

A DIVA'S CHRONICLES...



FINDING AND BEING A MENTOR

by Jennifer Leeland

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Since 2005, I've been writing with the serious intent to be a published author. Over the last three years, I've had critiques over a wide spectrum, some very extensive, some pretty light. I've had New York published authors and unpublished authors both eviscerate my work. Critique partners that tell the truth, spare no feelings and yet, still support me one hundred percent are gold.

A mentor is an entirely different prospect.

men · tor

[men-tawr, -ter]

–noun

1. a wise and trusted counselor or teacher.
 2. an influential senior sponsor or supporter.
–verb (used without object)
 3. to act as a mentor: She spent years mentoring to junior employees.
–verb (used with object)
 4. to act as a mentor to: The brash young executive did not wish to be mentored by anyone.
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Origin:

1740–50; after [MENTOR](#) (< Gk Méntōr)

Related forms:

men · tor · ship, noun

Synonyms:

1. adviser, master, guide, preceptor.

Recently, I've acquired someone I would consider a "mentor". Now, that's not to say several people haven't acted as my mentor. Crystal Jordan and Dayna Hart held my hand and guided my steps through my early publications. Both have been invaluable resources to my "growing up" in writing. Loribelle Hunt led me along the path of the business end of publishing and has kept my head firmly on my shoulders.

Yet, at some point, I began to take these fantastic (and correct) voices for granted. A slight arrogance drifted into my writing, my attitude, my career. I became complacent.

Then, two things happened. I had a couple of rejections from New York (when I was SURE I was ready) and an editor gave me some honest criticism that echoed comments I'd gotten from my critique partners and publishers. Criticism that I had ignored.

That honest criticism led to an interesting relationship and mentorship. She's one of the few people I will say exactly what I think when I think it. There's very little censorship on either of us. I frustrate her and she frustrates me, but the result is usually some understanding at the end

of it. Our work has been brutal for me, not only because it has made me *think* about my process, but because it has forced me to implement what I've learned.

As the Romance Divas Mentorship program kicks off, I want to add a few things that might help those involved to deal with the task ahead.

For the Mentee

1. **Recognize that the process will be painful.** Don't assume that that means you "can't write" or that your mentor "hates you and everything you produce". This is *your* process. Own it.
2. **Don't Be Afraid To Defend Your Position.** If your mentor asks you to do something you think is nuts, try it. But if it doesn't work, tell them. You'll be surprised at the weird things you'll defend. The trick is to know whether what you're defending is a "voice" thing or just a stubborn thing. Personally, I can't know the answer to that until I try their way first.
3. **Recognize your frustration and take a step back.** Sometimes, it's just too much information or too many things to change, or too discouraging. It is okay to take a day or two to let the "new idea" sink in. And let your Mentor know you've reached your limit.
4. **Be open to new ideas.** If you're someone who is brand new and still don't know what your voice might be, go cautiously and ask, ask, ask. It's very easy to lose your voice to someone else's if you're not careful. However, the whole idea of a mentorship is guidance to better writing. Be open to change, just be aware of who you are as a writer.

For the Mentor

1. **Recognize that the process will be painful.** What seems completely reasonable to you might be a foreign concept to your mentee. And what looks like stubbornness might be fear, frustration or misunderstanding. Patience is needed.
2. **Ask, Ask, Ask.** At every stage of the mentorship, questions are the key. "How are feeling about this?" is a really good one. "What do you think of the changes you've made?" is also important. Reluctance is normal, expected and necessary for growth. A mentor isn't being obdurate, but cautious. It's better to discuss feelings of doubt than to let them fester.
3. **Recognize your frustration and take a step back.** Sometimes it seems the person you're trying to help is treating you like the enemy. They're not. The inherent aspect of a mentor/mentee relationship is both collaborative and abrasive. It's important for you to know when you've reached your limit. Taking a step back is essential if your frustration level is very high. Silence can be hurtful, so let your mentee know you're taking a step back. Then, amazingly, when you connect again, it can be even more productive than you imagined.
4. **Be open to a unique perspective.** The most important job for a mentor is to understand the vision and voice of your mentee. Always check in and ask yourself "Am I replacing

my mentee's vision or voice with my own?" The point of mentoring is to take the raw talent in a writer and help them to polish their writing. You are their guide in the experience unique to them. Just as your experience was unique to you.

I really hope some of this has been helpful. It's all based on my own opinion but I hope it can give you some insight.



About JENNIFER LEELAND

Once upon a time, there was a little girl...

I loved Harlequin romances when I was little and used to sneak them from my mother's bookshelf. But my father influenced me with Agatha Christie, Ngiao Marsh and Arthur Conan Doyle. I always loved to write but never thought about becoming an author.

In 2003, a profound experience changed that. My mother showed me a manuscript written by my father. No one had ever seen it. No agent. No editor. No one. He died in 2002 never realizing his dream to be a published author.

I wondered if that would be my fate? Would my family come across my attempts at story telling and shake their heads in pity? I vowed that I would at least try.

Romance seemed to be my genre, but there was a small problem. Dead bodies kept showing up. Apparently, I couldn't write a romance without a little mystery. Luckily for me, romantic suspense is a thriving genre.

I have also gotten to write a quirky contemporary series about an alcoholic guardian angel (Divine Intervention Series).

Jennifer Leeland was born when I wanted to write erotic romance. I'd loved reading it and wanted to take a shot. It turned out that writing erotic was as much fun as reading it. The more I write, the farther I want to go.

But my first love is romantic suspense.

I live with a Redneck, who loves to brainstorm with me on occasion, and my two dirt faced Okie kids in the Northern California Boonies. And I write all my love scenes with Thomas The Tank Engine in the background.

For more on Jennifer, visit her <http://www.jenniferleeland.com>