



The Importance of Mentors

A Monday Morning Musing from Mickey the Mercenary Geologist

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My Mercenary Geologist business has three facets:

First and foremost, I am a field geologist, mapper, and prospector who subscribes to the David Lowell School of “Boot Leather and Drilling”. I am a dedicated career professional who welcomes the challenge and reward of working in remote and primitive conditions. In more than three decades of experience, I have seen nearly every rock type on the planet and have experience in exploration and evaluation of a multitude of commodities in diverse geological environments.

Secondly, I am an exploration and mining analyst specializing in evaluation of projects, companies, and business development within the junior resource sector. The last 17 years of my career have been devoted exclusively to the venture capital business. During this time I have developed a strong network of professional contacts that constitute a “who’s who” of the mining and exploration business, while also becoming an investor, economist, and evaluator of junior exploration and mining companies and their projects. My field experience as a “for hire” (hence Mercenary) consultant for most of my career enables me to deliver an opinion on the merits of a project and company in a rapid and efficient manner.

Thirdly, I am a mentor to young geologists and students. I have a deep passion for exploration and mining and a sense of responsibility to my professional community. This business “been berra berra good... to me” and that is motivation to give back knowledge and communicate my experiences to those bright minds who are the future creators of new wealth on our Earth.

The first and second business efforts afford me a nice living. The third generates no capital but I approach it as diligently and enthusiastically as the former.

Mentoring is an integral part of the progress and development of human society.

Some of us are fortunate enough to have special teachers who inspired our educations and careers by passing along knowledge and wisdom gained thru their prior experiences. Every successful professional can point to a very few older people, be they parents, school teachers, college professors, or job supervisors, who profoundly influenced his educational and career path.

With that introduction, I credit those who have mentored me in my development as a person, geologist, scientist, and writer.

My first mentor of course was my father. Dad put a baseball in my left hand and a glove on my right hand when I was three or four years old. The family has an old Brownie photo to prove it. As a result, I developed a lifelong love affair with the game of baseball both as a player and a spectator. He taught me how to fish. I am a very good fisherman. As I detailed before, he also gave me a gambling streak, which has proven to be of enormous value investing in the venture capital arena ([Mercenary Musing, September 15, 2008](#)).

My mother lent me financial sense. She taught me to save, be frugal, and most importantly, that debt is bad. Because of her guidance, I have incurred only one substantial debt: My small hobby farm in central New Mexico's South Valley bought in 1984 and paid off in 13 ½ years. I have no intent to assume debt again in my life, have never carried credit card debt, and pay cash for any personal necessity or discretionary item or I do not buy.

Various people have told me that I write well. I sincerely appreciate those compliments and give credit to my 6th grade teacher and mentor, Mr. Edgar Balden (Yes, he was bald as a cue ball!). An integral part of his honors English class was a minimum one page "theme", the subject of which was assigned on Friday, written over the weekend, and turned in on Monday morning. I must confess sometimes despising this task and often procrastinated writing until Sunday night, much to my mother's chagrin. But his weekly assignment forced me to think, be creative and disciplined, and become an effective writer. In retrospect, it was then that I first developed intense focus under pressure of a looming deadline.

When I launched my website and newsletter in April 2008, I thought about Mr. Balden and how he was my inspiration to develop a writing style at age 12. Regrettably, I learned that he died a few months before and I am unable to give him credit personally.

My next mentor was my math teacher as a high school senior. Mr. Marney Nowland was fresh out of college and so hyperactive and enthused about his subject and his students that he literally shredded boxes of chalk on the blackboard. He kept a big towel on hand to wipe the sweat off his brow and the considerable debris off his hands several times during any given 50 minute lecture. I swear a white cloud constantly followed him around the classroom.

Although I had a penchant for science and math, Mr. Nowland inspired me to be dogged, persistent, and relentless in solving problems. He stayed after school for two afternoons a week without compensation to teach a college prep pre-calculus class to a group of his trigonometry students. My thanks goes to Marney: I was well prepared for engineering calculus at the university and got an easy A the following fall.

