

Leadership and the Art of Mentoring: Tool Kit for the Time Machine

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Executive Summary

Mentoring is both an opportunity and a risk. It is largely a teaching process beginning with parental nurturing of children and continuing through the life cycle of organizational and personal interrelationships. A key principle considered in this article is that mentoring is both an obligation and responsibility of leadership. Through mentoring, the wisdom and experience of the senior is passed to the junior. This includes passing on and discussing principles, traditions, shared values, quality, and lessons learned. Mentoring provides a framework to bring about a cultural change in the way we view the professional development of competent future leaders. The road to the top in most organizations today is an uphill and bumpy ride—you simply can't float to the top. Mentoring is a key way to help us get to our destination.

Introduction

Mentoring is perhaps the most powerful method by which we can shape the future. The term has become a buzzword, often carelessly shot into the air along with a dust cloud of other jargon from the unofficial, unwritten dictionary of

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those who consider themselves the cutting edge of modern leadership and management. But real mentoring, properly understood, is much more than just another clipping from last week's Dilbert cartoon. Without an in-depth study of mentoring, the capacity of an individual to mentor is limited to the horizons of his or her own experience. Thus, mentoring is literally a time machine that allows us to have a profound influence many years beyond today's hubbub and humdrum. And, it is safe to say that, just as sure as you are related to your grandfather, mentoring can make a significant difference in the lives of people.

A mentor is a trusted advisor, teacher, counselor, friend, and/or parent, older and more senior than the person he or she helps. A mentor is there when you need him or her. Mentoring is an ongoing process. In organizations, it can apply to all leaders and supervisors who are responsible for getting their work done through other people. The individual who is assisted by a mentor is usually called a protégé—in essence, a student or pupil who learns from the mentor. The process by which one person aids another in this type of relationship is known as “mentoring.” Regardless of how we choose to define it, mentoring—if properly conducted—can have a most positive change in the life, attitudes, and behavior of the protégé. But what does this really mean? Does mentoring differ in any way from teaching, parenting, or being a friend?

This article attempts to answer these important questions in a practical way that will enable people to implement the principles of mentoring in everyday life. If we comprehend the principles essential to mentoring, we will have in our grasp the tool kit that can make our time machine work. On balance, this article attempts to demystify the phenomenon of mentoring by cutting through buzzwords and misconceptions to communicate a workable understanding of mentoring and its practical implementation.

The Mentoring Process

It may be a useful mnemonic and analytical device to treat the term *mentoring* as if it were an acronym. The various aspects of effective mentoring, expressed as verbs, can be understood as corresponding to the letters in the word as follows:

Model
Empathize
Nurture
Teach
Organize
Respond
Inspire
Network
Goal-set

We will discuss each of the components in turn and, in so doing, will develop a working understanding of what it means to be a mentor.

Model

An effective mentor must lead by example. When the mentor serves as a real-world role model for the protégé, the cliché that “actions speak louder than words” comes to life. Mentoring requires significant amounts of time for mentor and protégé to be in close proximity. The protégé is always observing and learning from the mentor. The opportunity to see how the mentor actually deals with a variety of situations is an important part of the process because it takes things from the abstract, conceptual level to the realm of practical, pragmatic application.

A mentor must behave at all times, both publicly and privately, as if the protégé were the mentor’s shadow. Part of the mentoring process is the act of demonstrating for the protégé as he or she “shadows” the mentor the proper methods, techniques, practices, and procedures that are part of the way the enterprise functions. More than this, though, is the need for the mentor to show the protégé how a mature professional deals with various challenges and opportunities. A mentor should be a model of composure, dignity, integrity, and professionalism, under all manner of conditions. A protégé who shadows such a role model will eventually come to understand, at a deep level, what he or she must be and do. A successful protégé is one who is willing to listen, observe, learn, and grow from the example of another.

An outstanding mentor who personified the principle of modeling ideal behavior was the great baseball player and Hall of Famer, Jackie Roosevelt Robinson. It may be hard to believe for people who grew up after the dawning of the Civil Rights movement, but until 1947 almost all “major league” professional sports in America were completely closed to African-Americans. No matter how talented, even the best African-American athletes could never play in the all-white professional leagues. But in 1947, Jackie Robinson bravely broke the “color barrier” and became a major league baseball player for the Brooklyn Dodgers.

It was a very tough challenge for Robinson. He had to overcome bitter, angry resistance and resentment from some of his own teammates, let alone opposing players, managers,

and owners. He was repeatedly subjected to the most vile racial slurs, obscenities, and insults. Players would intentionally try to injure him with their spiked shoes as they slid into him at his position at second base. In some cities, he could not eat in the same restaurants as his teammates nor sleep in the same hotels. It was a hard, lonely struggle for this young man—the one and only African-American in all of major league baseball. But Jackie Robinson was prepared. He understood and applied the four P’s: *preparation prevents poor performance*.

Dodgers owner Branch Rickey had met with Robinson prior to the season to discuss the risks they were both taking and the difficulties they were certain to encounter. They agreed that it was crucial for Robinson not to sink to the level of his attackers. Bigots would be circling constantly like vultures, all too eager to pounce on any excuse to find Robinson somehow “unfit” for the major leagues. In their view, if Robinson proved unfit, then by extension so did all other African-Americans. Jackie Robinson represented an entire race, and he would be under intense scrutiny at all times. The pressure was crushing and unrelenting, but Robinson never let it beat him.

