

BY KAREN HAWTHORNE

**W**hen the supervisor in her department at an auto parts manufacturing plant in Oshawa retired, Wendyline Beaudoin, EIT, was suddenly considered the “expert” in her department’s two-person staff. She was just a few years out of chemical engineering school and was frustrated by the lack of guidance and training in her job—a job that required highly technical monitoring of the environmental impact of the plant’s manufacturing processes.

“It was a huge plant and I had to familiarize myself with several jobs,” says Beaudoin, currently on parental leave. “It was frustrating—I didn’t have the experience in how the paint-line works and the molding machines—there was no one there to guide me technically, no professional engineers with technical expertise in my specific field. And my department was also physically separated from the others so we lacked that daily interaction.”

Beaudoin’s participation in a mentorship pilot study through Professional Engineers Ontario (PEO) provided an outlet to relieve some of the pressure she was feeling and boosted her confidence in handling difficulties in the workplace. She was paired with Greg Bavington, P.Eng., vice president of operations at NRI Industries in Toronto, and the two met in person, by phone and by email from September 2002 until mid-2003 to discuss any problems she was having and steps to resolve them. In fact, the relationship developed into a friendship and the two have been in touch since the pilot was completed last year.

“It was enjoyable, (Bavington) is low-key and approachable,” says Beaudoin. “It gave me a great perspective, because he’s sitting at the opposite end and I wasn’t his employee. I wasn’t sucking up. I would tell him a situation and he would say, ‘OK, you could approach it in this way.’”

With a supportive and senior-level mentor to turn to in her field, Beaudoin says she experienced personal growth, not

## The Buddy System

### Finding a mentor in the world of work

Partnering senior-level professional engineers with engineering interns received rave reviews last year from participants in a Professional Engineers Ontario (PEO) mentorship pilot program. Now PEO is ramping the program up for a province-wide launch this May. Here’s why.

just in terms of her professional engineering career, but as an individual, learning how to balance family and work, and if and when to change companies.

Bavington says he benefited from the experience as well. Being almost 20 years away from the start of his career, he had forgotten some of the issues that young graduates deal with. “It was quite worthwhile for me to be able to hear my ‘mentee’s’ concerns and issues in the workplace with full honesty and disclosure. It will be helpful to me in managing young graduates in the future,” he says. As a management executive, Bavington has supervised professional engineers for many years, and says he would encourage other professional engineers to become mentors for the valuable insights and the opportunity to help a young graduate.

Now that the Oshawa plant where Beaudoin works is closing down, she has started to job hunt and has consulted with Bavington about prospective employers.

“I’d ask him what his opinion is about a company,” notes Beaudoin. “Giving people the opportunity to meet a more experienced engineer is a great opportunity. It’s really important to have someone to guide you and give you advice.”

In today’s workplace, Beaudoin is not alone in her frustrations over the lack of guidance in the workplace and supervisors with the time to provide it, according to Catherine Mossop, a management consultant in Toronto and author of *Mentoring and the World of Work in Canada* published in French and soon to be released in English. Mossop

has developed mentoring programs that match employees of a company with external mentors to develop skills, experience and leadership to fill what she has identified as a gap in the workplace that is ultimately affecting a company’s bottom line.

“In Canada, the demographics show there are knowledge transfer problems. No natural mentoring is taking place and although some senior managers do have an obligation (to develop their employees), it’s next to impossible to fulfil,” Mossop says. “You might have one person managing 47 people with no time to do any developing.” For the most part, people have to jump to a new job to move up the ladder and training costs to replace lost employees start to compound, affecting the company’s productivity and bottom line. “It takes between 1.5 to three times the salary to recruit and train an engineer who is only fully competent after two years on the job,” says Mossop.

Since the 1980s, budgets have been slashed and burned, middle management layers were cut, and the first thing to go was soft skills development. People coming into the workforce in the 1980s kept their head down and nose to the grindstone and then returned to school for an MBA if they wanted to be hired anywhere in management. On the other end of the spectrum, older executives with a wealth of knowledge and experience have had no time to mentor and develop their staff.

“There are all these 30- and 40-year-olds who are not getting developed to go into leadership and now there’s a talent shortage,” says Mossop.

Many experts agree that the missing link is mentoring—building on a relationship, improving decision-making skills, communication and having an experienced support person to develop skills and abilities over time.

PEO has long acknowledged the value of mentoring to develop engineering graduates and provide a link to the professional engineering community through its Student Membership Program, its chapter system, and its participation in career fairs and classroom discussions about ethics and licensing. Its Engineering Intern Training (EIT) Program—with a membership of 2700 as of January 2004 and growing at a rate of 100 per month—is in place to fill the gap between knowledge provided in engineering school and the skills required for practice. EITs also have access to PEO's quarterly *EngineerMENTOR* newsletter to keep them informed of news and developments.

