

The background is a solid red color. On the left side, there are several white, curved, wavy lines that sweep across the page from top to bottom, creating a sense of movement and depth.

Santosh  
Chaturvedi

**UNMENTOR  
- THE  
NEGATIVE  
MENTOR**



# **UNMENTOR**

*THE NEGATIVE MENTOR*

**Santosh K Chaturvedi**

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# **UNMENTOR**

*THE NEGATIVE MENTOR*



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## **Prologue**

I always wanted to share my observations about teaching and mentoring.

I found these so amusing, and mentees and students suffering at the hands of their mentors.

I felt it was not right to call such persons 'mentors' and hence coined this term 'unmentor' which was like abandoning the mentee or giving negative mentoring. The purpose of talking and discussing about this topic is to wish that

mentees will get suitable and  
appropriate mentoring, one which  
they would enjoy and relish and  
be grateful to their mentors all  
their lives

And not curse them or their own  
fate of having had the misfortune  
of being  
Unmentored.

## Mentors and unmentors.

Have you ever wondered that as a student you did not get a very good mentor while somebody else had such a nice mentor?  
who is very knowledgeable,  
who is very bright,  
who is very enterprising,  
and very supportive,  
but your mentor is a *khadoos*  
(rude, snobbish, and doesn't seem to care about others, quite

opposite to charming, smiling and friendly personality)! Or a snob.

**H**ave you ever wondered why your mentor does not have anything good to say about you, does not encourage you, and does not give any good advice to you?

Your mentor does not help you in your career.

**I**f that is so you don't have a mentor, you have an unmentor.

**We** have heard a lot about  
mentors and mentoring in  
institutions and colleges but  
***unmentoring*** is another  
phenomenon.

There is no formal training for  
mentoring in most educational  
institutions.

Professionals feel it comes  
naturally to them.

*Maybe it does!*

**What** comes more naturally is  
unmentoring!

**Who** would we consider as  
unmentor?

## **Definition of unmentor or negative mentor**

**U**nmentor is a person who instead of encouraging a student or person in their career or helping them develop or evolve and transcend, puts them down or demotivates them.

The bottom line is they don't like you.

**Unmentor** is someone who gives  
negative mentoring.

**Unmentor** is one who becomes  
stumbling block, has a negative  
effect, discourages the student  
and puts obstacles.

To justify this they say obstacle is  
the path.

Unmentor is the opposite of  
mentor.

As mentioned above, there are  
truly no formal teaching courses  
in mentoring.

People learn from what they have  
seen their own mentors do and  
that is what is passed on from  
generation to generation of  
students.

Anyone can be an unmentor.

**Why** does one become an  
unmentor?

It is a very interesting question  
and as I was pondering and  
wondering about this point, many  
thoughts crossed my mind.

In my forty years of teaching, I  
have seen more unmentors than  
mentors.

## **Who becomes an unmentor?**

**A**n anyone can become an  
unmentor.

Rather, everyone has a bit or  
more of unmentor in themselves.

It depends – what manifests and  
what remains hidden.



## **Why does one become an unmentor?**

This is a difficult question. It is  
not easy to understand this  
phenomenon.

Is it natural?

Is it genetic?

Or acquired?

Is it supernatural?

Or a mix of these causes.

Well, there can be many theories  
for this.

The first is a psychoanalytic  
viewpoint.

Freudian.

There are repressed conflicts  
with their parents - father or  
mother figure,

Which are displaced on to the  
mentee.

The conflicts may be  
psychosexual or any other.

Unmentoring is the desire to  
inflict pain on the mentee.

Sort of sadistic pleasure in  
troubling the mentee.

“I suffered, why shouldn’t you!”

It may be a Learnt behavior.

Or a conditioned response!

One sees, so many mentors  
unmentoring around themselves,  
it appears to be the natural thing  
to do.

**U**nmentoring becomes the easy  
method of mentoring.

And doing this again and  
again,  
gives vicarious pleasure,

or is an easy way out,  
it becomes the preferred way of  
mentoring.

It may be out of jealousy.

**J**ealousy – towards other  
mentors who got good- [looking  
or working] mentees but you  
have a difficult nut to crack.

## Out of Selfishness.

“I need not labour much, why should I take the trouble, there is nothing in it for me”.

Unmentoring is less effort and so much more vicarious fun at the cost of the mentee.

Mentoring requires a lot of hard work, responsibility, and energy.