Every day, he played all-star-caliber baseball on the field. He also conducted himself like the consummate professional and gentleman he was, both on and off the field. He carried himself with quiet dignity, notwithstanding the most brutal indignities thrown at him. The only way he fought back was by playing baseball with an unsurpassed degree of dedication, drive, energy, and determination, game after game. In so doing, he gradually won the grudging respect of many former enemies and demonstrated for countless other African-Americans that there was hope for them too. To this day, he remains a shining role model for everyone who must deal with racism and discrimination of whatever variety.

In time, Jackie personally mentored other African-American baseball players who entered the major leagues through the doors he had opened, including teammates Roy Campanella and Don Newcombe. He told them what they needed to know, but more importantly, he showed them. His example proved to them, on a daily basis, what was needed to succeed. Because of his influence, it was easier for them and for everyone else who came later. He was the model for them to emulate, personally and professionally. That is what mentors do.

Clearly, lessons of this type do not lend themselves to a quick one-time demonstration. This is not an easy, by-the-numbers, single-shot process. A person becomes a mentor and a role model through persistent effort and interaction with the protégé over a considerable period of time. It may be that a mentor can teach the basics of a task at hand fairly quickly, but the deeper lessons that distinguish mentoring from simply teaching or training require prolonged involvement. You cannot model optimal actions over a broad spectrum of conditions at once, at will; it must happen naturally, in its own time. With enough time and given a sufficiently wide range of circumstances, a relationship can mature from

one of trainer-trainee to the more transformational one of mentor-protégé. An effective mentor is like an elephant that tramples down high grass and flattens bushes to ease the way for the younger, quicker animals. Real mentors exhibit caring for others. They are inspirational and high minded, with tremendous energy and a positive attitude toward making a difference in people's lives. This requires that a mentor be capable of maintaining a give-and-take relationship with a protégé. In turn, protégés must be willing to learn, actively seek help, and apply what they have learned.

Empathize

The ability and willingness to empathize are central to mentoring. Only by truly understanding what the protégé is experiencing and by identifying with what the protégé is feeling can the mentor know what is needed. Without empathy, the would-be mentor is reduced to acting in a canned, off-the-shelf, generic, one-size-fits-all manner, and the protégé is robbed of the individualized focus that is so important to every mentoring relationship.

Mentoring involves something more than teaching. This extra ingredient is empathy, a measure of interpersonal involvement and caring. In fact, empathy is in many respects the Golden Rule in practice—we treat others as we would like them to treat us in similar circumstances.

An empathic mentor will comprehend the types of challenges and struggles a novice faces, usually because he or she was once a novice too. It may take a little jog around the memory track to recollect those long-suppressed thoughts of the painful early days, but it is worth the effort. A mentor who remembers what it is like to be new and inexperienced will be far more effective in assisting others in that position.

When a mentor puts himself or herself in the protégé's stiff, squeaky new shoes, he or she knows without being told which areas are likely to be causing discomfort and difficulties. The mentor can anticipate problems and needs and proactively take steps to smooth the path. The protégé will appreciate this because it saves asking countless questions. It shows consideration for the protégé's need for self-respect. Empathy helps form a bond between mentor and protégé, thereby fostering the kind of mutual commitment that characterizes mentoring at its best.

One of the most remarkable mentors in history is Anne Sullivan, the teacher of Helen Keller. Immortalized in the play and film *The Miracle Worker*, Sullivan exemplified all facets of an ideal mentor as she worked with her young deaf and blind protégé. Perhaps most notable, however, was her steadfast determination to empathize with her very challenging student. Sullivan had to overcome multiple daunting obstacles—a seven-year-old, “spoiled,” wildly undisciplined, extremely stubborn Helen Keller, who almost from birth had been unable to see or hear! How would she ever be able to connect with such a pupil? How could she hope to teach her anything at all? Virtually all of the usual teaching methods were utterly useless.

Anne could not teach her student by pointing to objects or by showing her words and pictures in a conventional book because Helen was unable to see. She could not teach by reading aloud or explaining things orally because Helen was unable to hear. Each of these conditions alone would have been a formidable obstacle, but together they made the situation virtually impossible. Plus, Helen was so young and had been encased in sightlessness and silence since such an early stage of her infancy that she had no preexisting knowledge of or experience with any form of alternate communication method or language.

Anne Sullivan is known the world over as the miracle worker because she did indeed overcome all these obstacles and succeeded in teaching Helen to an astonishing degree. Helen's parents would have been thrilled if she had learned even to sit at the dinner table without becoming violent. Ultimately, Sullivan took Helen far beyond that first hurdle and taught her to read and write to such a phenomenal level that Helen graduated from prestigious Radcliffe College and became a famous author. Sullivan accomplished this monumental achievement largely because she tenaciously refused to admit defeat and gradually attained true empathy with Helen.

