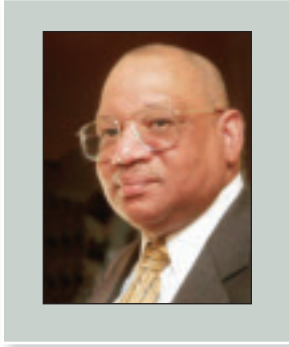


## ► PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Welford C. Roberts  
PhD, RS, REHS, DAAS

## Mentoring: How You Can Touch and Shape the Future of Environmental Health

When I first started this column, while I was sure of the topic that I wanted to present, I did not know exactly how to frame it. During that time, I was notified of the passing of NEHA Past President V. Harry Adrounie. As I reflected upon his life and service as an environmental health professional, my message for this article became very clear...how can one's life shape the future?

First, however, let me present a few words about Past President Dr. V. Harry Adrounie and echo some of the comments from our colleagues that I have seen concerning his life and commitment to environmental health. I am proud to serve as NEHA's president because of what we represent and the proud tradition we have established towards protecting the health of our nation, communities, and citizens. We are recognized as a major national entity in environmental health and are called upon for our service and support to major national and regional health initiatives. We built this reputation over time and I attribute our standing and successes, in part, to the leadership provided by our past presidents, including that of Dr. Adrounie. Unfortunately, I did not know him personally; however, I grew to "know" him through the accolades and comments expressed by colleagues that I respect (thanks to Tony Aiken, Bob Powitz, and Harry Grenawitzke). As I researched Dr. Adrounie's career, I immediately found a kinship of sorts ... in addition to sharing the experience of the NEHA presidency, he and I both are retired military officers, and we both retired at the rank of

*Mentoring gives us the opportunity to... project our knowledge and experience into the future of environmental health.*

lieutenant colonel. Some of the other titles that are associated with Dr. Adrounie include "director," "professor," "dean," "chairman," "founder," and "commander"... all reflective of him as a leader in our profession. He also was a Founder Diplomat and Diplomat Emeritus of the American Academy of Sanitarians (AAS).

As I stated earlier, this column is about mentorship, and Dr. Adrounie is a perfect example of this concept. To quote NEHA and AAS member Dr. Bob Powitz, "Harry was always ready with a quick smile, a kind word, and *genuine concern for young professionals and students*. He embodied the zeal, knowledge, skills, and attributes of our vocation in such a way that he was *inspirational to many of us* who pursued a career in environmental health. Harry was a valued colleague, a true friend, and *patient mentor*." The words that I italicized are obvious indicators of mentoring.

Mentoring gives us the opportunity to influence the young and emerging environmental

health professionals and to project our knowledge and experience into the future of environmental health. As I think about the impact and significance of mentoring, I am reminded of the phrase from the English poet John Donne in the 16th century: "No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent." This statement tells me that every person relies upon other people for information, knowledge, and guidance. This is especially true in environmental health: it's a very broad discipline encompassing numerous subject areas, so we often rely upon our peers for their experience and knowledge in various areas of environmental health. This column, therefore, explores the nature of mentoring as it applies to environmental health and how it projects current knowledge and experience into the future.

The popular Wikipedia Web site offers some definitions and explanations for *mentor* and *mentorship* (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mentor>; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mentoring>). Mentors provide expertise to less experienced individuals to help them advance their careers, enhance their education, and build their networks. Mentorship is a personal relationship that develops over time where a more experienced or more knowledgeable person helps someone who is less experienced or less knowledgeable. Mentoring differs from instructing and coaching. The latter two provide knowledge and build skills. Mentors, however, influence and help shape the viewpoint and attitude of the mentee (or protégé); the focus is on issues related to career and life.

