**The World-Voices Mentoring Program - An Update**

The WoVO mentoring program continues to be one of the organization’s most successful, yet unnoticed achievements. For the most part, it does exactly what it is intended to do, and that is to provide a link between those members needing some assistance, and those who are ready, willing, and able to help.

The original aim of the program was to provide a platform where newcomers could receive unbiased help from our more experienced members, but it has turned into much more than that. In many cases, our experienced members are helping each other with different areas of expertise, for example, an experienced studio tech reaching out to another member with marketing skills. Some of our newcomers, who may be inexperienced with voiceover performance and production, are offering help with bookkeeping, web design, or whatever skills they bring to the table. This is how a community works, and we are extremely happy with the way our members have engaged with the program.

Because of its very nature, we have engaged in very little oversight of the activities within the mentoring program. We invite feedback from both mentors and mentees to monitor how the program is working and responses have been overwhelmingly positive with only a small amount of concerns reported. I’d like to take this opportunity to clarify a small number of issues that have been brought to our attention.

**Mentor burn-out**

We all have limited time and resources and there may come a point where a mentor wants to take a break, or maybe they are working with a small group of regular people and their bandwidth is full. Becoming a mentor is not a one-time decision where you opt for an on-going commitment; you can edit your member profile and uncheck the mentoring box at any time. Do you need a break? Do you have a massive e-learning project that’s going to need all your time for the next couple of months? Simply edit your profile and take yourself out of the mentoring loop for as long as you need.

**Personality clashes**

It happens. Occasionally people do not get along in a one-to-one relationship. Not everyone has compatible teaching methods or learning processes. One may be reflective and absorb information slowly and methodically, while another may react better to hammered bullet-points and a rigid action plan. This can lead to frustration and a fraught relationship. Don’t be afraid to walk away (either mentor or mentee) because this is not a failure; it’s just different, and maybe incompatible, methodology.

**Unrealistic demands**

We ask that mentors give a minimum of half an hour per month. This is a small commitment, and most mentors happily give more. Some mentees have expressed an expectation that they are engaging in a program that will give them a weekly hour-long session with the mentor, and while this may happen, it is the choice of the mentor. Remember, the average mentor is working with multiple mentees and this donated time can add up.

**Professional services**

Many of our mentors offer professional services as part of their business: anything from book-keeping, editing, and web design, to technique and performance coaching. Some run successful consultancy businesses. We understand (and really appreciate) that in many cases they are donating otherwise chargeable services for free. There is nothing wrong with a mentee requesting professional services from a mentor if they find they are a good fit and the relationship will be beneficial to their career as a voiceover. If you want an hour a week from a mentor, and that’s beyond what they are offering within the program, then entering into a business arrangement may be the best way forward. However, this option can be open to some pitfalls.

Of note, the mentoring program is based on the goodwill of our volunteers. We neither vet nor approve/disapprove of anyone wanting to help. If someone says they want to offer some free coaching, we take that on faith. In many ways, we offer a simple matchmaking service. There have been a few cases where a mentee has been put under pressure to engage the mentor on a professional basis after an initial session. As mentioned before, there is nothing wrong with the relationship developing that way, but some feel that the free mentoring has been used as a recruitment tool for paid services. There is a world of difference between a mentee saying, “I’d like to engage you on a professional basis” and a mentor saying, “You really should sign up for my classes.” *Our less experienced members need to feel that the program is free from any aggressive up-selling*.

I’d like to reiterate that the points made here are, although rare, not insignificant. Our aim is to keep the mentoring program exactly as it is, but that can only happen if it self-regulates.

Thanks to everyone for making the program the success it is!

Peter Bishop

Executive Vice-President