Fortified with a powerful determination to comprehend the world as Helen knew it and drawing deeply from her own experiences to make every possible analogy, Sullivan burrowed through the multiple walls imprisoning her pupil. With tremendous persistence, she vicariously entered the dark, strange, silent world of her protégé and developed a combination of techniques that would penetrate all those layers of separation between them. Once she achieved the initial breakthrough, Helen's indomitable spirit burst forth in an exultant tidal wave of freedom and carried both mentor and protégé to undreamed-of heights. Helen eventually summarized her experiences as Anne Sullivan's protégé in these words: “It was the birthday of my soul, the day my teacher came to me.”

It is useful to keep this example in mind. The Golden Rule is a superb guiding principle for all mentors. Empathize with your protégés, and treat them as you would want to be treated. Comprehend not merely their position, but also their actual circumstances. As Anne Sullivan has shown us, this is the key to building bridges across even the widest chasms.

Nurture

Nurturing encompasses a caring attitude, emphasis on development, and an understanding of the “law of the harvest.” The mentor nurtures the protégé as a farmer tends the wheat, providing seeds, nourishment, protection, and the room to grow, each in its turn, in the proper amount, and in its own due time.

Most significant is that harvesting is a natural process that abides by certain unchanging principles, in a definite sequence. No farmer can reap before sowing nor expect a rich harvest without a sizable prior investment of time, talent, and

labor. These seem to be obvious points, but they are often missed by people who are “too busy” to do more than go through the motions of mentoring.

If mentoring is to be more than a mirage—if it is to be a real process rather than illusory window-dressing—the mentor will have to tend to the real needs of the protégé. Seeds of knowledge must be planted and watered, cultivated with sufficient tools and the information necessary to use them properly, and given enough time for the seeds to germinate and take root. Only later can the crop be weeded and given more advanced nutrients—and then still more time must be allowed before any harvest is expected. It is impossible for a farmer to receive on-demand a bounteous harvest according to some artificially imposed “schedule” if the seedlings have been denied the time to mature and bear ripened fruit. This is the law of the harvest. Its components and its sequence are established by nature and are forever immutable.

To nurture a human being, similar natural laws must be obeyed. We cannot reasonably expect a harvest of expert-level performance from someone who has not had the appropriate training or the time to apply and internalize that training through actual trial and error. Not only is it unrealistic, but it is extremely frustrating to the person who is placed into such an unfair situation. Similarly, it is not enough to give a trainee a computer, or any other tool, if we fail also to provide the necessary practical instruction on how to use it effectively.

On a more intangible level, nurturing requires the mentor to care about, and to care for, the protégé. This, too, cannot be faked or rushed or forced. If the mentor is unwilling to learn what motivates the protégé, and to develop a degree of co-ownership of their aspirations, there will be a lack of nurturing.

A fascinating example of the nurturing aspect of mentoring comes from the world of literature. Don Quixote, the odd, visionary, self-made “knight” created by the brilliant Spanish novelist Miguel de Cervantes, has been amusing and amazing people for hundreds of years. In both the classic novel and in the more recent musical play and film *Man of La Mancha*, Don Quixote touched the life of a troubled young prostitute named Aldonza.

Many people who met the highly eccentric old man assumed that he was insane. Here, after all, was a fellow riding around Spain as a knight-errant long after knights in armor had passed from the scene, doing battle with windmills he imagined to be menacing giants. Don Quixote saw everything as grander and more magical than it appeared to “sane” folks, including his cherished “golden helmet,” which others saw as an ordinary barber’s basin.

This applied to the people Don Quixote met, too. He saw in the simple peasant Sancho Panza the makings of a noble squire to assist him in his knightly missions. He saw in the rough, bitter, cynical prostitute Aldonza a wonderful, virtuous lady of the highest principles to whom he would dedicate his greatest victories. To him, she even had a loftier, sweeter, more musical name—Dulcinea. Through many adventures,

he consistently treated Sancho and Aldonza as if they truly were the people he envisioned them to be.

Aldonza, in particular, fought him on this every step of the way. Years of abuse, degradation, and poverty had taught her that life was miserable and that she was worthless. But Don Quixote steadfastly treated her as the fine lady of nobility, Dulcinea, in public and in private, and in all manner of circumstances. He was totally dedicated to serving her, defending her honor, and building her up. With complete consistency, he behaved as if she were the royal lady of his dreams. And very gradually, this patient nurturing began to have an effect.

People usually are not transformed overnight. The law of the harvest says that things happen in their natural order, with the time they naturally require, and not one minute less. On some level, Don Quixote knew this, and he persisted in nurturing Aldonza despite her many angry refusals to be helped. Eventually, the harvest did come, and she became a different, better person. At the conclusion of the musical play, she even declares, “My name is Dulcinea.” Such is the power of a mentor who nurtures not just for a day, and not just when it is convenient or easy to do so, but with dedication and long-term commitment.

There is a difference between nurturing someone and being a mother hen. Good parents must let their children make some of their own decisions, including the inevitable mistakes, and learn to deal with the consequences. Through grappling with gradually increasing degrees of autonomy and living with the natural aftershocks of bad decisions, children eventually become responsible adults who gain independence from their parents. So, too, must good mentors allow their protégés progressively increasing degrees of independence, together with the concomitant responsibility for their actions.

