

Mentor Up. Mentor Down.

I was mulling about Father's Day (and if you just said "Oh, yeah, the Oliver Hailey play for which Marian Seldes won her Tony." – Congratulations! You have just won your Theatre Geek merit badge and you really need to get out more.) I like being a father, though not so much Father's Day. (Fathering to me is its own reward and acknowledgement.) I am the biological father of three, but the figurative and surrogate father of dozens and dozens of folks with whom I have worked early in their career.

I have advised them about mortgages and marriages; I have coached them on scenes and sides. I have weighed in on agents and auditions and the other anxieties of their business. I have amused them with anecdotes about performances and performers past. I have reassured them with tales of my own colossal screw-ups.

In short, I have probably been a tedious pedant; but my surrogate sons and daughters have gotten their own back by teaching me. They have taught me about new restaurants and newly fashionable neighborhoods. They have taught me about computer programs and FaceBook and iPods and iPads and smart phones and apps, apps, apps. They have revealed to me the latest slang and the hippest fashions (to no avail: I am stuck in 60's preppy.) They have tried to teach me about contemporary music and the latest dances. In exchange for the dubious gift of my wisdom, they have shared their youth.

One of the benefits of our profession is the sense of family, of community, when we are doing a show. Let us carry that sense of family, of community, into all aspects of our interactions. People of all ages and experience meet on a level platform in our business. We are friendly compatriots on a first-name basis whether we are 25 or 75. I urge you to take advantage of this multi-generational paradigm. Reach out to the older generation and ask them what advice they might have for someone at your stage of life. Reach out to the younger generation and ask them what apps and social networking tools they have found most useful. (I would not necessarily advise reversing the process; proffering unasked-for advice is a much dicier proposition and smacks of presumption.)

But do ask. Ask how your older or younger colleagues keep in touch with agents, casting folks, directors. Ask how they keep in shape; ask what books they are reading, what shows they would recommend. Let us learn from one another. Use your fellow actors and stage managers as a resource. Be a resource. Mentor up. Mentor down.

Erik Erikson coined the term "generativity" for a stage of life in which one attempts to give back, to leave one's mark on the world by caring for others and creating/accomplishing things that make the world a better place. This is something we all can do, no matter what stage of life we are in. We can all be "fathers" – even those of us who are as yet only sons – or daughters.