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Connie Vance, EdD, RN, FAAN
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**THE MENTOR AS PYGMALION: REALIZING POTENTIAL
        THROUGH EMPOWERMENT**

Mentor is a magic word…our relationships with caring, effective mentors can create profound, often unexpected, effects on our self and career development. Our mentor connections release talent and potential and empower us. The word "Pygmalion" also implies magic— the power of belief and expectation that causes human transformation—a frog to prince, flower girl to princess, rags to riches idea. Both terms arise from Greek legends that provide essential lessons in today's world for success and satisfaction in life and work. In this presentation, I postulate that the Greek myth of Pygmalion is an important ingredient in successful mentoring.

Mentor. We know that Mentors are always on the lookout for promising "stars"—Mentors are *talent brokers* who reach out to develop and protect potential and talent wherever it may be found. They tap into the often hidden gifts of others, sometimes unrecognized even by the persons who possess those gifts. The main purpose of mentoring is the personal and professional development of a person, known as the protégé. The mentor connection has been defined as a "developmental, empowering, and nurturing relationship extending over time in which mutual sharing, learning, and growth occur in an atmosphere of respect, collegiality, and affirmation" (Vance & Olson, 1998).

Mentors are futurists in that they invest in future potential through their belief in and advocacy of their protégés' (i.e., students, colleagues, subordinates) development and growth. Their investment involves a time commitment, generosity in sharing their wisdom and the hindsight of experience, as well as making connections and opening doors to their contacts and networks. A sustained respectful relationship characterized by encouragement, communication, sharing, and support is the driver of mentoring.

The first recorded account of Mentor occurred in the Greek legend, *The Odyssey,* by the poet, Homer. King Odysseus's friend, Mentor, was entrusted with the tutelage, protection, and nurturance of the king's son, Telemachus, while Odysseus was on his ten-year journey doing battle for his country. Athena, the Goddess of heroic men, was also a guide to Telemachus in his search for his father, and assisted Mentor in the care of their protégé.

Pygmalion. Ovid in his *Metamorphoses, X,* describes Pygmalion, a sculptor, who carved a beautiful woman out of ivory. The statue was so realistic and beautiful that he fell in love with it. Indeed, his belief was so strong that he prayed to Venus (Aphrodite) to bring her to life. His belief and expectation were rewarded--she came alive as Galatea. The myth also says that they married and had a son and a daughter. This engaging legend has been recreated in sculpture and paintings, opera, ballet, music, plays and films. GB Shaw's play, *Pygmalion* (1912), was the basis for the popular Broadway musical and movie, *My Fair Lady.* The poor, uneducated flower girl, Eliza Doolittle, was miraculously transformed into a sophisticated upper-class lady by Professor Higgins who treated her as a well-bred lady and taught her how to speak and act like one.

The core lesson of the Pygmalion story is that one person's expectations have a powerful effect on another person's behavior. The Pygmalion effect requires the person to internalize this expectation, which then acts as a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy (SFP). The theme of this phenomenon is that one person, inspired by a vision, belief, desire, or expectation, persists in the relationship with another person, ultimately transforming that person in accord with the vision or expectation (Eden, 1990). This Pygmalion phenomenon, or self-fulfilling prophecy (SFP), certainly appears to drive productive mentor relationships. If the protégé is seen and treated as someone deserving of attention, would not the protégé begin to "buy into" the belief of the mentor, and act on that belief? Would not the protégé's performance be enhanced as a result of the mentor's expectation? Will the increased self-belief and self-confidence, stemming from the mentor's belief, lead to empowerment and achievement of the protégé—the self-fulfilling prophecy? (Vance & Olson, 1998, p. 125).

The Pygmalion phenomenon came to be known as the expectation effect and the self-fulfilling prophecy (SFP), in which the prophecy causes its own fulfillment. The idea that one person's expectations can deeply influence another's behavior has captured the imagination of teachers, researchers, academics, and leaders for many years. More than half a century ago, Albert Moll concluded from his clinical experience that subjects behaved as they believed they were expected to—shades of the "placebo effect," well known in the clinical field. The placebo derives its healing power from its being expected to cure the ailment (Critelli & Neumann, 1984). This ubiquitous and powerful effect presents control problems in research, but is an important ally in clinical, educational, and management practice. Practitioners in these disciplines know that the clinician's belief in the client's capacity to improve and grow is one of the most important determinants in the outcomes.

