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Dear Reader,

Last month (www.limglobal.net/readings/62.htm) we shared an excerpt from the book *Mentors*, by Larry Daloz, giving a brief glimpse into learning in adulthood and the role of a mentor. This month, we are honored to include here an interview with the author, where we had the opportunity to ask him about that particular case, and also capture other valuable insights from his experience as a mentor. Enjoy the reading!

Isabel Rimanoczy
Editor

Quote of the Month

"We will either find a way, or make one."

Hannibal (Carthaginian General, 3rd Century B.C.)



Issue 63

The LIM Newsletter

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MENTORS

An Interview with Larry Daloz

LIM News: *In the last issue we shared a fragment of Dave's journey, where he was in midst of some dramatic discoveries about himself. It sounded promising but at the same time, unsettling. What happened to him after that?*

LPD: That interview was so long ago. I haven't seen him since, but his life did re-stabilize. He never went back to full time work; his son moved into his business and supported him; he slowed down a lot in subsequent years, and in a good way he became less compulsive. He also began contributing more to his community, becoming involved in local affairs. Some people go through fairly incremental

changes, and don't have a dramatic shift like he did. When change is a transformation rather than a transition, then it's more likely to have a period of loss and uncertainty while the inner life rearranges itself, and that's certainly what the literature suggests. There is a well known book by William Bridges,^[1] in which he described transitions, going through an ending then a neutral zone, before going into a new zone. I would describe that process as transformative rather than transitional.

LIM News: *What is a transitional change?*

LPD: One that does not require fundamental change in assumptions and orientation, a change that is incremental, adding on rather than a fundamental reorientation. Transformation and metamorphosis refer to change in form, to a higher form. The form of thought itself changes, the way we make meaning and see the world.

LIM News: *Does everyone go through a destabilization period, in order to grow?*

LPD: We need to first say what we mean by growth. Growth is change with a clear direction. Both transformation and transition are forms of growth. But some growth entails a deep change in form, and other growth is simply additive, for example, a plant in some ways simply gets bigger. But at some point it changes form, it puts out a flower, which is fertilized by pollen of another plant and the plant undergoes a profound transformation. Transformational growth is when the flower becomes something else.

LIM News: *What is the role you played as a mentor for Dave?*

LPD: In that particular case I had a formal role as well as an informal role. My formal role was as a teacher/adviser, he was a student of mine in a class and I helped him make educational decisions. I also had an informal mentoring role, in some of the long conversations, about purpose and what he wanted out of his life, and in that sense what mentors often do is they encourage their protégés to think deeply about their life, their purposes. You don't get paid for that, to work with people at a deeper level. that was the informal but more truly mentoring role. Another thing I did was to set him up with other potential mentors. When he was looking for an independent study, I arranged for him to work in another institution, I put him in touch with resources. This is another thing mentors do. Part of our work is helping people decide where they are going and another part is to help to equip them to get there. It can be very concrete, or more general, empowering them to find their voice, give more confidence, sense of importance in their life.

LIM News: *Do you play different roles as a mentor for different individuals? How would they differ and why?*

LPD: In my particular case, when I was doing the work that I described in the book with Dave, I was hired to be his adviser. In other cases a mentor may be someone who is a supervisor on a job, or a teacher, or maybe a close friend, usually an older person, someone who helps you to deal with pressing issues in your own life. Mentors show up at different times for different people, in many different ways. You know the saying "When the student is ready the teacher appears"? Mentors are really a creation of our imagination. They are not outside there, walking the streets wearing a mentor hat; we create them when we have a need to learn what they have to teach us. Usually we don't call them mentors. Most people who have mentors don't think of them as mentors.

LIM News: *So is it more a request than an offer?*

LPD: There are many programs that pair up people with mentors, hoping they match. it may or may not happen. Formal mentoring programs may be useful, but my experience is that they often do not work well; an effective formal mentoring program needs to have a light touch. For example, where I worked at Lesley University we had a team of 7-8 faculty and 30-40 students; they would interact for some time getting to know each other, until the students would request a particular faculty. There was

more choice and a chance to shop around.

LIM News: *How is a mentor different from a coach?*

LPD: My quick answer is that you can hire a coach but you cannot hire a mentor. What I mean by that is that the term 'coach' as it is used now, is a professional term for someone you hire to help you do your job better. A mentor is a less clearly defined role and a bigger role. A mentor is not something you can buy. The outcome of a good coaching relationship is more competent job performance. The outcome of a good mentoring relationship is greater wisdom.