When I was in the U.S. Army, junior officer mentoring was a major part of professional development. I learned that mentoring is not a casual process. Melanson (2007a) suggests that successful mentors assume evolving roles and move back and forth between them adopting the most suitable one as needed. These roles include the following: competent professional, respected leader, humble sage, passionate teacher, reflective traveler, avid storyteller, keen listener, trusted counselor, and consummate student. Melanson (2006) also identifies 10 rules that mentors should follow and 10 for mentees to produce a successful relationship. Examples of rules for the mentor include it's not about you; always maintain confidences; and set and enforce boundaries. Examples for the mentee include cherish your mentor's time; always maintain confidences; and learn from your mistakes. There is not sufficient space here to elaborate on Melanson's publications, so I urge you to acquire and read them for a more thorough understanding. Also, a third publication (Melanson, 2007b) directed to senior leaders in the army medical department provides a listing of publications/suggested readings related to the mentoring process.

The future of environmental health is ever evolving. Currently, economics are having a major impact on how environmental health programs are staffed and administered. Budget deficits are making it difficult to staff programs at previous levels. Recently, I had the opportunity to visit various regions of the U.S. and to interact with our colleagues in the northeast (the Yankee Conference involving affiliates from Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont),

Texas (TEHA), and Nebraska (the other NEHA), and to learn firsthand about how environmental health programs are experiencing diminishing resources and how they are coping with the losses. The good news is that programs are adapting and environmental health managers are finding innovative ways to continue to serve the public with diminishing resources, but without compromising public health. Advancing technology and knowledge and emerging issues are also influencing environmental health's future. For example, management information systems and their input devices allow environmental health inspectors to collect, record, and assess field data on the spot and to catalog, store, and analyze it for trend analysis to help shape programs. Last year, and continuing into this year, many environmental health programs have been reacting to the occurrence of the H1N1 flu and the associated vaccination campaign, which has consumed significant time and effort. The way that managers have responded to and addressed issues such as these is a reflection of experience. Our environmental health directors have the leadership and management skills to adapt to changing situations like these. Our current leaders, however, will not be in their positions forever. As they move on to retirement and other well deserved fortunes, new professionals will need to replace them. This is where the mentoring process culminates.

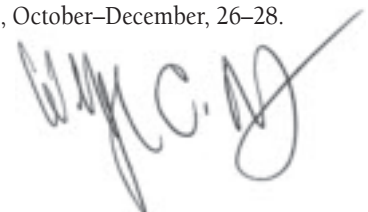
In an earlier column (JEH 72[2], 2009), I mentioned mentoring as an integral part of environmental health workforce development. Here, I reemphasize the point, but in addition to preparing an employee for career progression, the mentor also can think of the

process as a means of influencing the future of environmental health. Mentors can pass their experiences to junior colleagues who then can incorporate and use the information to shape their own technical abilities, and their management and leadership skills and style to address future environmental health issues.

As I read the e-mail messages in tribute to Dr. Androunie's life, many acknowledge how he helped them shape their perspective on environmental health and its practice. He truly was a mentor. I believe that mentoring is one of the most important things that we can do as environmental health professionals. I submit to you that every environmental health professional at their mid-career point and beyond should be mentoring those who are new to the workforce and even emerging professionals, e.g., college and high school students. This is your opportunity to touch the future and to help our profession *LEAN FORWARD!* 🐘

## References

- Melanson, M.A. (2006). Mentor and protégés: Simple rules for success. *Army Medical Department Journal*, July–September, 50–58.
- Melanson, M.A. (2007a). Evolving roles of highly successful mentors. *Army Medical Department Journal*, October–December, 37–39.
- Melanson, M.A. (2007b). Mentoring in the army medical department: Advice for senior leaders. *Army Medical Department Journal*, October–December, 26–28.



# NEHA Credentials

Protecting human health and the environment since 1937



Why should your employees hold a NEHA credential?

**BECAUSE YOU WANT THE BEST WORKING TO PROTECT YOUR COMMUNITY!**

Professional credentials such as the Registered Environmental Health Specialist/Registered Sanitarian (REHS/RS) and Certified Professional – Food Safety

(CP-FS) have been rigorously developed to insure that those who successfully pass the credentialing exams have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to competently practice environmental health.

For more information on NEHA credentials, please visit our Web site at [neha.org/credential](http://neha.org/credential) or contact the credentialing department at (303) 756-9090, ext. 337 or 339.