Merton (1948) first wrote about the self-fulfilling prophecy (SFP), describing it as the process through which the expectation that an event will occur increases its likelihood of occurrence. Expecting something to happen, we act in ways that make it more likely to occur. Eden (1990) later reminds us that the prophecy does not fulfill itself; rather it is the prophet who, due to his expectations, acts unwittingly to bring about the expectation with the protégé buying into the expectation, thus making it appear to be self-fulfilling. The "expecter" and believer is the Pygmalion who produces a positive expectancy effect with the "cooperation of the "expectee". The latter has been investigated in relation to self-setting of high expectation, known as the Galatea effect, resulting from work on the Pygmalion "statue" itself. In this case, the "expectee"/protégé is the "prophet" who fulfills his/her own expectations after exposure to an "expecter/mentor who holds high expectations. Pygmalion and Galatea are closely intertwined and interactive because they trigger and expand each other's effects (Eden, 1990, p, 72-73). For purposes of this presentation, however, the focus will be the Pygmalion-Mentor relationship.

There are substantial research data and literature that continue to demonstrate the powerful effect of one person's belief in and expectation of another. This belief is communicated through attitudes, words, and behavior. Early research on the SFP was carried out by Rosenthal and Jacobson in their 1968 landmark experiment, titled "*Pygmalion in the Classroom,*" which conclusively demonstrated that a "teacher's expectation for a student's intellectual competence can come to serve as an educational self-fulfilling prophecy." The study placed students (K-5) in randomly assigned groups, designating some students as "late bloomers." (These were defined as students who have not fully used their native abilities, but should bloom during the year). There were no interventions with the teachers except in the achievement expectations implanted in the teachers' minds. At the end of the school year, testing revealed that the "late bloomers" gained four additional IQ points than had their randomly assigned control classmates. The results confirmed the expectancy hypothesis: Raising teachers' expectations regarding student

performance had initiated an SFP process in which teachers unwittingly acted in different ways toward different students and thereby fulfilled their prophecies. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) described another experiment in a summer Headstart program for 60 preschoolers who were randomly divided into two types of groups—with teachers who were led to expect relatively slow learning by their children, and teachers who were led to believe that their children had excellent intellectual ability and learning capacity. Pupils of the second group of teachers learned much faster and had greater achievement scores (p. 11).

This research on teacher-student effects set the stage for studies in interpersonal expectancy and organizational effects, in industry, the military, leader-follower effects, and outcomes in the workplace. A classic article in the *Harvard Business Review*, entitled *"Pygmalion in Management"* (Livingston, 1988) described the importance of managerial expectations for individual and group performance in the workplace. Livingston summarized evidence from many studies that demonstrated: (1) what managers expect of their subordinates and how they treat them largely determine their performance and career success; (2) a unique characteristic of superior managers is their ability to create high performance expectations that their followers fulfill; (3) less effective managers fail to develop high expectations, and the productivity of their followers suffers; (4) subordinates, more often than not, appear to do what they believe they are expected to do (p. 122). In addition, he made the point that expectations can't be "pie in the sky" or "impossible dreams"—that they must pass the test of reality before they can be translated into performance (p. 124). Expectations of leaders, teachers, and mentors must be realistic and achievable, and they must support their expectations with involvement, support, and encouragement.

An important point in the research literature is that managerial expectations and the SFP work their magic most strongly on young people. As the young mature and gain work experience, their own aspirations and expectations of their superiors become increasingly controlled by the "reality" of the past performance, and it becomes more difficult for them and for their managers to generate mutually high expectations (Livingston, 1988, 126-7). Livingston further claims that a young person's first boss is likely to be the most influential in that person's career. "If managers are unable or unwilling to develop the skills young employees need to perform effectively, the latter will set lower personal standards than they are capable of achieving, their self-images will be impaired, and they will develop negative attitudes toward jobs, employers, and—in all probability—their own careers… (p. 127). He sends a powerful message to mentors: "If managers are unskilled, they leave scars on the careers of young people, cut deeply into their self-esteem, and distort their image of themselves as human beings. But if they [managers] are skillful and have high expectations, subordinates' self-confidence will grow, their capabilities will develop, and their productivity will be high. More often than one realizes, the manager is Pygmalion" (Livingston, 1998, 130). To corroborate, a study by Berlew and Hall (1966), found that the correlation between how much a company expects of an employee in the first year of employment and how much that employee contributes during the next five years was compelling.

