

MENTORING CONNECTIONS

Editor's Note: This is a series of bi-monthly columns that will examine the mentoring relationship. Columns are written by individuals who have experienced the mentoring relationship firsthand as either a mentor or a mentee.

The Rewards of Mentoring

BY MARGARET REYNOLDS

The mentoring relationship can be extremely valuable, both professionally and personally, for the participants.

Life is what you make it. Sure, it's a cliché, but haven't you found that many clichés have strong threads of truth?

In fact, truth is what makes those phrases so enduring. For example, a mentoring relationship is only as good as you make it. So how do you make it a true gift to yourself and your mentee?

Mentoring is a chance to champion another's success. The concept is really quite simple. One who knows more advises another who knows less. But in reality, mentoring is much more. I have learned the rich value of mentoring by experiencing it first hand.

Mentoring Is About Trust

The Helzberg Entrepreneurial Mentoring Program asked me to mentor a key decision maker of a small business. I was paired with Bill Hartnett, COO of EPIC Entertainment. He needed help with branding and marketing, and I had years of experience in those areas.

One thing we worked on was how to operate EPIC as a for-profit company even though it is a subsidiary of Starlight Theatre Company. They wanted to find ways to set clear growth goals and align behavior against them. We developed a "dashboard" measurement tool that not only sets measures that drive the business but also provides diagnostics as to why performance is what it is. This measurement system guides day-to-day behavior by communicating priorities and performance, thereby aligning behavior against goals. Two important goals for EPIC were team effectiveness and market awareness. We developed specific plans to address each of these and set targets to measure performance.

Before we could start working on specific goals, however, we had to develop a working relationship. Mentoring is a relationship based on trust. To get the most out of a mentoring relationship, you need to feel comfortable put-

ting your "worst foot forward." To be helpful, a mentor must be trusted with confidential and proprietary information about the business, as well as the personal goals and objectives of the mentee. This enables the mentee and mentor to get to the heart of the issues and have more meaningful dialogue and outcomes.

The mentor's first job is to build a bond with the mentee and establish trust and credibility. Often this means feeling your way one step at a time. Some mentoring relationships are easy, because the parties have a lot in common, such as similar values and interests. Mentors and mentee can quickly become friends as well as colleagues.



To maximize results of the mentoring relationship, it is worth the time it takes to establish trust before you set the game plan of what you want to work on together.

Mentoring Is About Life

Although mentoring can help instill strong business practices, experience teaches us success in life is really measured by our relationships with people. Mentees must understand how to lead and manage to succeed. They must identify their personal style and values, and learn how to bring those to the workplace in a positive and inspiring way to become successful leaders.

Successful mentors take time to identify the needs, desires, goals and skills in both the personal and professional lives of their mentees. This allows for mentoring in a meaningful way

that will guide mentees to their life goals, not just their business goals.

Bill and I spend as much time discussing our families and interests as we do business needs. That time is well spent. The nuggets of wisdom that emerge in those long conversations are a result of good insights into the big picture of Bill's life—including values, skills and dreams.

Mentoring Is a Two-way Process

Many think mentoring is about a highly successful executive teaching an aspiring future leader all the wisdom it takes to run a business.

The truth is that a good mentor learns just as much as the mentee. Most good relationships are based on mutual value, and a mentoring relationship is no different. A good mentor listens and discovers what matters to the mentee. A good mentor is open to new ideas about age-old problems, and the mentee often brings a fresh perspective that the seasoned professional may not have heard before. Good mentors realize that everybody they meet has the ability to contribute to their pool of general knowledge, including their mentee.

Hartnett said that the mentoring relationship is most effective when talents and experiences of the mentor and the mentee contrast each other but don't clash.

"The diversity of our experiences and talents allows us to come at issues from different angles, while our similarities allow us to share the same goals," Hartnett said.

In a great mentoring relationship, both parties are mentors and mentees. Mentoring is truly a gift you can give yourself to grow both professionally and personally.

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