

COMMENTARY
INSTITUTIONAL DNA:
“ACES YOU CAN KEEP”

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*“Now ev’ry gambler knows the secret to survivin’
“Is knowin’ what to throw away, knowin’ what to keep.
“Cos ev’ry hand’s a winner and ev’ry hand’s a loser,
“And the best that you can hope for is to die in your sleep.”*

“You got to know when to hold ’em:

Many practitioners who have experienced outstanding careers in public and environmental health are most proud of their roles in mentoring scores of practitioners who subsequently earned leadership roles and significantly contributed to enhancing public health and the quality of the environment. Such mentors have enjoyed encouraging, counseling, teaching, supporting, and guiding individuals who were capable and sincerely interested in career development, achievement, promotions, recognition and becoming all they could be. They have admonished such protégés that they should be re-potted every few years so as not to become root bound, and have encouraged them to enhance their competencies so as to become outstanding professionals.

Meaningful mentoring is a basic leadership responsibility for leaders in the field of practice as well as in academia. Mentoring provides the opportunity to nurture, to guide, to counsel, and to inculcate values and information about the splendid challenges and myriad opportunities and potentials of the field of practice. Mentoring allows the mentor to enhance the careers of professionals, thereby providing continuity of leadership excellence akin to creating institutional DNA. Mentoring frequently results in a protégé being qualified and selected as successor to the mentor as the mentor assumes new challenges.

“Know when to fold ’em:

Mentoring is not for everyone. Mentoring requires an implicit understanding and two-way relationship between the mentor and protégé. Mentoring requires time, mentoring requires desire, and mentoring requires effort on the part of both parties. Mentoring requires that the mentor have the requisite competencies and experience, as well as a comprehensive vision of the field of practice. Some desiring to be protégés may not be suitable matches for the mentor.

“Know When To Walk Away, Know When To Run:

Mentoring requires a long-term relationship, not just a temporary alliance. A good mentor may have rewarding opportunities to counsel and support his/her protégés for many years. But the mentor should ensure that the protégé develop his/her own professional wings and reputation as rapidly as possible. While figuratively “standing on the shoulders of the mentor,” a protégé must develop his/her own vision and internal gyroscope and should not be a clone of the mentor.

***“You never count your money when you’re sitting at the table.
“There’ll be time enough for countin’ when the dealin’s done.”***

Quality mentoring results in pride and joy for the mentor, achievement and recognition for the protégé, as well as constantly improved public service, public health and environmental quality. Many will be ***“aces you can keep.”***

***“You got to know when to hold ‘em; know when to fold ‘em,
“Know when to walk away, know when to run.”***