LETTER FROM THE EDITOR AND PUBLISHER

On the following pages are profiles of our inaugural class of Valley Mentors. We believe the six honorees exemplify the virtues of true and meaningful mentorship.

This is the first time we’ve done this award. It occurred to us that there are many great awards out there, all honoring achievement of some kind, and each one is valuable. But there was one area where it seemed we were missing – and that’s mentors.

Mentorship is so very important. Mentors are the ones who recognize raw talent and drive and take their time – invest their time, really – to step in to make sure those prospects are supported, groomed and developed. In so doing, they shape the next generation of leaders.

You’ve probably noticed that successful people often give credit to one or two or even three mentors in their lives, and they talk about how those people were vital to their development. On the following pages, you’ll read six of those inspiring stories.

We had, in all, 20 finalists for the awards. All were truly strong candidates. The nominators submitted heartfelt and compelling applications, and I thank them for their time and effort. It is gratifying to see the profound level of mentorship that is taking place throughout the Valley area.

Finally, I want to give special thanks to our partners – the ones who made the Valley Mentors awards possible: Mission Valley Bank and Wells Fargo. Thanks to their support, we are able to honor outstanding mentors.

Sincerely,

Charles Crumpley
Editor and Publisher
Recognizing extraordinary efforts

Achieving great things in any community takes courage, vision, and tremendous effort. What each of us does can make life better for everyone.

It’s an honor to recognize the recipients of the San Fernando Valley Business Journal 2020 Valley Mentor Awards.
Lee Kanon Alpert

Lee Kanon Alpert is a founding shareholder of the Alpert, Barr & Grant law firm in Encino. He is a registered lobbyist and attorney and is a longstanding leader serving on a myriad of government, community, nonprofit, philanthropic, health care and infrastructure boards and organizations. He also is treasured by the dozens of people he has coached – both staff members and people he has met in the community.

Alpert was nominated by Jane Skeeter, the founder and chief executive of UltraGlas Inc. in Chatsworth. She wrote that she has known Alpert for 14 years while serving on community and advocacy boards, especially Val*Pac. She wrote: “He has an intuitive knack for seeing how a hardworking and deserving individual would benefit from his attention, guidance, support and advocacy.”

Skeeter went on to cite the example of Marja Marhaba, a local general contractor. Marhaba said she retained Alpert as her attorney. “He guided me throughout my situation and empowered me as his client. He gave me courage I did not have and made me realize my value. Eventually Lee invited me to lunch with a couple of his associates and asked me to join one the most powerful and highly respected organizations in the San Fernando Valley, Val*Pac.

“I never thought of me as a leader nor did I think I would fit with such a group. I asked him what he saw in me. He told me that my history as first-generation immigrant, an owner of a construction company, and the founder of a nonprofit for children with learning disabilities spoke to his heart.

“He told me I was a leader and got me involved in an organization I did not think I had any business being a part of,” Marhaba said.

“He sees the good in a person and he tries to draw it out….I consider myself blessed to be part of Lee’s life. He is genuine, has a huge heart and a pure soul.”

Michael Coleman

Michael Coleman owns and operates a Transamerica Financial Advisors Inc. office in Glendale. He helps individuals who are interested in beginning a career in the financial services industry by training new associates and agents how to obtain licensing and to market their services. In addition, he helps them build their independent businesses into agencies, if that is where their interests lie.

“Due to a high-level spinal cord injury, I am a quadriplegic,” said one of his mentees, Adam Hancock, who nominated Coleman. “My body is paralyzed from the neck down and dependent on a ventilator to breathe. I use a power wheelchair and portable ventilator to get around. I was looking for a way to work toward becoming more self-supporting and to rely less on public support programs. Michael not only introduced me to a career in financial and investment services, but personally mentored me in entrepreneurial success principles (positive mindset, planning, goal setting and achievement, overcoming adversity, etc.) He also helped me through my initial training and licensing to become an investment advisor representative and branch office supervisor with Transamerica Financial Advisors.