The Mentor and Pygmalion
The goal of Mentor and Pygmalion is similar—to develop to the fullest the potential and talent of another person so that they are empowered to achieve at high levels. The Mentor/Pygmalion *believes* in the protégé and *holds high expectations* for his/her career development and success. This is translated into *action* through interest and involvement (e.g., guiding, teaching, coaching, and supporting) the protégés' development and work. "Mentors give us hope—mentors believe in and nourish our dreams and expect us to reach for them. The "expectation effect" of mentoring plays a powerful role in our success and satisfaction" (Vance & Olson, 1998). As one leader has expressed it: "As I look back on my life, I guess one of the things that always sustained me was

the fact that people believed in me and expected me to do well and I was treated accordingly" (Vance & Olson, 1998, p. 4). This is the Pygmalion Principle in real life. A colleague/mentor of mine who is a highly successful entrepreneur told me had two mentors in his career, and each focused on "making me believe I was better that I thought myself."

Motivation and Pygmalion
Various theorists, especially Eden (1990), remind us of the importance of motivational processes in the Pygmalion effect. People are motivated to achieve by influencing them to raise their self-expectations. The belief and expectation that we have earlier discussed set into motion a motivational process that culminates in the investment of effort in performance and achievement. "Self-expectancy is the key to motivation, and motivation is the key to the Pygmalion effect" (Eden, 1990, p. 93). The Mentor-Pygmalion gets results by increasing protégé/follower motivation. Research continues to demonstrate the pivotal role of raising expectations in improving performance and achieving goals.

Four Roles of Mentor as Pygmalion
I suggest four key roles in the Mentor-Pygmalion relationship that support the development of potential and talent and lead to success and achievement--through the self-fulfilling prophecy and expectation effects. These roles are: (1) believer-visionary; (2) teacher-guide; (3) advocate-connector; and (4) role model-activist.
1. **believer-visionary**. The Mentor-Pygmalion (M-P) is a true believer in their protégé's abilities and performance, and transmits a vision of greatness to the protégé. King (1974) studied managers' expectations on the outcomes of organizational innovations, and concluded that managers' beliefs and expectations for performance due to the innovations had produced a definite SFP. The specific leadership behaviors were not measured; what was important was that the leader believed in and expected more of a follower on the basis of some characteristic of the follower. It appears to be like team coaching—the M-P builds on the strengths of each team player, and covers individual weakness through the interaction and unique contribution of each player that creates success. Bennis & Nanus (1985) believe that the transformative leader is a visionary who can influence followers on a grand scale. From their interviews with leaders they concluded that "the visions these leaders conveyed created a confidence on the part of the employees, a confidence that instilled in them a belief that they were capable of performing what was expected of them (p.20). Bandura (1986) described this belief as self-efficacy. The M-P inspires their protégés and followers to give their best effort. They raise expectations and thereby motivate, empower, promote potential and create high achievement. The effects are both individual and collective and are transmitted to the workplace and organizations.
2. *teacher-guide*. This is the behavioral component of belief and expectation. The M-P can actively promote high expectations by joining with the protégé as an interested, involved teacher-guide who fosters continuous learning. Communication and feedback are keys to success. Reciprocal interaction and mutual respect are important components in the relationship of teacher and "student." Strategies include mutual establishment of clear goals and objectives; providing information, support and resources for goal-achievement; encouraging, motivating, and cheerleading; and providing consistent feedback, making corrections, and recognizing progress and success. Teaching-guiding can be individual and collective/organizational.
3. *advocate-connector*. The M-P uses his/her connections to open doors for the protégé to gain new experiences and opportunities, to test their abilities, and to meet people who can be a source of encouragement and expectation. This networking expands the protégé's horizons and promotes aspirations. The M-P gives the blessing on the protégé's development and promotes the protégé's self-belief and motivation.