Any attempt to shelter people from all painful experiences will fail. No greenhouse environment, no matter how carefully constructed, can artificially protect its inhabitants—whether beans or human beings—indefinitely. Even if it could be done, the result would be people incapable of functioning as independent individuals in the real world. The key to effective nurturing is to maintain a balance between protecting the protégé and weaning him or her away from dependence. This is an imprecise process that requires mentors continually to monitor their protégés’ progress and make the necessary adjustments. It does not lend itself to rigid timetables or cookbook recipes. Only an actively engaged mentor can know his or her protégé well enough to gauge the appropriate mix of sheltering and weaning.

Teach

A central aspect of mentoring is the process of teaching. Mentors teach their protégés, first and foremost. Indeed, teaching in its fullest, most developed sense is the essence of mentoring.

Many people, no matter how knowledgeable and experienced, are uncomfortable with teaching others. They often have had no training as teachers. They may have been trained by ineffective teachers themselves and assume that the methods that were used to teach them are appropriate for them now to use on others. They may have little interest in being a teacher, or they may not comprehend how the concepts that are so familiar and second nature to them are foreign, difficult, and time-consuming for a novice to grasp.

There are many theories of education, each with its champions and critics. It is beyond the scope of this article to examine educational theory in depth. For our purposes, it will suffice to note that there is substantial evidence that by far the most effective teaching method, across the entire spectrum of subjects, is a commonsense approach known as direct instruction. For both short-term and long-term learning, in categories from mathematics to reading to logical reasoning, direct instruction has been shown to be a very powerful teaching method.

Developed by Siegfried Engelmann, direct instruction relies on time-tested methods that seem obvious but are very often neglected by amateur and professional teachers alike. In essence, the best results come from teachers who (1) organize the material into logical, step-by-step, building-block units of manageable size; (2) correct students' errors immediately; (3) frequently review all previously covered material and relate it to the current lesson; (4) include generous amounts of practical exercises on which students can flex their developing intellectual muscles; and (5) often test students' comprehension, formally and informally, and give them detailed feedback on their progress. With these basic principles constantly in mind, anyone can be an effective teacher.

It is crucial for mentors to spend some time developing a realistic plan for teaching their protégés. This requires empathy, in that the expert mentor must put himself or herself in the place of the novice protégé and determine what information needs to be conveyed, in what sequence, and over what period of time. The mentor must realize that this material is totally new to the novice and that most people need to see or hear unfamiliar material several times before they truly learn it. A one-time explanation is not enough, particularly when there is a great deal of material involved.

People differ in the ways they learn most readily. Some people learn by reading, so the mentor must provide a written set of resources to the protégé, complete with instructions on where to look for further help. Some learn by watching others perform the task in question, so the mentor must model the appropriate behavior. Other people learn by listening, so the mentor must also methodically, thoroughly, and with repetition talk the protégé through each concept. Still other people learn by doing, armed with a basic overview of the material. Thus, every effective training program will include ample practical exercises in which the trainees have the opportunity to test and expand their knowledge of previously presented oral and written material. These exercises must be done with the mentor's participation

to correct errors swiftly, offer helpful tips, and answer questions as they arise.

Because people vary in how they learn, it is a good idea to use all of the above methods, in combination, with any given protégé. At least until and unless it becomes clear that a person finds some methods far more effective than others, a mentor should provide a mixture of all of these approaches (reading, shadowing, listening, and doing) to give the protégé the best possible chance to learn.

Teaching must also progress in a logical, building-block manner. Mentors should begin by thoroughly establishing a solid foundation of the simplest, most general concepts and skills. These must include understandable definitions of all terms and acronyms, which often are used so profusely by experienced people that they fail to realize that others are unfamiliar with the vocabulary of this strange new language. It is a good idea to provide a written handout that defines all the key terms and acronyms in layman's verbiage.

Only when satisfied that the protégé has a firm grasp of the basics can the mentor build upon this foundation and add the next layer of complexity. It is very easy for unskilled teachers to get off track and jump erratically from concept to concept, but that spells disaster for the learning process. This happens because the mentor knows so much more about the topic than the protégé, and his or her brain automatically fills in all the gaps in the subject matter. By empathizing with the protégé and organizing a plan of action, the mentor should be able to determine which concepts depend on a foundation of basic knowledge and to teach both basic and advanced topics without skipping around and leaving gaping holes in the lessons.

Socrates, the great teacher and philosopher of ancient Greece, made a very powerful teaching tool famous. Socrates would ask questions of his students, including Plato, and through their answers and his skillful use of follow-up questions, he led them to think through the material for themselves. Day after day, the streets of Athens were the stage for this remarkable, interactive learning process. Plato became an immortal philosopher in his own right under the expert tutelage of his mentor Socrates, and later, in turn, Plato mentored another great thinker, Aristotle, who then mentored Alexander the Great. Such is the nature of mentoring, as one generation learns from the preceding mentors and then teaches the succeeding generation. Through his influence on his illustrious followers, Socrates profoundly affected the course of Western civilization.

