



# President's Message

*International System Safety Society President  
Robert Schmedake*

## The Value of a Mentor

At the core of any professional society is the charge to aid the membership in its professional development. A few years ago, our Society created the position of director of mentoring, research and development. Currently, Steve Mattern serves that role. Steve took on the program initiated by Mike Allocco and has established the mentoring program. He is now seeking members interested in participating, including mentors, as well as mentees. I believe that participating in a mentoring program is a tremendous benefit to any person's professional development.

In my career, I have been blessed with a number of mentors. These were people who were senior to me in my company, in my profession, in my military organization or in my education. Some were technical experts, some were managers and some were experts in other areas, but understood the business environment in which I worked. Being mentored was an advantage — it meant I could learn from the experience and mistakes of others.

Sometimes, the mentor brought expertise on the product. When I worked on weapon programs, I had a mentor who had experience in getting weapons certified for use. He understood the issues related to getting board approvals, and my program and I greatly benefited from his advice. When I worked on fighter jets, I spoke with pilots to learn about how situations looked from their perspective. I also spent time with maintainers and discovered their unique perspective on keeping aircraft safe. Sometimes, someone who has been down a path before can be a real asset, and sometimes it is good to hear another point of view of a problem on which you have been working.

Another type of mentor has been the career mentor. Some managers have helped me identify my strengths and weaknesses. They helped me identify career opportunities, develop my skills and improve my value to my employer. In short, they helped me find my niche.

With 30 years behind me now, I might be tempted to say I no longer need a mentor, but that's just not true. There is always room for improvement, and there are always new challenges. Lately, I have gotten good advice

on corporate survival. In the six months since I took office in the Society, I have struggled with budget issues and Conference legal issues, as well as with finding ways to encourage volunteers. I have come to rely on a number of good managers at my company, as well as a number of excellent members from our Society.

In any enterprise, seeing the dangers that lie ahead of an obstacle is a challenge. Mentors are the advance scouts who may have already traveled the route you are now taking. They illuminate the way forward and help us see the dangers and benefits of a particular path. I cannot imagine what my career would have been without the mentors I have had, and I want to encourage you to take advantage of the networks you are in to find the right mentor for the path you are taking.

Being a mentor also has benefits. As a Boeing Technical Fellow, I am expected to provide mentoring. I find that mentoring a less-experienced engineer sharpens my skills as much as theirs. For one thing, ideas I have come to accept as true get challenged. Questions from an engineer on why a particular path is a good path cause me to re-evaluate what I believe, and I often have a much better understanding of the topic after the time I spend discussing it with the mentee.

So, how does being a mentor benefit my value as a professional? One's career arc starts with the role of being a learner. We transition from learning the job to doing the job. Eventually, we get to a point where we imagine better ways of doing the job and create efficiencies in our work. When we move from creating better ways for ourselves to teaching others about these efficiencies, we begin to influence our employer's productivity and effectiveness at a much higher rate. When we transition from mentoring individuals to leveraging change at an organizational level, we are truly impacting our organization's effectiveness. Our value to the organization increases as we follow this arc.

So, contact Steve at [smattern@bastiontechnologies.com](mailto:smattern@bastiontechnologies.com) and volunteer. Become a mentor, or get a mentor. This is an excellent way to develop within your profession. ☺