Mentoring

An Essential Leadership Skill

Mentoring is an essential leadership skill. In addition to managing and motivating people, it's also important that you can help others learn, grow and become more effective in their jobs.

Should you become a mentor? And what do you need to consider before setting up a mentoring relationship? In this article, we'll highlight some things a mentor does and doesn't do, and we'll help you decide whether mentoring is right for you.

Becoming a Mentor

Mentoring can be a rewarding experience for you, both personally and professionally. You can improve your leadership and communication skills, learn new perspectives and ways of thinking, advance your career, and gain a great sense of personal satisfaction.

Is Mentoring Right for You?

Even if you understand the benefits of mentoring and it sounds like a great idea, you have to decide whether it's right for you. To explore your reasons for mentoring and whether you want to take this type of commitment further, ask yourself these questions:

- Do you want to share your knowledge and experience with others?
- Do you enjoy encouraging and motivating others?
- Are you comfortable asking challenging questions?
- Do you want to contribute to other people's growth and success?
- Are you prepared to invest your time in mentoring on a regular basis?
- How will mentoring contribute toward your own career goals?
• How will mentoring add to your sense of contribution and community?
• What type of person do you ideally want to mentor? Can you describe the professional and personal qualities of this person? Do you want someone from the same profession or the same career path?
• In what areas are you willing to help? Are there any areas that you don't want to go near?

Clarify your reasons and motivations for becoming a mentor. When you meet a prospective mentee, this will help you assess your compatibility.

What You Should Consider

Although you may want to jump right in with both feet, think about these practical considerations:

• **Frequency of contact** – How much time can you commit to this relationship?
  – Can you "meet" weekly? Biweekly? Once a month?
  – How long can you spend in each meeting? Half an hour? An hour? More?
  – Do you want to be available between "formal" sessions?

• **Method of contact** – Would you prefer face-to-face meetings, phone calls, or emails? If you were to use phone calls, who places the call? Can you both use an Internet phone service such as Skype (giving high quality, free local and international calls)?

• **Duration of partnership** – Do you want to limit the length of the mentoring partnership? Do you want to set regular intervals to review whether you’re both happy with the relationship, or do you just want to informally review progress on an ongoing basis?

• **Skills, knowledge, and experience** – What specific expertise can you offer to a mentee?

• **Confidentiality** – How will you approach confidential business information? Think of ways to speak about general concepts and situations while maintaining confidentiality.
Where to Draw the Line

When developing a mentoring partnership, make sure you have clear boundaries of what you can and cannot do for the mentee.

Answer the above questions to help you clearly define these boundaries for yourself. Then, when you meet your potential mentee, you'll better understand your own mindset – what areas you're interested in covering, and what you will and will not do.

Take the lead on where you'll allow the mentoring relationship to go and what ground you'll cover. As a general guide, focus on your expertise and experience. If anything is beyond your skills and abilities, refer the mentee to another expert.

For example, if a discussion about human resources issues raises a concern about employment law, send your mentee to an internal expert or attorney. If conversations about work problems lead into personal or family problems, the mentee may need more focused professional help from a psychologist or therapist.

As a mentor, you can become the mentee's confidante and adviser. You may be called upon to be a "sounding board" for all sorts of issues and concerns. So know in advance how you're going to deal with difficult situations and getting "off subject."

Key Points

A mentoring partnership can be an enriching experience. You can develop your leadership and communication skills as well as contribute toward your own career advancement.

Mentoring can also give you a great overall sense of personal satisfaction, knowing that you're helping someone else learn and grow on a professional and personal level.

Before you begin a mentoring partnership, it's important to think about your reasons for becoming a mentor and the practical considerations and logistics of such a relationship. If you decide that mentoring is right for you, the time and effort that you put into it can reap great rewards that far exceed your expectations.