This so-called Socratic method of questions and answers is a very effective way to teach. It is often used in law schools today because it causes students to learn a new way of thinking, not merely new information. It compels both teacher and student to be involved and actively engaged in the educational process. There is no room for passivity when there is a continual interchange of ideas, questions, and responses. The stereotype of the traditional lecture-dominated classroom populated with near-comatose students lulled to sleep by a droning bore of a teacher is the antithesis of a lively, stimulating Socratic dialogue.

Mentors should incorporate this technique of periodically asking their protégés questions and, based on their answers, assessing the need for either additional questions or further instruction. This is an excellent way to test a student's progress, quickly, frequently, and informally, and provide crucial early warning of problem areas that require more attention from the mentor. As Engelmann notes, "If the student hasn't learned, the material hasn't been taught." If a student can thoroughly explain the material to the teacher, in the student's own words, that is strong evidence that the material has in fact been taught and learned.

It is also absolutely essential that the mentor periodically review previously presented material with the protégé. All successful teaching programs include frequent reviews of previous lessons, with logical ties to the areas currently being studied. Repetition is an important component of learning, and the mentor simply has to take this into account. Again, it is all too easy to forget to conduct reviews or to assume that they are unnecessary. If the lesson is important enough to present the first time, it is important enough to review. If it is not reviewed, there is a high probability that it will not be learned. Remember, people internalize new information best when the material is presented in multiple ways (reading, observing, hearing, and doing) and at multiple times (reviewing). In instructional terms, what is required are real events, initiatives, and experiences capable of changing the mentoring trajectory—that is, making mentoring more central to the ever-increasing role of the leader as a teacher. Keep it simple, keep it practical, and ensure that leaders are doing the actual teaching. The teaching purpose of mentoring should be cultural rather than structural; personal development is the first priority—the kind that produces enhanced knowledge of attitudes, resulting in new and improved behaviors. Credibility and competence are the two essential things that protégés are looking for in this aspect of mentoring.

Organize

A mentor must be organized to be of much help to the protégé and must also help the protégé become organized. The systematic, methodical approach is essential, both in preparing an effective mentoring program and in building the protégé into a more effective individual.

An organized mentor will know at the outset what he or she wants to achieve and will focus every aspect of the program toward that goal. As the saying goes, "If you don't know where you're going, how will you know when you get there?" By developing a desired end state before beginning the mentoring process, a mentor gains the ability to gear every effort in that direction. Organization and planning are a vital part of a good teaching program. The time and effort spent organizing thoughts and materials into a logical, building-block, sequential plan of lessons all aimed at a definite, precisely defined target of what needs to be learned will pay big dividends in the form of improved learning and the quicker, better performance that follows.

Some people claim to have no patience for the organizing process. They would much rather "just do it" and skip the tedious preliminaries. They believe that, because they are so experienced and intelligent, it would be a waste of time for them to "go through the motions" of organizing a mentoring plan. They are mistaken.

Mentoring is too important a journey to commence without a prior investment of time and effort to develop an organized road map or plan of action. "Winging it" does not do it justice. No matter how much you know or how experienced you are, you still need to organize. In fact, paradoxically, it may be that the need for organization is greatest where a mentor is most knowledgeable and experienced because such an expert is more likely to take the basics for granted and omit key points. A person who is serious about being a mentor will spend the time to ensure that it is done properly. Mentoring is not a window-dressing, feel-good program to be given a cursory treatment and then forgotten, once someone has given us credit for it on a monthly report. Mentoring involves real people and real commitments between them, on a continuing basis. It is worth the time spent to organize a coherent, individually tailored plan. Failure to organize will result in aimless drift—largely random activity—with no guiding principle to steer the ship toward any particular port.

Organizing may not be the most emotionally rewarding facet of mentoring or the most fun. People tend to prefer to spend their limited time actually interacting with protégés or engaged in other activities that feel more like action and less like paperwork. But if you neglect to organize your efforts, you are unlikely to achieve the best results. In essence, the time you devote to organizing saves a lot of time and energy. It enables us to minimize or eliminate the resources we squander on irrelevant or secondary activities, while focusing maximum attention on our real goal and the key stepping stones along the way.

One virtue of analyzing the mentoring process is to give your efforts structure, a workable framework within which to organize your thoughts and actions. A topic-by-topic breakdown of the important ingredients of the process provides a ready-made outline to keep you on track and aimed at your target. An outline compels you to examine the essential facets of an effective mentoring approach. It leads you to devote some time to planning a method of addressing each aspect of the mentoring process, armed with an understanding of what should be achieved. Similar to a good checklist, an outline provides some assurance that major components will not be inadvertently left out or given inadequate attention. This is all part and parcel of what it means to organize. It may not be exciting, but it is a key to success.

Finally, because one significant lesson all mentors should teach their protégés is organizational skill, it is necessary first for the mentor to learn and use this tool. As mentioned previously, a mentor must model the desired behavior.

Respond

Mentoring is a communicative process. It is not a method for shooting information at a person who writes down every word. The ideal mentor is not a guru perched motionless atop a remote Himalayan mountain peak, sitting with legs folded and navel in mind, dispensing wisdom periodically like a fortune-telling vending machine. Mentoring involves genuine two-way communication between mentor and protégé on a protracted, continuing basis.