4. *role model-activist*. As a successful and accomplished role model, the M-P serves as vision of hope and possibility—that the protégé can reach heights they hadn't dreamed of before. The role modeling aspect paves the way for the protégé's realization that "I can do that too."

Group Workshop Activity: Self Assessment of your mentoring   activities and outcomes as Pygmalion, applying the four roles of   mentoring. <u>Handout: Table of Roles, Activities,   and Outcomes will be given to each particpant.</u>
 * What **activities/behaviors** do you engage in with your protégés? Use four mentor roles of **believer-visionary**; **teacher-guide; advocate-connector;** and **role model-activist** in your assessment.
 *Give **outcomes/examples** of how these activities/behaviors promote and produce the Pygmalion phenomenon—the SFP and expectation effect.

Lessons for Being Mentor as Pygmalion
The Greek characters of Mentor and Pygmalion, as well as Galatea, Athena, and Venus instruct us in the human phenomena of belief and expectation that lead to self-empowerment, motivation and achievement.
Dreams and human potential are often realized through a developing self-belief and self-confidence. These emotional strengths empower and motivate the protégé's desire for achievement. How can M-Ps be more effective in the transformation of their protégés? I suggest the following areas for mentors to develop in order to empower their protégés.

Communication. In the relationship that exists between the mentor and protégé, there must be careful communication—whether face-to-face (verbal and nonverbal), written, or electronic. The consistent message is belief in, encouraging, supporting, and reinforcing high expectations (Eden, 1990). It is communicating: "I know you can succeed in this." It is the blessing of the mentor: "I believe in you-- I will invest in you. You can do it." This message is also the trademark of the transformational/inspirational/ charismatic leader. It is important to remember that both verbal and nonverbal communication—attitude and words—convey the Pygmalion Message.

Feedback. Part of the communication process, this entails providing information and evaluation that promotes continuous learning and self-correction. It is an active process that entails watching and commenting on the protégé's development and performance--correcting errors, recognizing work well done, reinforcing self-confidence, and providing opportunities for discussion, reflection, and experimentation. Indeed, the mentor is an honest "mirror." Feedback is most effective on a planned, regular basis, as it provides the protégé a clear picture of the journey, and a map as to past and future guideposts and preparation strategies.

Challenge. The M-P promotes the protégé's stretching and "reaching for the stars," so to speak. They provide opportunities for progressive experiences and successes (Allen, 1998), and trust the protégé to step forward in meeting the challenge. The message is conveyed that nothing worth achieving is easy, and therefore difficult work may be expected, with the M-P lending support and guidance. The big motivational message to the protégé is that the M-P really believes in him/her and is expected and able to "step up to the plate" in confidence—again, acting on the belief and expectation of the M-P.

Climate and Culture. The M-P creates a humanistic, caring socio-emotional climate through verbal and nonverbal cues that convey interest and acceptance. Positive criticism and recommendations are made in an atmosphere of respect and mutuality. M-Ps promotes a "we can

do" culture that is filled with promise and optimism. Culture transformation is not easy and the M-P must be seen as a culture shifter.

Investment and Advocacy. Successful mentoring as Pygmalion requires an investment of scarce resources—time, emotional and physical presence, and intellectual involvement. This means opening doors for the protégé to new experiences and new acquaintances who may be able to provide different challenges and opportunities for the protege. The P-M is a strong and active advocate and believer in the potential of the protégé and is willing to go the extra mile in their investment for the future competence and achievement of the protégé.

SUMMARY

The Mentor as Pygmalion holds the promise of more enlightened and skillful approaches to developing potential and empowering others to realize success and satisfaction in life and work. The expectation effect and self-fulfilling prophecy, part of the Pygmalion-Galatea phenomenon, can guide mentors in their dyadic and collective relationships with students, followers, and colleagues. And we end with another Greek: Plato, who said in *The Republic,* "Those having torches will pass them to others."

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