Unmentoring does not require any effort!

Unmentoring is easy.





## **Types of unmentors**



### **Reluctant unmentor –**

has no skills of mentoring,  
doesn't want to,  
but is forced to,  
hence becomes unmentor.

This person does not like to  
mentor but has to mentor  
because being in an institute and  
as a faculty, one is supposed to  
mentor some students whether  
the mentor is interested or not so  
very reluctantly takes up the role  
or task.

These are teachers who like to have the title of being a teacher or a professor but do not enjoy, teaching, research, publishing or mentoring.

To retain their jobs, they are forced to mentor – as a reluctant mentor.



Have you ever had a reluctant  
unmentor?



## **Casual unmentor –**

just wants to be known as a mentor but has no intention or desire or need to mentor.

Wants to be known as a mentor for his CV, biodata or resume, and mention the number of many PhDs, postdocs, under his guidance and so on.

But does not have the heart or motivation to mentor.



Have you ever had a casual  
unmentor?

**Deliberate unmentor –**

This is the classic unmentor!

He gets joy in unmentoring,

joy in giving trouble,

is sadistic and

relishes seeing the mentee

squirm,

This one is a

***TORMENTOR.***



Have you had a deliberate  
unmentor?

## **Competitive unmentor –**

is insecure,  
wants to do better than other  
mentors,  
have more students under him,  
become popular and  
liked by people.

Competition is with other  
mentors.

Which mentor is more popular,  
has more students, and whose

students are doing well in their  
career?

There is subtle competition with  
his mentees too.

Scared that mentee will outshine  
him or become better than him.



Have you had a competitive  
unmentor?



## **All powerful unmentor –**

wants mentee to be totally  
dependent on him,  
for every decision they should  
ask the mentor,  
use him as an aid or a slave,  
making them do their own chores  
– return the library book, buy  
some milk, egg etc.  
not really like a child, but a  
servant.

Would expect mentee to help them in household chores, run errands for them and help in many non-academic activities.

Have you ever had an all-  
powerful unmentor?



### **Absent mentor-**

One who is never available,  
always traveling or too busy.

Volunteers to mentor but neither  
has the time nor  
the inclination.

These are mainly the so called  
'visiting professors' who spend  
more time outside their own  
institutes, but are not honest  
enough to admit that they do not  
have the time to mentor.

Some who care for their mentee  
use a proxy mentor.



Were you stuck with an absent  
unmentor?



## **Proxy mentor-**

One who is a senior mentee or a subordinate of a mentor but is asked by the mentor to fulfil their role and mentor other junior mentees on their behalf.

This may not be too bad, if the proxy mentor is good; may even be better than the mentor, proxy mentor is also like a mentor in training.

Have you had proxy unmentors?

## **Greedy unmentor**

This one wants gifts, favours, money, or other objectives, usually expensive ones.

It is an extension of the '*guru dakshina*' concept, discussed in details later on in this book.

The most famous or infamous *guru dakshina* has been the right-hand thumb sought by Guru Drona, from his proxy shishya (disciple) Eklavya.

Greedy mentors are of two types-  
the obvious ones who directly or  
indirectly seek favours.

Then, there are the subtle or  
covert ones, who do not demand  
but readily accept the gifts  
offered by the mentee.

These mentors are predictable  
and the mentees can get a good  
result, in the end, for a price.

The mentees can also easily  
manipulate these greedy  
mentors.

Have you given gifts to your  
mentors, to seek favours from  
them?

Or has your mentor directly or  
indirectly sought favours or gifts  
from you?



### **Political type of unmentor-**

This one plays politics between different mentees and different mentors and between mentees and mentors.

Creates chaos and unrest in the academic environment.

Have you faced a political  
unmentor?

## **Yo-Yo Unmentor**

These unmentors are not too  
bad!

Neither consistently useful,  
Nor consistently harmful.

They are positive mentors for  
some and negative mentors for  
some;

And couldn't care less for others.

Also, they may do positive  
mentoring at times, and negative  
mentoring at other times for their  
mentees.

They blow hot and blow cold,  
depending on their moods!

Such mentors can be avoided  
when they are blowing hot and in  
bad mood, and approached when  
the going is good.

Have you seen a yo-yo  
unmentor?



### **Pseudo unmentor –**

actually, want to do good in the long run but by untraditional unique ways.

They may shout at the mentee, curse them and show a harsh behaviour and attitude.

