

MENTORING IS A TIMELESS SUCCESS FACTOR

Mentoring is a genuine commitment to helping the career development of a less experienced, less knowledgeable colleague. At its best, mentoring is a collaboration that is truly shared. Done well by both the mentor and mentee, the experience can be transformative.

Recognize the talent and the valuable contributions that up and comers could make to your company. Ideally, enter a mentoring relationship with a sense that their successes become your successes.

Specifically, mentoring involves helping others develop knowledge and skills to learn how to be a great teammate, to handle difficult situations, to recognize the importance of seeking input and advice from others and, in general, how to become better leaders and succeed in our work for our clients.

There is no one set approach to mentoring. It can be an informal arrangement, though it works best when mentors feel a strong sense of responsibility and have an attitude of truly wanting to help further a colleague's career. It is really an intentional, developmental relationship. Lulu Gonella of LWG Consulting believes mentoring works best when the relationship is "organic," i.e., when two people naturally form an informal but intentional relationship. She also believes that by being a role model, the mentor can further enhance the benefits for the mentee.

The tone of the relationship is very important. To quote the Center for Creative Leadership's (CCL) guidebook about mentoring, "the capacity of the mentor to influence rests heavily on her or his ability to relate in a non-authoritative way," while guiding the mentee's learning and growth.

So, how to begin? It would be helpful to begin with an assessment of the mentee's competencies and areas of potential growth. Again, to borrow from CCL, assessment areas include:

- Strengths, goals
- Blind spots, biases, vulnerabilities
- Self-awareness, self-image
- Receptivity to and use of feedback
- Readiness to be mentored
- Receptivity to you as a mentor

I recommend ordering CCL's 32-page *Ideas Into Action Guidebook Seven Keys to Successful Mentoring*. Visit www.ccl.org.

In my work with clients, I have found that mentoring works best when the person is ready, accepts that seeking continuous improvement is a strength, not a sign of weakness, and has the motivation and drive to work toward specific goals.

If this works as you intend, and it certainly can if you commit to it and follow through, there should be personal satisfaction and fulfillment for you, as mentor, and for the mentee. By bringing out the best in your colleague, that person will have a greater ability to be an effective teammate and contribute positively to the company culture. She or he will perform on a higher level, serving clients with more energy and enthusiasm, and helping the company succeed. Here are some specific guidelines for mentoring:

Set expectations and goals together.

- Be open and honest with each other about progress, and how the relationship is working.
- Recognize that there must be compatibility, respect, trust and available time.
- Trust can be enhanced if both you and your mentee are comfortable allowing yourselves to be vulnerable with one another.
- As a mentor, recognize the need to be both challenging and encouraging.

Here's a link to Google for a worthwhile read by Dana Theus, another very capable consultant and founder of InpowerWomen. While written for women, Dana's insight certainly applies to men, as well. <http://www.inpowerwomen.com/do-women-need-a-mentor-to-succeed>.

Earlier in my career, I had the privilege of working in an organization where people naturally took it upon themselves to help others. We had no formal mentoring program; I just worked alongside many great leaders who organically went out of their way to mentor our up and comers. They were superb mentors, helping people learn and grow, and, in fact, those they mentored went on to mentor others. This cycle perpetuated a winning organizational culture in which employees felt valued and important members of our company team. They were truly invested in our organization.

For example, over coffee, breakfast, or lunch, we would discuss issues like the challenges of a single woman entertaining a client, and explain the long-term client benefits of superior risk management services versus low price, and discuss what should be included in a proposal and how it should be structured, and how to take full advantage of our global organization's resources. These discussions contained real-world advice and insight that I doubt formal training could have provided, and that on-the-job experience would have taken much longer to instill. And they were fun!

I could practically watch our people grow.

The common thread was the mentors' attitudes. We wanted to help others succeed. We were secure in ourselves—as the saying goes, we were comfortable in our own skin. And we appreciated the positive contributions we were making to the company by mentoring.

Mentoring is a timeless success factor.

Currently, I am working with a highly successful company, a leader in its field that is committed to helping their younger people grow in their careers. I have every confidence that these mentors will be very effective in helping others with their careers as they truly care and have a genuine desire to serve and help their younger teammates. It starts with the CEO and cascades throughout the company. All leaders share a desire to help others.

It is certainly true that everybody is already very busy, and taking on a mentoring relationship is an added (and important) responsibility. Yet, I feel confident that you will discover a deep sense of satisfaction in helping a colleague develop. You will likely further enhance your own feedback and relationships skills, and certainly continue your own learning and growth.

About The Author



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