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STRONG MENTORSHIP TODAY GUARANTEES A THRIVING
HAIR INDUSTRY TOMORROW.

// by KARIE L. FROST

For Matrix artistic director Nicholas French, the words of his father—famed UK hairdresser Freddy French—left an indelible mark on him. “He always said, ‘It’s even more important what you leave behind.’ So I’ve always had the attitude to encourage and mentor up-and-coming stylists to take our industry to the next level,” recalls French, who regularly leads “Icons and Legends” teaching and mentoring events at Skyfall, his education center in Palm Springs, California. If Freddy French’s words ring true to you, mentorship may be an enriching way to take what you love about being behind the chair and sharing that knowledge with others. But what does it take to be a strong mentor? Industry pros that have made teaching a major part of their careers share what it means to lead and pave the way for others.



THE STRONG MENTOR

Successful mentoring isn't just about teaching a cut or color technique—it's about listening to the mentee and determining what he or she truly needs to overcome hurdles. "I choose to follow the mentees' lead, and listen to what they're saying and what they're *not* saying," shares Rebecca Beardsley, owner of ShineForth Salon, executive director of Haircuts With Heart and author of "5 Simple and Effective Self-Care Strategies." Above all, "mentors need to help the student see her value and the gifts she brings to the industry," she says, adding that teaching practices that support personal growth first and career growth second help achieve this goal.

Joanne Rempel, Eufora color development manager, believes that a strong mentor wears many hats: educator, cheerleader and psychologist. "We spend all of our time mentoring on cosmetology and skill, which is necessary and required; however, most stylists don't leave our industry because they can't cut a bob," she stresses. "We must mentor and create mentorship programs that focus on not only technical skills, but also the psychological demands of working with guests, the preconceived ideas of beauty and the demands that these create on the stylist."

LEADING ON ALL LEVELS

Certainly it pays to seek a mentor early in your career, but even established stylists benefit from the insights of a teacher. How mentors approach these two groups—the newbies and

the veterans—can make a difference. “At the beginning of a stylist’s career, you’re very hungry, but as years go by, sometimes that hunger fades—in order to thrive you need that same enthusiasm as you had to begin,” says Jason Reyes, John Paul Mitchell Systems international trainer. Addressing both groups’ needs takes finesse. “With new talent, it’s important to understand the frustrations at the beginning of a stylist’s career and teach her patience and perseverance,” adds Reyes. Veterans, however, may be more rigid due to years spent doing hair a certain way, and Reyes has found that encouraging change boils down to the mentor truly understanding where the veteran is at in her career and working together on how best to guide her to the next step.

In some ways, green stylists can be easier mentees because they’re open to new ideas and more malleable, according to Johnny Ramirez, co-owner of Ramirez Tran Salon in Los Angeles. “They’re motivated, inspired, and willing to learn new techniques to help them enhance their career as a hairstylist,” he says. Plus, they’re plugged into one of the biggest hurdles for veteran stylists:



Rebecca Beardsley (L) with mentees for her Haircuts With Heart community outreach program.

social media. “Many established hairstylists express frustration and are hesitant to fully expose their work on this new platform,” Ramirez points out. Part of the mentor’s job becomes more than demystifying cut, color and customer service, but also teaching social media prowess, like taking the right photographs and involving the target audience.

Yet don’t discount mentoring veteran stylists, while Beardsley notes that teaching newbies humility and ownership of their position is beyond rewarding, working with established talent pays you back tenfold. “It’s more like helping them



Nicholas French leads mentees at Skyfall learning center in Palm Springs, California.

craft their lives, and find ways to let go of old behaviors that don’t serve them,” she says. “I help give them a fresh perspective by not only learning techniques, but coming out to join me in my work with the community.”

TWO-WAY STREET

In mentorship, the teacher often learns a lesson, too. Most pros report that patience is the guiding principle in successful mentoring, and they’ve all had to learn patience in spades. “Mentoring is all about the Ps: patience, perfection, perseverance, precision, programming, passion, processing, persuasion, and yes, pain,” French laughs. “Realize that mentoring involves being uncomfortable—and that’s not necessarily a bad thing. Being uncomfortable is a signal that you’re learning something new, even as a mentor.”

“I’ve learned it’s all in the delivery,” says Wella Professionals global ambassador Sonya Dove. How you communicate ideas to your mentees can make or break the relationship. “When conversations are taken the wrong way, feelings can be hurt. That’s why I’ve learned to always leave the person feeling empowered,” she says. For Ramirez, learning that some students simply aren’t open to new ideas and change is a lesson with which he’s had to come to terms. “What I’m still learning is that I will always be committed to helping others, but without expectations,” he says. Being humble and setting aside ego also benefits the mentor as much as the mentee. “Not every person you mentor will have the same personality as you, which can make the process challenging because when personalities clash, it hinders the learning process,” explains Ramirez. “I’ve learned that it’s okay to not have the same vision.”