“The success principles I learned from Michael not only helped me improve my professional possibilities, but actively improve all areas of my life,” added Hancock. “Additionally, he has created a positive training environment that not only helps others become successful professionally, it also focuses on honesty, integrity and always doing the right thing for others (whether clients or business associates) to help make their lives better. His generosity, generous nature and positive influence are incomparable. Demonstrating with his own personal conduct and actively training others how to be successful by genuinely helping others, combined with a passion for making the world a better place is not something you find in people or businesses every day!”
HONOREES

DAVID FLEMING

Throughout his successful career as an attorney and civic-minded businessman, David Fleming has always maintained a passion for supporting his community and helping others succeed. Fleming has been involved in so many civic duties and philanthropic causes, he once was described by former Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan as “Mr. San Fernando Valley.” He now serves as the senior advisor to Sen. Robert Hertzberg, the California Senate Majority Leader.

Fleming founded the Los Angeles County Business Federation (BizFed), an umbrella lobbying organization representing 180 chambers of commerce and trade groups. During his 58-year career as an attorney, he was appointed to 14 federal, state, county and city boards and commissions. He also served on more than 20 boards for nonprofits and chaired many of them, including the Valley Economic Alliance for 16 years and Valley Presbyterian Hospital for 25 years. Over the past 50 years, he has devoted over 80,000 hours of service to civic, community, charitable and government organizations.

Interestingly enough, Fleming was nominated by another Valley Mentor, Lee Kanon Alpert. Alpert credits Fleming with encouraging him to get more involved years ago. In his nomination, Alpert said of Fleming: “He is generous with his time and money, is a very humane, caring and an engaging person with all, regardless of their standing, status, wealth or ethnicity. He treated me and all others the same and encouraged everyone to get involved with the Valley and our organizations.

“He also encouraged some of us, like me, to get involved in broader municipal and state and federal entities always for the benefit of the Valley,” Alpert continued. “He was involved at all level of politics and remains involved in our community. Dave has never been ashamed of or forgotten the Valley. He is a wonderful, down to earth man, who – if he is your friend – will promote and help you regardless of the circumstance.”

KAREN GABLER

With over 28 years of experience counseling businesses in all aspects of employment law, Karen Gabler has earned a reputation for developing proactive and creative strategies to enhance workplace productivity, improve workplace culture, ensure legal compliance and avoid employment disputes. She co-founded LightGabler in 2011 and has been instrumental in helping to build the firm from seven to 26 people and from 287 to over 3,000 clients today.

Her colleague Angela Lopez nominated Gabler, praising her generosity.

“When I first joined the firm, I was fortunate enough to work alongside Karen,” said Lopez. “Karen is very strategic, while my impulse is to act based on whatever seems best in the moment. Her willingness to explain her tactical decisions helped me learn and grow as a professional, and I now approach all problems in a more mindful and deliberative way. She also models great community service and involvement and has involved me in several wonderful community service organizations over the years.

“Karen frequently reaches out to her own personal contacts on behalf of young attorneys and has helped many of us develop community ties and clients through board membership or other community involvement,” Lopez continued. “She has a great legal mind and often devotes time to helping others learn. Karen has been very generous with her time, especially in connection with new laws adopted for the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Lopez offered up a telling story. She said Gabler encouraged her to drop a client development obligation that she did not particularly enjoy. She said that Gabler “reminded me that hard-earned personal time is too valuable to spend on organizations that you do not feel passionate about supporting, and I always consider her advice now when taking on new obligations.”

Lopez went on to say: “I think I have done some of my best work while working with Karen. Like other good teachers, she always seems to expect great things and believes in the potential of those she helps mentor.”
PEGI MATSUDA

Pegi Matsuda has had a multifaceted career across different industries and has excelled at all. During 15 years as a telecom professional, she was also actively involved in numerous community projects. She was publisher and president for 13 years of the Business Journal and had a leadership position at Valley Presbyterian Hospital in Van Nuys, where she increased donor revenue six-fold. Two years ago, she launched a consulting practice where she works with small businesses and local nonprofits.

“I consider Pegi Matsuda to be a key force behind my professional success,” said Rojean Kashanchi, who worked with her at the hospital.

“Through her guidance, support, and generosity, Pegi has instilled in me a strong sense of professionalism, ethical business values, and a dedication to lifelong learning. In addition to her successful career trajectory, I am also inspired by her love of community and humanity. As I have gotten to know Pegi over time, she has become both a professional mentor and personal role model.”

“Pegi’s unwavering support and faith in my leadership ability have helped me feel confident in taking on a new role as one of the youngest senior directors in my field,” added Kashanchi. “Whenever my insecurities started to arise again, Pegi would wisely reassure me that I was promoted for my strong potential and I am expected to self-educate in order to be successful. She has continued to coach me since this latest transition to ensure I am meeting the expectations of this role.