The new mentoring program was designed to meet a specific imperative on Admission and Practice Standards within PEO's strategic plan: "PEO assures that the standards of qualification, practice and pro-

the professional practice exams, and acting as a resource for day-to-day work and life decisions, says Noreen Calderbank, P.Eng., PEO manager, prelicensing programs.

"Everybody needs a mentor, especially with all the pressures out there today. We all make mistakes in our career, especially at the beginning. But at the critical early stages, most of our work relationships are extensions of our school relationships and these have been built along peer lines because they naturally happen that way," she says. The mentorship program addresses the need for access to a (mostly) senior-level, experienced professional engineer for guidance and advice—a need that isn't always being met within the workplace. For internationally-trained engineering graduates relocating to Canada—about half of the close to 3000 EITs registered in Canada last year were internationally trained—without even the basic support structures that are built through the school environment, that kind of access to a mentor can provide an enormous assistance understanding the business language and culture here in Canada, says Calderbank.

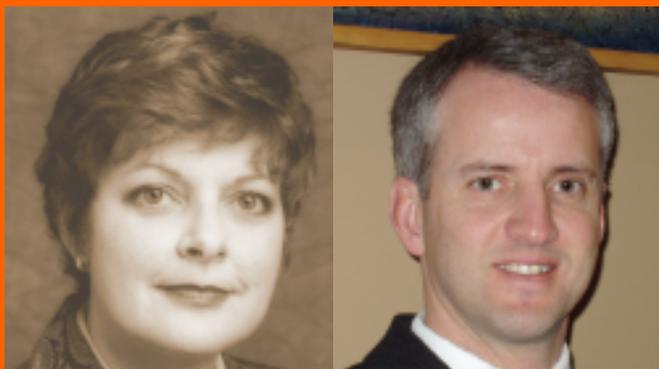
With other groups and industry now recognizing the importance of a structured mentoring program, the PEO pilot was not developed in isolation, notes Margaret Walcott, PEO administrative assistant, EIT Program, who was involved in the lead-up and implementation of the pilot. Other organizations around the world with mentoring programs were consulted, including St.

place and about providing guidance as they progress toward professional licensure. The feedback was very positive," says Walcott. The pilot was conducted in two chapter areas in Toronto: North Toronto and Toronto Dufferin. An original 24 pairs were matched. Professional engineers who volunteered their time and interested EITs filled out forms regarding their engineering discipline, industry and interests, attended introductory sessions and were asked to connect at least once a month for discussion and developing career goals. A feedback session and celebration dinner officially wrapped up the pilot last June.

PEO is now preparing the program for a province-wide launch and is planning to start recruiting in the spring, with an initial potential to match about 1000 people. New software developed in British Columbia specifically for mentorship programs is being studied by PEO with the view to purchase. Already, APEGGA has made a commitment to this system and will be going ahead with the start-up of a formal online mentoring program within a few weeks. This online program will facilitate matching of participants using in-depth assessment and goal-setting criteria. It is designed to offer meaningful activities to achieve these goals for both protégé and mentor. Participation in a mentoring program is not a one-way street often the mentor will report benefits equal to those received by the protégé. PEO is developing a mentoring manual as a supplement to the online functions to help guide participants as they progress within the program.

Calderbank is excited about the launch, and is calling for support and participation from the province's professional engineers to make the program work: "With our membership firmly committing to this, providing support and time, this mentoring program has the potential to become one of the largest and most effective of its kind. I think with the proper management and support, this system will not only benefit the engineering profession as a whole in Ontario, but it could be used as a model for other professional associations beyond the scope of engineering." ❖

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Management consultant Catherine Mossop (left) believes effective mentoring can overcome knowledge gaps in the workplace. Greg Bavington, P.Eng., (right) of NRI Industries, Toronto, has high praise for engineering mentoring efforts, such as those being developed by PEO.

fessional conduct of PEO licensees promote competent and ethical practice." The prime objective of the program is to provide general guidance on career development and assimilation into the engineering community for all EITs who are interested.

Mentors can help communicate the requirements for getting licensed with PEO, the necessary work experience, preparing for

Michael's Hospital, the faculty of pharmacy at the University of Toronto, Canada InfoNet.org and the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta (APEGGA).

"Being part of the pilot project has been a beneficial and rewarding experience. It really is about providing interns with a support mechanism that some may lack in the work-