

# **Tapping the Insight of a Wise Mentor Who Knows You Well**

by Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2008, published in the *Houston Home Journal* on Saturday, August 30, 2008

Over the past six years, I've written several articles about paradigm shifts. "Paradigm" is just a word that describes your outlook or perspective on a situation. It's "how you see things." There are lots of other words we might use to describe the same thing: viewpoint, mindset, perception, and frame of reference.

I like the word "paradigm" because it reminds me that what we "see" is not "the truth." "Para" is a Greek prefix meaning "like" or "resembling"; "deigma" is a Greek word meaning "a specimen" or "an example." Connecting the prefix with the root word amplifies the connotation that what we see is not exactly the real thing, even though it may have the appearance of being authentic.

The way we see the world seems so real and absolute to us that we usually don't realize we have paradigms. We become aware of our existing frame of reference when we obtain some new information that totally changes our perspective.

You've probably experienced this. A paradigm shift occurs when you are subjected to some form of "Aha!" insight. You realize that what you knew to be true has been supplanted by something that is different, yet seemingly much more valid. Sometimes we feel foolish when this happens. Sometimes we are grateful for the enhanced awareness.

You gain similar insights from a wise mentor who has a lot of knowledge and perspective that you've not yet acquired. That wisdom has developed from his or her life experiences, however, not from yours.

What if you could tap into such an astute individual's perspectives with the assurance that he or she has exactly the same life experiences you do? Perhaps you can!

Let's draw a horizontal time-line of your life. Label the far left side of the line "birth" and the far right side of the line "death." We don't know when you will die, but let's assume for the moment that you'll live at least a hundred healthy years. Place a small vertical line at the appropriate spot on the horizontal line that represents "now."

For many of the life experiences you've had to the left of the "now" line, if we worked hard enough, we could pin down the date and time of their occurrence. Anything to the right of the "now" line, however, exists at this very moment only in your imagination. At some future time, it might be documentable, but for now, it's not "true" at all.

Your paradigms today are from the point on this time-line that you've labeled "now." Looking back over the experiences of your youth, aren't you able to make meaning of past events in your life from a much more contextual perspective now than you were able to do then?

By using your imagination, you can similarly envision what "now" might look like to you from the vantage point of the future. Looking back from age 99, you'll have much greater context for understanding the situations you face right now.

What would you, as an incisive 99 year old, suggest you do with that awkward situation in your personal life? What would that wise mentor advise you to do at work? With all the experiences and perspective you can imagine, what does that wise "you" from the future have to say about the important decisions in your life today?

When you want to lash out at an irresponsible teammate, or you are tempted to do something to impress others, or you are wondering if you should apologize for your role in that argument, consult your imaginary mentor. If what you choose today puts a smile of satisfaction on the face of that old, wise counselor, you probably chose the right thing!

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*Want a better future for the organization you lead? Choose to build better leaders today. Contact Dennis Hooper at [dhooper2@juno.com](mailto:dhooper2@juno.com) or (478)-988-0237. Enjoy his work at [www.buildingfutureleaders.com](http://www.buildingfutureleaders.com).*