Most students do not feel bad about this, always respected the teacher and were aware that this behaviour was for their own good.

Did not oppose the strictness or  
disciplinarian attitude.

Of course, some students feel  
upset with this.

Pseudo unmentor thus is a  
double negative term.

This type is becoming less and  
less.

Have you had a pseudo  
unmentor?

One should accept that there may not be pure subtypes as discussed above.

There may be a mix of reluctant, tormentor or a casual and absent mentor, greedy, or a mix of many qualities.

What qualities have your mentors  
had?



## **How negative mentoring is done –**

The main action is inaction.

Being unavailable.

By not giving-

proper advice for projects,  
papers, publications or

not giving time,

not giving proper direction.

Rather being unsupportive,

harassing,

humiliating and  
giving negative feedback  
to put the person down,  
demotivate.



Scolding the mentee or shouting  
at them.

Ask difficult questions to the  
student, which the mentor knows  
that the student is ignorant about.

This will make the mentee feel  
worse.





## **The strange art of unmentoring**

Inaction does not need any  
training.

The less the mentor does, more  
is the unmentoring.



## What happens to unmentee –

They

become depressed,



have a nervous breakdown,

feel inferior,

lose self-esteem,

are at risk of self-harm,

become shattered of failure.

Some use unhealthy methods to  
cope like smoking, drinking  
alcohol, using drugs,

Some forget their own mentors  
and go to other mentors.



Coping with unmentoring in a  
positive way –  
take it as an opportunity to  
work harder,  
become resilient,  
strong,  
self-made and  
an opportunity for transcendence.

If things go wrong, you can  
blame your mentor

or

otherwise, you must take the  
blame, on yourselves.

## **Are you getting negative mentoring?**

Identify that you are getting negative mentoring and deal with it.

Compare with other mentees and colleagues if they are getting more time and attention from their mentors.

Others are being involved in more research, papers, presentations and activities good

for their career – but such things  
are not happening to you.

Another sign is  
if mentor and mentee don't like  
each other or  
don't get along with each other,  
they avoid each other,  
say bad things about each other.

If there is mutual dislike the  
chances of unmentoring are very  
high.

Since decades unmentoring is going on, but it is swept under the carpet and ignored.

Nothing is really done about it.



## **What happens to the mentor/ unmentor?**

They are usually oblivious of their  
actions,

And do not care about their  
mentees.

Many times, their actions are  
subconscious and without the  
intent to harm their mentees.

They remain as disturbed,  
troubled and stressed as their  
mentees.

Not all unmentors enjoy  
unmentoring.

They may be aware of their  
incompetence

And lack of skills but are too  
embarrassed to seek help and  
training.

They hope nobody notices their  
unmentoring.

## **Dysmentoring –**

This is even more pathological.

It involves teaching wrong,  
unhealthy things,

how to cheat,

how to use unfair means,

how to avoid work,

be corrupt,

use fake and fraudulent methods

to push forward by hook or by  
crook.

Have you had a dysmentor?

**Advantages of being  
unmentored  
or  
getting negative mentoring.**

Mentee becomes a self-made  
person,  
not the mentor's replica, and  
successful in the long run without  
a godfather.

You can be proud of yourself and  
your achievements without any  
support.

Barriers in seeking mentoring is related to the fear that one might land up with a negative mentor.

Doubts about whether one would get a good mentor or a negative mentor prevent the student from seeking a mentor.



## **De-mentorization**

In this competitive world there is

de-mentorization

which implies bringing down the

value of mentoring.

Success is counted in terms of

material gains and not overall

growth and development.

Mentoring is not taken seriously

hence so much unmentoring

happens.



## **Mentoring and relationships**

Mentoring is like a relationship,  
unmentoring is like a relationship  
becoming toxic, unenjoyable, and  
gone sour.

In a relationship you expect  
mutual give and take;

in a mentoring relationship you  
expect only to get, receive, and  
be supported.

If this does not happen it is  
negative mentoring

Some consider mentoring to be like a parent-child relationship.

Parent always feels good if the child does better than them.

There are less chances of negative mentoring in this type of a relationship.

These days we find more negative mentors than positive ones.

**The well-known stories of  
unmentoring**



There are stories in Hindu  
mythology about  
Karna and  
Eklavya  
in the  
Mahabharata.

Everyone has heard these  
stories.

Guru Drona was the teacher and  
mentor for the *kauravas* and  
*pandavas*.

