them if they are to achieve anything of value," he writes. "Success never comes instantaneously. It comes from taking many small steps. A set of goals becomes a map a potential leader can follow in order to grow." By coming into the relationship with clear-cut goals, Schmidt was able to tell Smith exactly what she needed from her, and Smith was able to deliver.

Smith started her career in tradeshows in Texas. Early on she was asked to organize a small user conference for 35 clients. A fish out of water, Smith was thankful for

a friendly face at the conference's hotel who taught her the ropes, and also introduced her to MPI. "It was like I found home," she says. Smith has since sat on the MPI board in Dallas as well as in Minnesota. She was also part of the leadership development committee when The Power of 2 program came about two years ago.

"I think the beauty of the program is that you can ask for mentoring on very finite, narrowly focused items," Smith says. "That was kind of the purpose of the program when we developed it. We wanted mentees to very narrowly focus what they wanted to accomplish."

Smith and Schmidt stuck to the program's three-month length, finding time to meet each month to talk over Schmidt's goals. At their first meeting, Smith brought research about MPI and talked to Schmidt about MPI International and different advisory councils. She also shared her own experience and provided names of others who may be helpful. As the pair grew closer, they talked about topics other than MPI involvement, too.

"At that point, my business was starting to roll a little bit more and she was really a good sounding board to bounce things off of," Schmidt says. "You always get out more than you think. I've increased my involvement within the chapter, some of that coming out of what she shared with me and helping me define where I want to go and what I want to do."

As a mentor, Smith didn't have to learn anything special, she didn't have to study up; all she had to do was share the knowledge she already had. And Smith's ROI ended up being just what every good mentor would want: a new friend. "I've gotten to know Julie Ann on a much deeper level than I would just being on the same committee as her or a member of the same organization," Smith says. "To me that's the biggest gain of the program."

While Schmidt decided the MPI board isn't for her at this time, it might be someday. Or, maybe she'll try to volunteer at the international level, which seems an even better fit for her. Whatever she decides, she'll have Smith to go to for advice and encouragement when it's time to apply. ■