Mentors must truly listen to questions from their protégés and respond to them fully. This requires active listening from protégés. Mentors should follow up with more questions after the initial question to ensure that their protégés understand the answer and are satisfied with it. It is important to remember that the primary client or customer in any mentor-protégé relationship is the protégé. The protégé knows best when there are relationship problems, inadequately answered questions, or a pace that makes effective learning impossible. The mentor must respond to the protégé's needs if the mentoring process is to succeed.

Less obviously, but also very important, the mentor must respond to the protégé on multiple communication levels throughout the mentoring process. The protégé may be reluctant to voice certain concerns or to ask too many questions. An effective mentor must be alert for nonverbal indications and cues. It takes some diligence, sensitivity, and perceptiveness for a mentor to develop the capacity to respond to the protégé in this manner. A protégé who discovers the mentor is sufficiently in tune to respond even to unspoken questions and problems will be more likely to appreciate that mentor and to bond with him or her.

A mentor should be available much of the time. Particularly in the early phases of a mentoring relationship, a mentor must be prepared to devote sizable amounts of time. Although other duties will demand the mentor's time as well, a mentor has to be physically present and actively involved with the protégé if the process is to work. Many aspects of the mentoring process require frequent interaction and the continual exchange of information between mentor and protégé. It is impossible to "mail it in" and somehow rig up a shortcut around the day-to-day facets of mentoring. At best, any such attempt to do an end run around the requirement to be responsive would be a counterfeit facsimile of mentoring. It might bear some superficial similarities to mentoring, but it would lack the power and efficacy of the real thing.

Do not confuse responding with being reactive or sitting back waiting to answer questions. A responsive mentor does not merely react to a protégé, but is proactive. Mentors must anticipate needs, problems, and concerns, and try to take care of them in advance. This is one area where another key principle—organization—is particularly helpful. With proper organization, a mentor can foresee many of the usual pitfalls along the way and do as much as possible to build precautions against them into the mentoring plan.

Jaime Escalante demonstrated the principle of responsiveness in a most remarkable way, as memorialized in the film *Stand and Deliver*. He stunned his colleagues when he left his high-paying position in the computer industry to become a mathematics teacher in a low-income Hispanic section of Los Angeles. What he found when he entered his classroom was a disheartened collection of underachieving, streetwise teenagers whose minds and hearts were on anything but mathematics. But Escalante was determined to use all of his considerable skills to make a difference for these young people, regardless of the cost to him personally in terms of time, effort, lost income, and frustration.

Escalante decided to teach his students calculus—not just high school mathematics—although many people would have considered that an achievement in itself. To make this happen, he knew he had to respond to his class, not as a class and not as a cluster of stereotypes, but as unique individuals. He worked hard to explain calculus from the most basic principles, illustrating his points with real-life examples from his students' own experiences. He appealed to their ethnic pride by stressing the illustrious history of Hispanic achievement in higher mathematics, including the groundbreaking advancements of the ancient Mayans. And he tailored his teaching methods to the needs of each student. If that meant supplemental review sessions in his own home, over dinner, then that is exactly what he provided. Even after he suffered a serious heart attack, he refused to relax; his students needed him, and he was not about to let them down.

The results of Jaime Escalante's work were so phenomenal that they became the subject of a popular motion picture—hardly the place one would usually expect to find a high-school calculus class! His inner-city students performed like superstars on the difficult Advanced Placement calculus examination and earned a huge head start on their college mathematics careers. Escalante repeated this feat year after year, mentoring ever-increasing numbers of students from his previously obscure school to reach unheard-of achievements in calculus. Moreover, his responsiveness to and total involvement with each student helped them in many aspects of their lives, not just in academics. Under his care, they proved to the world and to themselves that they could excel in any forum, against any odds. That is the impact of a mentor who responds to each protégé on a meaningful, individualized level.

Inspire

A mentor should be more than a good role model, teacher, and helpful acquaintance. Important though all of those are, true mentoring encompasses something extra—an element of inspiration. The mentor who can inspire the protégé will have a profound, deeply rooted effect on that person for perhaps an entire lifetime. When inspired, a person is powerfully motivated to transform himself or herself into something better than before. Inspiration is the key to the most fundamental, core-level transformations.

Inspiration is one way in which leaders differ from managers. A leader has a broader vision and a far-reaching drive that goes beyond the more limited focus on daily operations that is the typical province of managers. The best mentors will also be good leaders because similar qualities are required of both.

Can a person acquire the ability to inspire others? Are there steps a person can take to improve the chances of being an inspirational individual, a leader? To some extent, inspiration is a matter of chemistry and does not lend itself to conscious analysis or application; but there are things a mentor can do to enhance this important element of the mentoring process.

It is useful to read about leadership, especially in-depth discussions of some inspirational leaders. Reading a few case studies of effective leaders will lend at least an intellectual understanding of some of the key factors that can form the foundation for more pragmatic, action-driving steps.

Probably the most significant factor contributing to one person's ability to inspire another is integrity. The mentor must have, and be perceived to have, integrity. No one is apt to be inspired by a hypocrite. We are moved by people we admire, and we admire people who exemplify qualities we want to have. Honesty, consistency, and commitment to correct principles are traits we can all strive to incorporate into our approach to life. Over time, with sufficient testing in stressful situations, these traits will add up to integrity and help us to inspire those who look to us for guidance.