His favourite shishya / disciple as  
Arjuna.

Somehow, he came to know of  
skills of Eklavya who mastered  
the skill of archery by practicing  
in front of the clay idol of Guru  
Drona and secretly watching the  
Guru training his royal disciples.

Guru Drona asked Eklavya to cut  
and offer his right hand thumb as  
*Guru Dakshina* (because he did  
not want anyone to be better than  
Arjun.)

He did not want Eklavya's  
Magadh to attack Pandava's  
Hastinapur.

Maybe he realised that anyone  
can learn by just keeping his clay  
image/statue,  
so, the live person is not needed,  
this made him insecure and  
threatened.

It was like an online course or  
distance learning of current times  
without live presence of the  
teacher.

A strong criticism of Dronacharya  
is his partisan behavior  
towards Ekalavya and  
his strong bias in favour of Arjuna

Same way, Guru Drona rejected  
Karna because of personal  
reasons.

Karna went to Parasurama, who  
taught him well, till he realised  
that Karna had got more powers  
than him.

Mentee could outshine the  
mentor.

Somehow, Parashurama felt that  
Karna had cheated him.

Enraged, Parashurama accused  
Karna of stealing knowledge, and  
laid a curse upon Karna that he  
would forget all the knowledge  
required to wield the Brahmastra.

Upon Karna's pleading,  
Parashurama relented and  
modified his curse, saying that  
Karna would only lose the  
knowledge when he needed it

most while fighting against a  
warrior greater than him.

In some folklore,  
Goddess of knowledge  
Saraswati cursed Dronacharya  
with an unarmed and humiliating  
death for Drona's actions against  
Eklavya and Karna.

Saraswati said that knowledge  
belonged to all, and that it was an  
acharya's duty to spread that  
knowledge everywhere.  
The Goddess disapproved  
negative mentoring.

Despite whatever reasons he gave, Drona was unfair to Ekalavya and Karna to achieve something for himself- to protect his promise to Arjuna that he would make Arjuna the world's greatest archer, as well as his oath to Hastinapur.

## **What are qualities of unmentor?**

They don't know how to mentor.

They don't want to mentor.

They don't want to know how to  
mentor.

They are busy with their own  
activities.

They are selfish,  
Arrogant and rude.



## **How to deal with a negative mentor?**

Know that you have one.

Identify the type of unmentor.

Talk to your peer.

Talk to other teachers or  
superiors.

Give a feedback about the  
mentoring to the mentor – directly  
or through an email or through  
someone else.

While giving a feedback to the  
mentor – try to point out  
something positive, like agreeing  
to mentor, and then mention your  
expectations or how you would  
like to be taught.

Try to understand the mentor, his  
personality, conflicts and life  
situation.

Show some empathy and  
compassion towards your  
unmentor.

They are going through their own  
academic and professional  
stress.

They probably received negative  
mentoring themselves or  
Were harassed by their  
unmentors.

There may be nothing personal –  
he is just an unmentor.

If this does not work -  
Ask for a change in mentor  
Or look for another suitable  
mentor.



For the Unmentee  
What is better - mentor or  
Unmentor;  
Is controlled strictness favourable  
in the long run;  
Pseudo or masked unmentoring  
is noticed more often than not,  
though the mentors may deny  
such mentoring.  
For each it may be different!



## **Why did I come up with this idea?**

I have personally gone through negative mentoring many times, not always, in my career and have seen so many types of negative mentors.

Like Eklavya, I watched mentors mentoring their favourite mentees and learnt my lessons, without giving any *guru dakshina*.



**How I mentored, positive and  
negative and how I corrected it**



## **How I unmentored?**

I was not harsh or punitive  
but used a lot of sarcasm and  
scepticism.

I was strict and disciplinarian and  
was generally disliked.

I didn't mean to be like this, but it  
just happened!

Sometimes, I poked fun at them,  
though did not humiliate or  
ridicule (or so I thought).



## **How I gave up unmentoring?**

Only when someone gave me a feedback about how miserable I made them feel.

I realised that it should be possible to teach and mentor without making them feel miserable or hurting anyone. Also, I saw alternative ways of positive mentoring which were not traumatic to students and satisfying to me.

Since then, my slogan has been-  
learn with fun  
teach with fun and  
live with fun.  
If at all, I make fun on myself!

## **Barriers in seeking mentoring.**

Mentees don't find suitable  
mentors.