LIM News: *How is it different from a therapist?*

LPD: A therapist normally deals with some kind of deficit or wound, while a mentor works with adequately functioning people. A therapist is there to get you off the floor to walk again, a mentor is to get a person who is walking to be more conscious about where to go. It is about making wiser choices about their lives. I have a college professor whom I consider one of my mentors. I've known him for over 40 years and I still write to him. These relationships can go over a long time. Hopefully you would not see a therapist for that long!

LIM News: *In your book you mention different theories about development of adults. Which is your preferred framework?*

LPD: I think the best framework is several frameworks. Any theory gives you a particular angle, perspective of vision, but you need to be able to triangulate your vision. In that sense, I don't have a favorite one. However having said that, both Perry^[2] and Kegan^[3] for me give a far more adequate framework - than lot of other developmental theories. I also quote Levinson^[4] in my book, as he talks about the transitions you go through life. That is useful information to have, if you have a middle class student in his midlife, who is wondering what his life is about. To think of midlife transition is a useful framework.

LIM News: *What makes a person evolve from one stage into the next?*

LPD: That is actually one of the biggest questions in developmental theory. Kegan has one of the richest ways of understanding how stage change happens. He views human change systemically and understands that human beings live in ecology of social forces. There is a permeable line between an individual and his or her environment. For example, what helps a child make a shift from an early stage to the next? He describes it as the holding environment, which holds, releases, and hangs around.

It supports you as you go through the change. *Developing through relationships*^[5] is a wonderful book. It's relationships that keep us in place or help us change. No one develops in a closet. We become human in relation with other human beings. So the question is "How do relationships either hold us in place or enable us to grow?" Let me give you an example. I personally come from a fairly conservative family background, and the relationships in my world held me as a fairly conventional person. I went off to college, I came in contact with a whole new social reality, a new group of people who thought differently, were more diverse than my world, challenged much of what I had thought was true, and also who were friends, people I came to like, so it felt safe to change. And there were also professors in that world who gave me reasons and helped me create a whole philosophical framework for understanding the change I went through. That all could be called a mentoring environment; what really enables stage change is a mentoring environment, one that supports, challenges and provides continuity.

LIM News: *Can mentors help in making this progress?*

LPD: They can help put in place a mentoring environment that will enable people to change.

LIM News: *Did you have a mentor yourself?*

LPD: Many people don't think of having had a mentor. That is not something to be ashamed of, often when they start thinking they come up with people who have served mentoring moments for them, or have been helpful, or sometimes a writer whom you never met can serve as a kind of mentor. It doesn't have to happen over a long period, it can be a short moment. And yes, I have had several mentors.

LIM News: *What makes a good mentor?*

LPD: I think the most important thing is the capacity to listen and to really see the protégé. When I've asked that question of people who had mentors, the answer I most often hear is "this person really saw me", or "saw me in a different way". A good mentor helps you see yourself in a way that opens new possibilities for you, points to aspects of you that you may not have thought or honored before.

LIM News: *What advice would you have to someone who got inspired with becoming a mentor?*

LPD: I would suggest that they think into their own life, when they had mentors or mentoring moments, perhaps someone older, at least half a generation older, who is half way between a parent and a peer. I've noticed this with males looking for mentoring; they often lacked a positive relationship with their fathers. The next thing to do is to ask if you already have been a mentor for someone, because often people don't think about that. So the first thing to do is to examine your own life. There are a couple of good publications, such as *The Mentors Guide* by Zachary.^[6] In fact the literature on mentoring has mushroomed over the past 20 years. If you Google the word, you will be overwhelmed. You are bound to find a wide variety of "mentoring programs", many of which welcome people who would like to offer their wisdom and support to younger people. Probably the best thing to do is just to notice when young adults look to you for help or advice. Who knows? You might already be a mentor!



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- [1] Bridges, W. (1991) *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley
- [2] Perry, W.G. (1968) *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme*. Austin, Tex: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- [3] Kegan, R. (1994). *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- [4] Levinson, D.J., and others. (1978). *The Seasons of a Man's Life*. New York: Knopf.
- [5] Fogel, A. (1993). *Developing Through Relationships*, Chicago: Univ. of Chicago.
- [6] Zachary, L.(2000). *The Mentor's Guide: Facilitating Effective Learning Relationships*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.



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