I went to the University of Tulsa as a scholarship engineering student, took the requisite four semesters of mathematics, chemistry, physics, basic engineering, and computer science classes, then changed majors to geology during my junior year. I met my undergraduate advisor and next mentor the following semester. Dr. Colin Barker was an Oxford graduate, a petroleum geochemist, and arguably the most astute scientist I have ever known.

Midway thru my senior year, Dr. Barker offered me a job in his research lab and gave me an office and laboratory space. With his guidance I was able to procure a student research grant normally restricted to graduate students. It bought scientific equipment, chemicals, supplies, and reagents for my senior thesis. I researched an esoteric subject: The release of water from synthetic quartz crystals as they were heated to melting.

The idea was to develop an empirical method for determining the temperature of formation of quartz in hydrothermal mineral deposits. Though the project was ultimately inconclusive, it furthered my education immensely. I give Colin credit for teaching me how to think independently and conduct original research.

After getting an honors B.Sc. degree in Earth Sciences, the next step in my educational experience was a Master of Science program in Geology at the University of New Mexico. I was granted a research assistantship in the geochemistry professor's lab. He was not someone I could relate to as a scientist or a person so after three semesters, we parted ways. I messed around in geology grad school a couple more semesters, took Spanish classes, and then went to work in the mineral exploration industry.

My first boss in the mineral exploration business is also one of my mentors. In 1976 I took a summer job with Conoco Metallics in Albuquerque and will never forget my first day on the job: Flying around with Fred Jenkins in a bubble Bell 47 helicopter examining copper oxide prospects in northern New Mexico. He showed me the copper oxide nail test that day and you can see me illustrating the technique as I mentor [young geologists in Chile](#). In 1982, I suggested that the corporate muckety-mucks at Santa Fe Pacific Mining hire Fred Jenkins as my boss and we worked together for another five years. Fred taught me the art of prospecting as a complement to the science of geology and, though now retired, he is still one of the best prospectors in the Western US.

But I digress.

After beating the bush in the western US for three companies over two years, I decided to go the poor grad student route again and finish my Master's program. One day I walked unannounced into Dr. Lee Woodward's office, told him I was returning to school, wanted to become a "dumb field geologist", and do a mapping thesis under him.

I presented Lee with a rudimentary geology and sample map of the mineralized area chosen for my mapping project and he agreed, perhaps a little reluctantly given my previous abandonment of the program, to be my thesis advisor.

It was the best move I ever made.

I thank Lee for allowing me to work independently but gladly providing advice and guidance when asked, and for sharpening my technical writing skills with his infamous red pen. Despite our collective efforts, my M.Sc. thesis still became a 199 page book. It just may be the longest Master's thesis in the history of New Mexico's geology department.

Dr. Lee Woodward was originally just another of over 20 UNM geology professors to me and, as chairman of the department, he was a bit intimidating to many grad students. But he was willing to become my thesis advisor, I won him over with hard work and determination, we co-authored my first two peer-reviewed journal papers, and we became successful business partners staking and leasing mining claims a decade later.

Lee Woodward is my most influential mentor. But most importantly, he is my lifelong friend. And he is still the best fly fisherman I know.

Many thanks must go to Lee and his lovely wife Katy.

I have been incredibly lucky to have such a cadre of mentors in my life and would be a much less intelligent and effective geologist if not for these people who gave so freely and willingly to ensure my success as a student and professional. They all influenced my life profoundly as a youth and young man.

As a result, I am devoted to mentoring geology students and young professionals in my chosen business. The premier professional organization for those of my ilk is the Society of Economic Geologists. I am a Fellow of this group for over 20 years and voluntarily serve as an [SEG Mentor and on the Student Affairs Committee](#). I encourage any and all young geologists to contact me for educational or career advice at any time. I will respond promptly as my travel schedule permits.

There is a page on my website devoted to mentoring activities ([Mentoring](#)). I have conducted geology career seminars at the University of New Mexico and New Mexico Tech and have an upcoming venue this fall at the University of Utah. In early 2007, I mentored young professionals on a 10 day field trip to copper mines in northern Chile.

I am available to any geology department with students considering careers as economic geologists and especially those with SEG student chapters. I simply ask that my out-of-pocket travel expenses be covered.

