



Photo: PCI

Mentorship—We Must Make It Common Practice Immediately

William N. Nickas, *Editor-in-Chief*

Lately, I've had a bit of time to reflect upon the impact in both my professional and personal worlds. I strongly believe that there is a call to action here, partly due to how the COVID pandemic and social media seem to have altered our social norms. We need to revive our commitment to mentorship.

I've had many mentors: the college professors who taught engineering and how to look at things; the senior engineers in the Florida Department of Transportation's bridge department; E. Carl Driver, the man behind E. C. Driver and Associates (the first private bridge company I worked for); and all the members and staff (current and past) I have known since joining PCI. As I think back on what I've gained from my interactions with these exemplary people, I am concerned that such mentorship opportunities are not readily available for early- and mid-career professionals today.

None of us succeed alone. We all need someone in a mentorship position to take an interest in us, see something in us that perhaps others missed, and put their energy into our professional growth and well-being. The career journey of someone in our industry is one of interactions, conversations, and collaborations with highly knowledgeable, dedicated, and inspiring professionals. Most are incredibly passionate about their perspectives and approaches, me included (that's somewhat of an understatement for those that know me).

I briefly touched on the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in bridge design and construction in my last editorial. While I believe AI offers several benefits, I also deeply believe that mentorship is a critical ingredient to our success. Professionals and code officials need to carefully look at AI results for fatal flaws (strength and service) and detailing changes that put our past deemed-to-satisfy specifications out of kilter. That critical thinking may come through as a mentoring moment in your shop.


What does it take to become an effective mentor?

Is there a course or online program? In actuality, mentorship is simple. You just need to engage, listen, and allow the person being mentored to navigate their way and ask questions.

There are plenty of opportunities for mentors to provide feedback and direction while showing and demonstrating "what right looks like." Your mentorship approach can be formal or informal; both are highly effective.

Mentorship is about putting people in a position to be successful and allowing them to work through difficult situations. It's about discussing mistakes and approaches. It's about engineering and the business side of the company (how the bills get paid, how to make payroll, why we need insurance). It's about finding a healthy work-life balance (something we never talked about back in the day).

Above all, mentorship is about connecting. Recently, I heard someone say, "relationships matter." That thought rang true recently while I was flying out of Chicago, where I happened to run into a governmental engineer I have known for years. As we talked, he thanked me for taking the time to help guide him along his bridge engineering journey. He said that he had initially thought I was a bit of a know-it-all, and close minded, but his perspective has changed as he nears retirement. He has even passed along a few of the pearls of wisdom I'd shared those many years ago. I told him that I had no ownership of those pearls—they'd been passed to me 40 years ago by a fabulous mentor who took the time to see that I got started on the right path.

Mentorship, rooted in our upbringings and our successes and failures, is also about the future. By responding to my call to action, investing your time, and becoming a mentor (and encouraging others to do the same), you can show your support of the industry. And who knows? Maybe you'll pass on a few pearls of your own. 

PS: For more information on wellness in the workplace, check out the ad on page 55.

Editor-in-Chief

William N. Nickas • wnickas@pci.org

Managing Technical Editor

Dr. Richard Miller

Technical Editors

Monica Schultes, Emily Lorenz,
Dr. Krista M. Brown

Program Manager

Trina Brown • tbrown@pci.org

Associate Editor

Angela Tremblay • atremblay@pci.org

Copy Editor

Elizabeth Nishiura

Layout Design

Walter Furie

Editorial Advisory Board

William N. Nickas, *Precast/Prestressed Concrete Institute*

Dr. Krista M. Brown, *Independent Consultant*

Dr. Richard Miller, *RAM Bridge Education LLC*

Tim Christle, *Post-Tensioning Institute*

Gregg Freeby, *American Segmental Bridge Institute*

Brent Toller, *Epoxy Interest Group of the Concrete Reinforcing Steel Institute*

Cover

Designing the twin bridges of the Interstate 70 West Vail Pass Auxiliary Lanes required innovative ideas and collaborative solutions from the design team, owner, and stakeholders. Photo: Kevin Petrillo.

Ad Sales

Scott Cunningham • scunningham7@aol.com
(678) 576-1487 (mobile)
(770) 913-0115 (office)

Reprints

lisa scacco • lscacco@pci.org

Publisher

Precast/Prestressed Concrete Institute

Bob Risser, President

If you need to update your contact information with us or have a suggestion for a project or topic to be considered for *ASPIRE*, please send an email to info@aspirebridge.org.

Postmaster: Send address changes to *ASPIRE*, 8770 W. Bryn Mawr Ave., Suite 1150, Chicago, IL 60631. Standard postage paid at Chicago, IL, and additional mailing offices.

ASPIRE (Vol. 20, No. 2), ISSN 1935-2093, is published quarterly by the Precast/Prestressed Concrete Institute.

<https://doi.org/10.15554/asp20.2>

Copyright 2026 Precast/Prestressed Concrete Institute.



American Segmental Bridge Institute



Epoxy Interest Group



Expanded Shale, Clay and Slate Institute



NATIONAL READY MIXED
CONCRETE ASSOCIATION



Precast/Prestressed
Concrete Institute



Post-Tensioning Institute



SILICA FUME ASSOCIATION