The other central element of inspirational character is a selfless, altruistic nature. People who are willing to sacrifice their own self-interest for the good of others tend to inspire others. Altruism is a noble quality refreshingly different from the usual human tendency to ask "What's in it for me." We trust and admire people who have proven themselves to be unselfish, and that naturally leads to our being inspired by their example.

Example, as usual, is crucial. Although a protégé might be inspired by the mentor's words, that will soon wear off if the mentor's actions fail to support what is said. No one needs to take a course in rhetoric or hire a professional speechwriter in order to be an inspiration. If the mentor is the type of person others might wish to emulate, and if the protégé has ample opportunities to observe the mentor handling difficult situations, the inspiration will follow.

A contemporary mentor who embodies the principle of inspiration is Marva Collins. This famous educator has taught generations of impoverished, disadvantaged, inner-city children from the roughest neighborhoods of Chicago. Collins has never been content just to achieve an orderly classroom, although many would consider that a major victory under the circumstances. Despite the discouraging predictions of hordes of self-styled educational experts, she has taught thousands of poverty-level African-American children to read, write, compute, and achieve several grade levels above their age group. More than this, she has instilled in them a genuine love of Shakespeare, Dante, the Greek

philosophers, and many other things typically assumed to be far beyond the grasp of her young pupils. Under her guidance, African-American children as young as three or four years old learn to read, memorize, and recite lengthy passages and analyze sophisticated themes from the great thinkers of civilization. She has proven her maxim "Any child can be a real achiever," thousands of times over.

Marva Collins is, of course, a master teacher. Her nonsense, low-budget, back-to-basics approach has worked wonders, especially when combined with her unconquerable faith in the worth of every child and her absolute refusal to accept failure from herself or her students. She has twice, 20 years apart, been featured in glowing reports on the television news magazine program *60 Minutes*. She has twice been formally invited by presidents of the United States to be secretary of education—invitations she declined because she did not want to leave her inner-city classroom. She is in constant demand as a speaker and is the author of several successful books. She has achieved her astonishing results, where so many others have failed, in large part because she knows how to inspire her very youthful protégés.

Her students see her every day working endlessly with total dedication and genuine love with each individual child, no matter how difficult and resistant to change the child may be. They see her doing the same things she exhorts them to do, including reading and rereading every book she assigns them. They see her, an African-American woman from a small town in Alabama, refusing to throw any "pity parties" for herself no matter how much prejudice and discrimination is thrown in her path. They see her devoting her time and talents—indeed, everything she has, including her life savings—to Westside Preparatory and the other schools she has founded. They see her demanding the same lofty standards from herself that she expects from them—excellence and achievement, hard work, and persistence. And they see that she never gives up on them, just as she tells them every day never to give up on themselves.

Day after day, Marva spends time with every student, one on one. She cradles a child's face lovingly in her hands, looks into the young eyes that, in her words, "hold wonder like a cup," and says, "You are a very, very bright child. You are going to succeed. You are going to produce. I will never let you fail. I promise you that!" As one of her former students recalled on *60 Minutes*, 20 years after he had been in Marva's classroom, "When somebody does that every day for two years, it transforms you!" That is the impact an inspirational mentor can have.

Mentors such as Marva Collins achieve titanic accomplishments because they inspire. And they inspire because they live the principles they teach. Every mentor must aspire to do the same.

Network

A good mentor introduces the protégé to other people who can also provide support, information, and resources.

Networking is vital to effective functioning in the real world, and the mentor should give the protégé a head start on establishing those key contacts.

It takes years to cultivate and build a network of friends and associates of sufficient breadth and depth to be useful in a wide range of situations. One of the greatest resources an “old head” owns is a network of people who can help cut through the usual tangle of red tape and quickly obtain the desired result. These contacts are enormously valuable shortcuts who effectively reduce untold hours wasted in researching issues from scratch or running into bureaucratic roadblocks. In some cases, it is literally impossible to accomplish a given task without the extra boost a good network can supply. When something must get done, reliance on such a network is a tremendous force multiplier.

Of course, a mentor cannot simply deliver a network to a protégé as if it were a notebook. Relationships are nontransferable—at least not directly transferable. But it is possible to act as a go-between and a facilitator. The mentor should personally take the protégé to meet as many contacts as feasible, one at a time, in their respective work areas. These meetings should be rather informal, under pleasant, ice-breaking conditions, with an eye toward helping the protégé establish a relationship with each contact.

The very act of physically accompanying the protégé on a series of personal visits to meet and chat with contacts is a valuable lesson because it will demonstrate the importance of getting out from behind the desk, escaping from the office, and interacting with people face-to-face. Particularly in this electronic age of E-mail, voice mail, cell phones, and faxes, it is very easy to lose the personal touch that is so central to effective networking. No matter how high-tech our society becomes, human beings relate much more naturally to each other than to any other means of communication, no matter how convenient or timely. Mentors must show how to use, cultivate, and keep a network flourishing, now more than ever.