Fear that they may get stuck with  
any of the different types of  
negative mentor.

Prefer to watch, observe and  
learn.

Internet is the new guru, with little  
scope of negative mentoring that  
one can notice as of now.

Or learn from experience given  
by life.

## **The mentoring unmentoring index or ratio**

There is no perfect mentor.  
Everyone has qualities of both a  
positive and negative mentor.  
Maybe, there are some neutral  
mentors,  
Mentors are also human.  
They have their own strengths  
and weaknesses  
Quirks and charms.

A mix of positive and negative  
mentoring skills.

There is politics or motives of  
mentoring, not mentoring or  
unmentoring.

Like in many spheres of life,  
there are different motives for  
mentoring,

Not always focused on the  
mentee

But on themselves,  
Their own growth and benefits.



A doha by Kabir illustrates the  
qualities of a good mentor -  
*Guru kumhar shish kumbh hai,*  
*ghadi ghadi kadhei khot*  
*Antar haath sahaar dai bahar*  
*bahai chot / dhok*

The teacher is the potter,  
student is the pot  
Moment to moment (guru)  
removes the anomalies,  
with gentle support of hand inside  
Pats from the outside  
[To give the pot (disciple) a  
shape]

It is an ideal situation as the guru from inside is supportive but from the exterior is giving it a shape by hitting gently on the clay.

In unmentoring, the inside hand support is not there so the student is mis shaped or the outside hand is hurting the person.

## **Final word**

In the end getting a positive  
mentor is your karma and luck,  
if you get a positive mentor it is  
good,  
if you get a negative mentor it is  
better and  
if you get both  
it is best and you are lucky.  
One gets good mentoring from  
life – its experiences.



TEDx Talk on

Unmentor, the negative mentor.  
February 2020.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2Vbrdy1ajM&t=14s>



## **Comments on Unmentoring**

Some comments received after the TedX talk were put up on Youtube.



## **Comments:**

I've been through the full classification of being unmentored, tormented, dismentored but also positively mentored...very insightful

Yes, medical field is full of such lost people, Poor mentorship is endemic in our field

Everyone in the audience must be looking at each other with blaming eyes on their "mentors"

Good quality talk...rare to see good quality TedX talks these days when anyone can speak in one of those

Hats off to you Sir for voicing it out. You conveyed it across very well.

This is such a fresh perspective on mentoring.

My experience of you as a mentor over the last 25 years has been great. The humor remains and is enjoyable, more so when there is a tinge of gentle sarcasm!!!!

Good mentoring not from mentor,  
but from life. inspiring!!!

Who here thought of Harry Potter  
on hearing dismentor

A relevant topic. I got both  
mentors in my life.

Wow! This can be a chapter in a  
book.

Loved the Kabir ka doha

I've been unmentored

Me too!

You nailed it sir! All mentors and mentees should see this.

Much needed...very insightful.

Splendid thoughts on unmentoring

I have been dismentored

Funny and insightful

I am a tormentor

You are a maha-mentor for us!

Unmentor the mentor now

It's so true that for something that  
carves another person's  
character and career, there is no  
course or training in mentoring

Leadership courses exist...guess  
it's for this reason



## Thanks

To the Dronas & hidden mentors

Whose Eklavya I was and  
remained

Who blocked my paths in my  
career

and led me to be what I am  
today.

Thanks for the *tichchis* [nudges,  
soft punches] from my parents  
and elders, who wanted me to  
become a *pakka chawal*

[experienced and knowledgeable]  
and not remaining a *kachcha*  
*chawal!* [inexperienced and  
ignorant].

Their patting on my back always  
reminded of the *doha* by Kabir  
mentioned in this book.

Jaya for editing.

Jagdish for his suggestions.

## **Epilogue**

I didn't expect that I would learn so many interesting facts and views about mentoring and unmentoring while writing up this book.

Frankly, I got this idea from the feedbacks on my TedX talk to write this up as a chapter or book.

The more I thought, the more ideas I got and I could compile these here.

This is not the end of negative  
mentoring.

It would be eternal, sadly, as long  
as people do not have a passion  
to learn and teach.

## **About the Author**

Santosh K Chaturvedi was Dean  
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# **Unmentor**

## **the negative mentor**

**Santosh K Chaturvedi**

This book describes about mentoring and unmentoring. It describes the types of unmentors, why one unmentors, and the advantages and harms of unmentoring.

Based on personal experiences.

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