

Establish a Great Mentoring Relationship

By Susan Elaine Murphy and Ellen A. Ensher

"Friendship is born at that moment when one person says to another, 'What! You too? I thought I was the only one.'"

—C.S. Lewis

RELATIONSHIPS with others can be part of life's most satisfying and most challenging moments. Mentoring relationships can be rewarding, but also contain inherent challenges as well.

A substantial body of research shows that mentoring relationships bestow a number of important benefits upon protégés, mentors, and their organizations. Although the focus typically highlights benefits for the protégé, such as access to promotions, pay raises, and increased career and job satisfaction, mentors also benefit substantially. For example, mentors may gain an important confidant—a person to whom they can pass along their wisdom—and great satisfaction from knowing that they are helping each other.

Organizations also benefit. By encouraging great mentoring relationships, organizations can ensure that the next wave of managers is qualified to assume leadership roles. But to create a great mentoring relationship, organizations must follow certain criteria.

Selecting the right mentor or protégé. Relationships that are the most successful are characterized by a high degree of reciprocal benefits. Mentors and protégés receive as much as they give in the relationships. A necessary ingredient to making sure you get the full benefit in the relationship comes from knowing what you want out of the relationship, and setting specific goals and expectations. That might mean carefully targeting a potential protégé or mentor and taking stock of what benefits you can offer.

Today's mentoring relationships are not merely limited to the older, wiser

person who mentors the younger, inexperienced worker. Mentoring can be accomplished by peers, those a few steps ahead in their careers, or those working a temporary job. Creating a network of mentors is an important key to finding the mentor of your dreams.

Another important element to consider when building an effective mentoring relationship is the need for the protégé to be assertive in communicating his expectations. Successful protégés did not passively wait for the mentor to approach them. Of course making a first impression was never more important than when the protégé approached a potential mentor, because it gave a mentor what we call a comprehensive first impression. Successful protégés were clear about what they could offer in the relationship in addition to being gracious.

People are often attracted to others who share the same values, beliefs, or appearance. Therefore, if you and your mentor have many superficial differences, working quickly to discover common interests will contribute to building an early rapport. It is important to reveal just enough about yourself to increase intimacy without being too forward.

Telling someone about your values, beliefs, and hopes is an important step to finding those important similarities that make a relationship work. In many relationships, we learn about others as they learn to trust us enough to disclose information about themselves. In many cases, these moments of self-disclosure are part of the bonding in the relationship.

Deepening the relationship. All great relationships are defined by respect, trust, and achievement of goals. Trust was an important component in the mentoring relationship of Araceli Gonzalez, formerly a councilwoman for the City of Cudahy, who confronted the ultimate test of trust when she discovered rampant corruption among her colleagues. As a

young politician she was uncertain of how to proceed. She turned to her mentor, Rosario Marin, a former U.S. Treasurer, for advice. Rosario advised her to "Do the right thing and turn them in." Araceli did that, and everyone except her mentor turned against her. However, with her mentor's help, she was able to weather this challenging situation and her career flourished.

Another important element necessary for deepening the mentorship is to recognize and embrace defining moments. Mentoring relationships can be made or broken depending on how mentors and protégés respond to defining moments. A defining moment is typically an intense transformational experience that can, and often does, change one's life, for better or worse. Defining moments can be caused directly by one's own behavior or they can force people to respond to situations that are completely out of their control. An example of a defining moment is when 16-year IBM veteran Charles Lickel informed his mentor, IBM Senior Vice President Linda Sanford, that he was gay. With Linda's support and encouragement, Charles became the co-chair of IBM's gay and lesbian task force and has helped IBM become a best practice organization for diversity management.

And finally, although it may seem obvious, scholarly research supports the intuitive wisdom that mentors and protégés who communicate more frequently are much happier and productive than those who communicate sporadically. For a mentoring relationship to be effective, both parties must commit the time and energy to work with each other.

Managing the relationship. Relationships are not static. Although they may change over time, a protégé or mentor will come to a point where it is in the best interest of her career to assess whether the current mentoring relationship is providing long-term career benefits. Individuals involved in effective mentoring relationships know the importance of taking stock of the relationship and making changes or moving on when it becomes necessary. Today's mentoring relation-

ships are fluid and include several mentors devoted to different career needs.

There are five keys to creating an effective mentoring relationships:

- develop a deep understanding of each other's work environment and issues
- develop a mutual admiration society
- be open to your partner's influence and ideas
- develop a relationship that is meaningful for both parties
- consider the importance of gender, race, and generational differences in the relationship.

To be truly effective, a mentoring relationship must not be taken lightly. There is much more give-and-take in today's relationships than in the typical teacher-and-student relationship of the past. Today's relationships are reciprocal, respectful, and productive. Because today's mentoring relationships take so many forms, it is up to protégés and mentors to develop a plan for building the mentoring relationship that will meet both individuals' needs.

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