



by Nancy Ethier

# THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTORSHIP



**Nancy Ethier is a Canadian referee since 1992, and FIBA referee since 1999. She officiated one Pre-Olympic Tournament, one Olympic Tournament, one FIBA World Championship for Women and one Junior Women, one FIBA Asian Women's and Junior Women's Asian Championships and two Championships of the Americas.**

Mentorship is a word that has been used to mean many different things. For me, it is as simple as a process of on-going exchange between individuals that allows for one to support the development of another. It is less about deliberate influence, or "power over" another, and more about accompaniment, or "empowerment" of another.

Mentorship has been both a means of professional and personal development for me, as well as a way to contribute to the development of others in the great sport of basketball. It has played a very important role in my development as a basketball official. I have had many mentors over the years; however two have had significant impact at critical times in my career: Pierre Marion and Bill Crowley. I have been involved in refereeing for fifteen years now, seven of those at the international level. It is hard to believe how fast time passes when we start to look back and tell our stories! I started working with Pierre in 1998, my seventh year of refereeing. Canada had decided to identify and fast-track young and promising officials in order to be able to offer suitable candidates to FIBA for international carding selection. At the time, I was both coaching and refereeing basketball. Pierre, one of the best referees in Canada, encouraged me to choose between coaching and refereeing,

and expressed confidence in my abilities to officiate at the international level. I decided, after discussion with Pierre, to commit myself to refereeing. I stopped coaching, and began participating in camps to improve my skills and to get to know other referees across the country. In 1999, there was a certification clinic in Canada which I attended, and it was there that I received my FIBA card. Had it not been for Pierre's council to make some choices and apply myself to my choices, I am not sure that I would have developed the requisite skills so quickly. Who knows, this opportunity may have passed me by. The decisions were mine and the effort was mine, Pierre had simply provided a little push accompanied by a big dose of support. It was a small action with a big effect. I only listened to him because we had previously established a sense of trust. I knew that there was nothing he stood to gain by offering his perspective, he was doing so only for what it could mean for me. In my opinion, this is a critical condition for effective mentorship. Pierre has since followed my development as an international referee and is still one of my biggest supporters and most of all a great friend.

My second mentor that has accompanied me in recent years has been perhaps one of the biggest supporters of female officials in Canada. Bill and I came to know each other at the first national referee camp in Canada in 1999, four months before I received my FIBA card. At the time, he was the President of the Canadian Association of Basketball Officials. He came to see me referee a game, and after the game, he walked onto the gym floor, looked at me directly and said

these words: "Whatever you want to accomplish and wherever you want to go in the basketball officiating world is waiting there for you to grasp hold off". At first, I didn't believe a word he said. Less than a year later, I was in Australia refereeing the final of the pre-Olympic tournament. I have since come to know Bill as a trusted friend, and have watched as he continues to promote women officials, not just with words but by the assignments he gives as coordinator, and how he models equality in his every day interactions. He has no tolerance for anyone treating another as less than an equal in all aspects. His motto is "Get on the floor and do the job, male or female". This has an incredible trickle effect on everyone with whom he comes in contact. Bill is still one of the first friends and fellow referees I call to debrief after my best and my worst games (admit it, we all have challenging games at times, otherwise known as great learning opportunities!).

When on assignment for FIBA, I have since found myself mentoring other female officials who haven't received the support that was offered me and that so contributed to my journey so far. Often times we spend evenings after games chatting about situations we are experiencing, sharing stories, laughs and ideas. We leave for our respective countries richer for our time together, and stronger for the support extended to one another.

My international road began by others sharing their belief in me, which helped anchor my belief in myself and inspired me to act, thank you Pierre, and thank you Bill. But I think the best thank you I can give is to do for others what you both chose to do for me.