“Pegi will always be my inspiration. I am excited to keep learning from her as I grow in my current organization and as a member of my community. I am often thinking, ‘What would Pegi do?’ when facing professional and personal challenges as I could think of no one stronger, smarter, or caring to channel.”

LOUIS PERRY

As president and founder of Kadima Security, Louis Perry has established a strong professional reputation in the greater Los Angeles area. He employs more than 200 security officers and has hired people from throughout Latin America as well as the Philippines, Iran, Israel and other countries. Perry also loves boxing. He’s a state boxing inspector, and he’s a director of the World Boxing Hall of Fame.

One who nominated him is Oscar Garcia, who started as an intern at Kadima when he was in high school. Garcia wrote that Perry’s mentorship had a big impact on his life trajectory.

He gave this example: “Louis gave me the assignment of picking three companies that I would like to work for, and he instructed me to send each of the CEOs of those companies a letter.

“So, I picked three companies, sat down, and wrote a letter to each of the CEOs. A couple of weeks later I surprisingly heard back from one. It was a handwritten response from the CEO. Then another responded. It was a form letter, but nonetheless, they replied.”

That real lesson, of course, was the power of making a personal contact. If you can’t get in the front door, a personal contact can get you in through the back door. And that lesson proved invaluable. Garcia said: “My last two jobs, one in biotech data science and one in investment banking, have come from my skill in finding the back door.”

Garcia wrote of Perry: “He made my world bigger. He taught me that if I really wanted to make something happen, I could.”
CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL OUR 2020 NOMINEES

Lee Kanon Alpert  
Founding Shareholder  
Alpert, Barr & Grant  

Jennifer Arnett  
VP, Head of Marketing  
B. Riley Financial, Inc.  

Paula Bahamon  
Vice President, Community Development Officer  
Mission Valley Bank  

Michael Coleman  
Investment Advisor Representative / Broker  
Transamerica Financial Advisors, Inc.  

Shari Corbitt  
Owner & Founder  
Awakenings Treatment Center  

Adrianna Cruz  
President  
U-Frame It Gallery  

M. Randel Davies  
Partner  
Downey & Raphony Law Corporation  

Diana Duenas  
Office Manager  
Gelb Group  

David Fleming  
Senior Advisor to Sen. Robert Hertzberg  
Office of Sen. Robert Hertzberg  

Karen L. Gabler  
Founding Attorney  
LightGabler  

Jonna Greenlee  
Vice President & Manager, Real Estate Division  
Bank of the West  

Howard Groebstein  
Managing Partner  
Groebstein, Grow & Kolodny  

Michael Hiller  
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Hiller Enterprise, Inc.  

Kendall Klingler  
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Frono Nutten & Associates  

Pegi Matsuda  
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Pegi Matsuda Consulting LLC  

Jannice Miller  
Managing Partner  
MAx Haga Law Group, LLP  

John Musella  
President & Chief Strategist  
The Musella Group  

Terri Hilliard Olson  
President  
Terri Hilliard, PC  

Louis Perry  
Founder & President  
Kadima Security Services, Inc.  

Julie Stankowski  
CEO & President  
Stankowski Law Group
By ROBIN CHOI

Crisis, be they a global health emergency that shuts down economies, a natural disaster or something affecting just a single business, can catch small business owners off guard at any moment. In the face of uncertainty, employees and customers alike seek strong leadership. Looking at insights from experts and customers, as well as perspective of business owners, can provide a guide to standing up to these challenges and inspire communities both within and outside of a business.

1. COMMUNICATION IS KEY
The uncertainty amid COVID-19 has created more of a need than ever for transparency, as it can help provide reassurance and position you as a leader. This makes open communication a strong initial step toward leading both employees and customers. Experts at management consulting firm McKinsey recommend focusing your message on what people need most from you. For employees concerned about their jobs, this can mean starting with a facts-based approach: Share what you know, what you don’t know and the basics of your plan to address the current situation. It’s also about coupling positive news and feedback that can help create feelings of security and motivation with a clear logistical path forward.

2. PUT PEOPLE FIRST
Small business owners have the potential to lead more than simply their employees; they can often be seen as leaders of their customers and community as well. This makes it critical that business owners approach leadership internally and externally with a focus on the people they’re entrusted to lead.