Reyes has watched his own skill set continuously improve through being a mentor. “The more I share with others, the better my skills get,” he says. “Plus, mentoring helps my mind stay in a creative state.” Mentees can even hold the title of teacher, according to Arrojo Techni-Color director and brand strategist Patrick McIvor. “As new techniques like hair painting or products like Olaplex have entered our industry, it’s the new stylists—my mentees—who understand how these work in new ways, and they teach me too,” he says.

LASTING LEARNING

“Education never ends as a hairdresser, and mentoring never stops once you choose that path,” asserts French. In an industry where trends and techniques change daily, keeping abreast of it all means constant learning and, in turn, a continuous need to connect when the going gets tough. Of course, it’s mostly on the mentee to do the outreach, but a strong mentor will be ready to receive the call. “Once someone lets me in to their lives, I take it seriously, and they’re always welcome to reach out,” says Beardsley. In fact, Dove asserts that some mentor-mentee relationships evolve into lifelong friendships. “This is the part of mentoring that fills my heart as it ends up I’m mentoring them through life, not just hair,” she says.

Thanks to social media, taking on the role of lifelong mentor is a tiny bit easier. “Social media allows mentors to help more people, as sometimes we don’t have enough time to help and guide as many people in person as we’d like,” says Reyes. Posting educational videos, answering questions, and simply giving encouragement on mentees’ pages all help fuel the relationship for years to come. But Rempel is quick to point out that though technical online mentorship has value in the industry for young stylists due to its ease and time efficiency, in-person mentorship is what truly helps drive stylists to greatness.

PASSING THE TORCH

Strong mentorship certainly creates future leaders—there’s no doubt about that. But for French, strong mentorship also passes the torch to the next generation of mentors—and history can be forgotten all too easily in today’s social media age. “Future leaders must have a great depth of knowledge,” he says. “The hair industry of the future has to be nurtured to be successful.” Adds McIvor, “In some industries, mentorship drives that industry exclusively forward, whereas in the hair industry, great mentorships not only drive our industry forward but also honor and teach the past and our craft.”

“Ideally, we want our future leaders to stand on our shoulders and go beyond what we ever thought was imaginable,” remarks Beardsley. “Helping them build that strong base of knowledge and experience while fostering their creativity, helping them find their own voice in hair, cultivating their inner life, broadening their knowledge of the world—this all allows them to see the endless possibilities of their capabilities. When we mentor this way, we are showing our future leaders what it is to be a mentor. Guaranteed, one day they’ll then pay it forward with another stylist—or many.”



Diane McCaffrey with mentor Patrick McIvor

MENTORSHIP METHODOLOGIES

WHILE PATIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE REMAIN THE BEDROCK OF SOLID MENTORSHIP, MENTORS HAVE DIFFERENT METHODOLOGIES TO DELIVER THEIR TEACHINGS.

AUTHENTICITY. “I mentor in a very authentic way. I teach how I work: Work smarter, not harder, and subscribe to the idea that there are no problems, only opportunities.” —Sonya Dove

OWNERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY. “My methodology sees success when I look at how they reacted to their own unexpected outcomes: Did they hide, make excuses, make it worse, or fix it and make it better?” —Patrick McIvor

HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE. “My methodology is to teach all the great foundational skills and techniques from the past to the next generation of hairdressers. Technique remains the same, but fashions and trends are fleeting.” —Nicholas French

SELF-ESTEEM. “I want stylists to value themselves enough that they don’t allow salon owners to work them down to the ground—that they find their home where they work.” —Rebecca Beardsley

HONEST FEEDBACK. “I do this with respect and dignity. Fluffy statements that don’t accurately provide feedback won’t help growth.” —Joanne Rempel

SO YOU WANT TO BE A MENTOR?

As Joanne Rempel says: “If you have the fortune to excel in your career as a stylist, it’s your responsibility to pay it forward.” Here, our pros offer insight on what it takes to guide others successfully.

“Have a servant’s heart and patience. And practice, practice, practice, because you must stay on top of your skill set in order to teach.” —Jason Reyes

“Understand that you need to be 100 percent committed personally, professionally, financially, and even socially—and the impact it can have on your family and life.” —Patrick McIvor

“Park your ego at the door and always share your unique techniques with the hairdressers coming up behind you.” —Nicholas French

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