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Pay It Forward: Mentoring New Information Professionals. By Mary Ann Mavrinac and Kim Stymest. Chicago, IL: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2012. Pp. 58. \$20.00 (paper). ISBN 978-083898625-7.

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) introduced the Active Guide series in 2008 with Melanie Hawks's *Life-Work Balance*. The latest installment in the series by Mary Ann Mavrinac and Kim Stymest, *Pay It Forward: Mentoring New Information Professionals*, continues to offer concise and useful professional advice in a presentation that lacks fussiness and formality – in this instance, almost to a fault. Following the ACRL Active Guides *Influencing Without Authority*, also by Hawks (2009), and *Conversations That Work: Conducting Performance Assessments*, by Phillipa Brown and Sue Baughman (2010)¹, the series now turns to the topic of mentoring.

The available literature on mentoring within the information profession is quite extensive. It is a common article topic in the library journals, as well as a book chapter topic in titles covering the management, recruitment, and retention of information professionals. Two recent publications go into much greater depth on mentoring. In Marta K. Lee's *Mentoring in the Library: Building for the Future* (Chicago, IL: American Library Association, 2011), the author has also created a guide to initiating the mentoring process, but at twice the length there is

¹ Full disclosure: Baughman and Brown are or were colleagues of the reviewer at the University of Maryland.

more room to explore the topic. However, while the book has useful sample forms to aid the process, it lacks the practical exercises common to the ACRL Active Guides. *Mentoring in Librarianship: Essays on Working with Adults and Students to Further the Profession*, co-edited by Carol Smallwood and Rebecca Tolley-Stokes (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., Inc., 2012), explores topics including philosophical reasons for entering into a mentor relationship, recommendations on setting up a program, mentoring across disciplines, and how mentoring fits into the careers of those new to the profession and those in the midst of their career. This work is a more thorough examination of the topic, but is likely not the place to start if you are simply eager to begin a mentoring relationship. By comparison, *Pay it Forward* is far less theoretical, and entirely conceived for practicality; its brevity enables hitting the ground running for getting into a beneficial mentoring relationship with some reasonable planning and effort.

Divided into twelve concise chapters, the first is simply a helpful introduction of the guide. The tone is certainly set here with cheerfully enthusiastic language, excessive punctuation, and abundant rhetorical questions. The second chapter briefly addresses the history of mentoring independent of the information profession and covers the basic premises of the relationship, best put with the following: “For the person being mentored, mentoring has moved away from a passive to an active process of self-discovery upon which individuals embark to forge their career path.”(10) And later: “It is fundamentally a learning process, one that is learner-centered, bi-directional, and one-to-one.”(11) Chapters three, four, and nine focus on the concept of mentoring as it pertains to leadership,

a useful approach for future managers in the profession. The fifth and eighth chapters examines “bridging the mentoring gap,” including fine anecdotes on how Stymest initiated her relationship with Mavrillac as her mentor, and what to do once the connection is made. Chapters six and ten discuss how the partnership found within mentoring is different from coaching, especially the limitations of having a direct supervisor as a mentor. The eleventh chapter, “What’s in it for me?” reviews much of the benefits already expressed previously in the book, but is now organized into sensible charts divided by mentor and mentee. The twelfth chapter is merely a brief conclusion made up of platitudes, with the real conclusion having occurred in the prior chapter. The chapters are quite consistent; not only in their brevity, but also in how nearly each includes at least one exercise.

As a practical guide, some of the greatest value for *Pay it Forward* comes from the exercises. There are three instances of “Reflection Questions” that bring about salient contemplation as it pertains to the corresponding topic. The other exercises take the form of short activities that also encourage self-discovery or self-awareness. Alas, one exercise is found lacking. In the tenth chapter, an exercise serves as a quiz where the reader is expected to differentiate between coaching and mentoring, and right or wrong answers are indicated on the following page. The initial exercise provides a subjective examination of the two roles, but by dictating answers it overlooks that there are times based on context when coaching and mentoring naturally overlap. Furthermore, in nearly all cases, the space included is not sufficient to actually write down the answers, which

diminishes the guide's capacity as a workbook. This small bit of unevenness does not detract from the function of the strongly conceived exercises, but it can prove a nuisance, as the reader would have to leave the book in order to complete the exercise.

Pay it Forward addresses about half of the mentoring relationship lifecycle. There is plenty of advice and exercises to get interested parties started and to nurture them along, but very little is said about how to exit a failing relationship, nor do Mavrillac and Stymest indicate knowing when a productive relationship has run its course. The closest they come to considering the lifecycle is when they state: "The mentoring partnership we espouse is situated in the here and now, where multiple mentors are encouraged throughout your career, including those for the seasoned information professional!"(7) Later, the authors also rightly claim: "[M]entoring relationships... can occur irrespective of time and place, widening an individual's learning context."(9) The authors also frequently return to the notion of the "democratic approach to mentoring," which is meant to indicate the balance of power and mutual investment each must party bring to the relationship; but by hammering on this point, it eventually begs the question: is there such a thing as autocratic mentoring? Even when including the supervisor/employee dynamic in the equation, it is difficult to imagine a mentoring relationship that is dictatorial.

The authors' prose, though clearly written, is very casual, and at times silly. While some degree of informality is expected from a guide, for a publication by an association supporting college and research libraries, the exceedingly

informal tone goes too far for the intended audience. A particularly representative example includes: “Really? Mentoring is a learning process? Yes!”(11) Other books in the Active Guide series also strike a casual tone, but not to the extent of *Pay it Forward*. Furthermore, there are many instances of unnecessary text emphasis in the form of all capital letters, italics, and quotes. It also merits mentioning that there are a surprising number of typographic errors for book of this length. As a result, it is challenging to take seriously the wisdom actually presented therein.

It is surprising that a publication on mentoring produced by the Association of College and Research Libraries does not delve at all into the area of mentoring faculty librarians towards promotion and tenure. The process for promotion and tenure is highly dependent on a thriving mentoring culture, and the topic is entirely overlooked in this work. Lee’s *Mentoring in the Library* does cover this form of mentoring quite effectively, and readers holding faculty appointments will be better served by that work. But, even for those holding faculty appointments, *Pay it Forward* is a useful guide for launching and nurturing the relationship, while undertaking exercises that will help the reader also learn much about their professional selves. This title belongs in any academic library supporting a graduate program in information science, or at any large research institution with a thriving library system.

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