When Ani Ramen House in New Jersey had to close temporarily due to COVID-19, they used their existing food supply to create meal kits for 1,350 families. Owner Luck Surabhiavananj told Nation’s Restaurant News: “We decided to make the most of a bad situation.” Initiatives that inspire good will and are true to the spirit of your business can have major impacts to more than just the people you employ or your patrons.

3. SOURCING PRACTICAL INFORMATION
Concrete, relevant information can go far in informing how leaders can and should address issues. However as the pandemic has clearly shown, access to this type of information is harder to come by.

This makes it more critical than ever to put concerted effort into seeking trusted information sources, be they news organizations, government agencies or academic institutions. Beyond these, consider sources that have become newly available amid the pandemic. A number of corporate consulting firms (McKinsey, Deloitte and Boston Consulting Group, to name a few) have opened up COVID-19-specific hubs to help guide business owners. Membership-based professional groups like Business Advantage TV or trade organizations offer resources as well. It’s also key to pay particular attention to developments that could affect your business: the status of COVID-19 in your area, new rules and regulations and changes in consumer behavior.

Leadership and how to best approach it has a number of variables, but a good place to start is considering what’s best for your employees, customers and the wider community. Looking as much as possible beyond profit and leading with empathy can pay off in the long run via loyalty and positive perception.

Robin Choi is Wells Fargo San Fernando Valley Region Bank President. For more information on how to approach the challenges of the current environment, please visit the Wells Fargo Small Business Resource Center at smallbusinessresources.wf.com

Sources: McKinsey, Harvard Business School

Initiatives that inspire good will and are true to the spirit of your business can have major impacts to more than just the people you employ or your patrons.
Mentoring programs can have a significant impact on organizations’ business goals, in addition to employee professional development, according to research from the Association for Talent Development (ATD) outlined in a report titled “Navigating All Possible Education and Career Pathways Can Be Daurting, even with the Many Resources Available. This is Where Mentors Play Such a Critical Role in a Students’ Journey.”

American Student Assistance and MENTOR Launched Partnership to Create Culture of Mentorship in Schools

N aminated earlier this year at the National Mentoring Summit, American Student Assistance (ASA) is providing a major multi-year investment in MENTOR. The National Mentoring Partnership (MENTOR) to help meet the relationship needs of young people. A central component of the partnership includes the creation of a campaign and technical assistance focused on prioritizing relationships and creating a culture of mentoring in the nation’s schools. This three-year, $3 million commitment is aimed at addressing the social capital inequities that exist for young people across the country and accelerating MENTOR’s progress in providing servant leadership for the field and youth mentoring movement. Launched as Relationship Nation, the partnership includes three main components:

- The launch and implementation a national awareness and influence campaign highlighting the impact of taking a rigorous relationship centered approach on outcomes from education to mental health to workforce development.
- Increase grassroots efforts to help educate policymakers on the impact of relationship-centered solutions across issues areas.
- The creation of a Leadership-Centered Schools Initiative, partnering with schools and school districts, bolstering local mentoring infrastructure and intentional approaches to ensure young people have the adult relationships they need to thrive.

“Navigating all possible education and career pathways can be daunting, even with the many resources available. This is where mentors play such a critical role in a students’ journey,” said Jean Eddy, CEO and President of ASA. “We know we must do more to address capital inequities that exist for young people across the country and that is why ASA is committing significant resources and joining forces with MENTOR to meet the relationship needs of our young people. We know we can go further together.”

“The top three benefits mentees received from participating in mentoring programs were professional development (56 percent), a better understanding of organizational culture (52 percent), and the development of new perspectives (27 percent).”

Some recommendations based on the research findings are:
- Test with a pilot program.
- Use mentors for new hires.
- Evaluate performance before and after the program to measure effectiveness.
- Provide clear guidelines and training for all involved.
- Get buy-in from senior leaders.

Information about obtaining the full research report can be found at mentoring.org.

The Association for Talent Development (ATD) is the world’s largest professional membership organization supporting those who develop the knowledge and skills of employees, improve performance, and help to achieve results for the organizations they serve. Originally established in 1948, the association was previously known as the American Society for Training & Development (ASTD). ATD’s members come from more than 120 countries and work in public and private organizations in every industry sector. ATD supports talent development professionals who gather locally in volunteer-led U.S. chapters and international member networks, and with international strategic partners.

For more information, visit td.org.