There is an entire generation missing from the profession of “economic geologist” with few practitioners between the ages of the mid-late 20’s to the mid-late 40’s. There were no exploration or mining jobs for newly graduating students for most of the past 15-20 years and university geology departments routinely eliminated positions for Economic Geologist. Now there are not enough qualified geologists to fill new demand created by the current commodities boom. I view this as a secular bull market in commodities that will last until after my generation is gone.

We Baby Boomers are now the white haired Chief Executive Officers and gray bearded Vice President’s of Exploration and the bald Consulting Geologists and Analysts who run junior resource companies, manage exploration groups, plan projects, map and develop targets, assess economics, analyze properties, and evaluate companies for investment or acquisition.

At the opposite end are the junior geologists sitting drill rigs or making computer maps and summer hire students breaking rocks, digging samples, or dragging IP cable around bush camps.

There are few geologists in our business that span the gap between these two groups in terms of age and experience. Particularly lacking are the senior geologists with 10-20 years experience.

I noted last year that a certain Athabasca Basin uranium explorer listed the following as its “Technical Team”: A Master’s degree candidate in geology was the Chief Geologist; a junior in college “taking some time off from school to work in the industry” was its drill project geologist; and a camp expediter and prospector “who knows the area” was the field crew.

This fact concerns me greatly. What happens when my generation retires (which I hope to never do) or dies off? Who will carry the torch?

I jokingly refer to myself as a “dinosaur” because I still make geology maps the old fashioned way: With a topographic map taped on a masonite board, a mylar cover sheet, Pentel 0.5 mm with hard plastic lead, and a set of Verithin colored pencils. The only difference is I now have a GPS which saves me the time-consuming task of reading the topo map or triangulating to plot my position.

Unfortunately I am a dinosaur in many more ways than that.

“Boot leather and drilling” discovers ore bodies and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Ask the economic geologist who arguably has created more real wealth than any other man ever to walk the Earth. Ask David Lowell.

As an example, good geological mapping and the resulting conceptual target found Fruta del Norte, southeastern Ecuador, the largest new gold deposit discovered in the current commodities cycle.

Other recent examples that I personally know and cover in my newsletter where careful surface and/or subsurface mapping and sampling discovered new mineral deposits or expanded previously know deposits include: Lydian International’s Amulsar, Armenia; Premium Exploration’s Orogrande, Idaho; and Eurasian Minerals’ Grand Bois, Haiti.

Where are the geological mappers-prospectors to make the discoveries after we are gone?

Who will be there with the requisite knowledge and experience to search for, find, and develop the mineral commodities that modern industrialized society will demand 20-30 years from now?

Where will the next generation of CEO’s, VP’s, Chief Geologists, and Analysts come from?

In my opinion, it is incumbent for my generation to select the best of the best and become mentors to those energetic, enthusiastic, up and coming, bright young geologists who are destined to take our places in the exploration and mining business as ever-increasing demand in BRIC and emerging countries fuels a secular bull market in commodities.

My fellow Economic Geologists, it is time to give back to this fascinating business that has allowed all of us to become financially secure and in many instances, *muy rico*.

Seek, find, and inspire a favorite young geologist to: See the World, Explore, Develop, and Create Wealth.

Let’s help the Earth become a better place for all to live.

Ciao for now,

Mickey Fulp
Mercenary Geologist



The [Mercenary Geologist Michael S. “Mickey” Fulp](#) is a Certified Professional Geologist with a B.Sc. Earth Sciences with honor from the University of Tulsa, and M.Sc. Geology from the University of New Mexico. Mickey has 30 years experience as an exploration geologist searching for economic

deposits of base and precious metals, industrial minerals, uranium, coal, oil and gas, and water in North and South America, Europe, and Asia.

Mickey has worked for junior explorers, major mining companies, private companies, and investors as a consulting economic geologist for the past 22 years, specializing in geological mapping, property evaluation, and business development. In addition to Mickey's professional credentials and experience, he is high-altitude proficient, and is bilingual in English and Spanish. From 2003 to 2006, he made four outcrop ore discoveries in Peru, Nevada, Chile, and British Columbia.

Mickey is well-known throughout the mining and exploration community due to his ongoing work as an analyst, newsletter writer, and speaker.

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