**The Story of the First Mentor**

The term mentor can be traced back to Homer’s epic poem, The Odyssey. The original Mentor, a combination of the goddess Athena and man, was entrusted with the care and guidance of Odysseus’ son, Telemachus.

In this great tale Mentors role was twofold: to care for Telemachus while guiding the young man to adulthood; and to help Odysseus fulfill his life’s quest by preparing Telemachus to stand by his father in their fight to regain control of their home in Ithaca (Daloz 1986). It has been noted that perhaps Mentor’s greatest challenge was “to help Telemachus see the error in his judgment in a way that would allow the young protégé to grow in wisdom and not in rebellion.” (Clawson, 1980) Mentor served as a role model, guide, facilitator, and supportive protector for Telemachus.

Throughout The Odyssey, Mentor helps Telemachus to grow and to learn. Mentor did not work in isolation as he guided Telemachus on his quest for knowledge about his father’s fate. When Telemachus ventured out in search of his father, he talked to Odysseus’ old comrades and in hearing them talk of the past, he learned and added to his understanding about the adult world. Mentor, through his support and facilitation of the young man’s travels, helped Telemachus to experience this learning and to draw meaning and understanding both of his role in the adult world and of himself as an adult, from his experiences.

Mentor supported and encouraged Telemachus in his search for adulthood; but, he did not attempt to make the younger man the clone of himself nor Odysseus. Not did Mentor fight Telemachus’ battles for him. Mentor stood by and watched as Odysseus and Telemachus killed their enemies.

In many ways, the task of the original Mentor had been to prepare his friend’s son for manhood. This might be viewed as a passing of the torch of leadership to the next generation. Telemachus spoke to his father of the success of his Mentor: “Thou shalt see me, if thou wilt, dear father, in this my mood no whit disgracing thy line, according to thy word.”

Indeed, Mentor was a transitional aide to adulthood in this famous, ancient Greek story.

*(from Gary P.DeBolt, Teacher Induction and Mentoring; School-based Collaborative Programs, State University of New York Press, Univ. Of New York, 1992)*