The mentor should supplement a personal visit to each contact with a list of people, addresses, office locations, telephone numbers, and E-mail addresses, complete with a brief description of who they are and what they do. The network is too important to entrust it entirely to the protégé’s memory; a written record will be a valuable insurance policy for the protégé to rely on. Plus, the list may serve to jog the mentor’s memory of each contact and lead to further helpful insights.

In addition to sharing a personal preexisting network with the protégé, the mentor should teach the protégé how to build upon this nucleus and add contacts of his or her own. The art of being a professional friend, exchanging legitimate favors, and serving as a prized contact for other people, is a vital lesson for the mentor to convey. This is the type of real-world practical skill that is an ideal subject for mentoring.

Goal-Set

Many young and inexperienced people fail to understand the importance of setting proper goals and objectives, or they

lack the expertise to make their goals realistic and attainable. Mentors set goals, teach the need for goal setting, and help their protégés master the process of establishing and effectively pursuing goals.

First, an integral part of the organizational aspect of mentoring is to set goals. Very early in the relationship with the protégé, the mentor should carefully establish some tangible goals to achieve with the protégé. As always, the goals should be worthwhile, specific, attainable, measurable, and have a timetable. This is critically important because the goals will be the target for everything that is done from that point on, the end towards which all efforts are directed. Once the goals are established, the mentor should periodically monitor progress toward attaining each goal (and milestones along the way) and make any necessary adjustments to the goals.

All of the mentors discussed in this article are outstanding examples of people who set highly challenging, worthy goals and then did everything necessary to achieve them. Jackie Robinson, Anne Sullivan, Jaime Escalante, Socrates, and Marva Collins knew exactly what they wanted to achieve, and they devoted themselves to their goals with magnificent persistence and dedication. Their single-minded pursuit of deeply felt goals—goals that motivated them from the very core of their hearts—enabled them to achieve vertiginous heights against incredible odds. Even our fictional example, Don Quixote, displayed legendary commitment to the vision that impelled him to his feats of courage and devotion. Despite—or was it because of—his failure to see the flaws in his “impossible dream,” he conquered obstacles that would have persuaded others to surrender. His story still has the power to stir our hearts hundreds of years after it was written because all of us hunger to have our lives count and to know that we have given our best in pursuit of a noble cause.

Second, in setting and stressing the importance of goals for the mentoring process, a mentor must also teach proper goal-setting techniques. Many young people confuse goals with wishes and fail to grasp the elements that are essential to transforming mere wishful thinking into an attainable and worthwhile plan for the future. Also, in today’s culture of instant gratification and minuscule attention spans, some people have never learned the discipline that is so central to the determined pursuit of a clearly defined goal. It is not uncommon for people to be unfamiliar with the very concept of deferred gratification, let alone be able to implement it. A mentor’s work is not done until the protégé moves beyond that level into the realm of a mature goal setter and goal achiever.

An excellent way of doing this is to meet privately with the protégé and let the person talk about background, goals (both near- and long-term), hopes, and dreams. The mentor can share present and past goals with the protégé too, and in so doing illustrate by example some of the factors the mentor has used in his or her own goal setting.

This will highlight some of the elements the protégé may have omitted and vividly demonstrate how they contribute to making goals realistic in concept and reality in execution. It should become apparent to the protégé that there are significant

differences between workable goals on the one hand and pleasant but less reality-based dreams, hopes, or wishes on the other.

The mentor should teach the principles of effective goal setting and guide the protégé to gradually develop and refine goals, objectives, milestones, measures of progress, and a plan of action.

Conclusion

This article has examined the mentoring process within an analytical framework that identified the key elements of effective mentoring. Through the study and evaluation of these principles as practiced by several notable examples, you can gain a working understanding of what it takes to be a mentor. Ultimately, however, it is only through actually trying these principles that you will truly learn what they mean. The learning curve will probably be neither smooth nor easy. But “mentor” is not a title we can arrogate to ourselves or have bestowed upon us through a simple adminis-

trative act. It is an honor that must be earned every day as we diligently strive to apply each of the principles.

If we succeed, it will be because we have learned how to use mentoring as a tool kit for our time machine. Through effective implementation of the tools that are the mentoring principles, we will influence the future and change the course of events in ways both great and small. As mentors, our greatest reward may be one day to witness our former protégés in turn become mentors.

A major challenge of contemporary organizations is to nurture the talent and interest of all employees so that the needs of education, government, military, business, and other professional fields can be met. To achieve this worthy goal, leaders must take seriously their obligation to mentor their people if they expect them to meet the needs of society in a world as complex as we live in today. Mentors must have the vision to develop the leadership potential in employees for the global and highly interdependent world of the future.

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Discussion Questions and Ideas

(Select from the following for discussion and additional ideas.)

- What is mentoring and why is it important? Who should be a mentor? How do we find a mentor? How and when do we mentor?
- Is mentoring a personal and force multiplier? Why? What are some of the important factors to consider in mentoring?
- Is mentoring for you? Do you need a mentor? To whom does mentoring apply?
- Why is mentoring a leadership obligation and responsibility?
- Does mentoring occur naturally or can it be cultivated? Why are mentor/protégé relationships actively encouraged in organizations today?
- How can mentor/protégé relationships be made more meaningful and productive for both parties?