

Does Mentoring Breed Success?

The author shows that mentoring is to the organization what the sequoia is to the forest.

By JERRY WILLBUR

Individuals are important to organizational success. That's a truism that borders on the clichéd, but study after study confirms it. Well-managed companies have a strong people orientation and get recruits and experienced employees to adopt and keep the organization's collection of shared values, beliefs, and practices. In addition, we find that successful organizations constantly develop their people.

These companies, and a steady stream of best-sellers proclaiming their virtues, issue a stirring challenge to the rest of the business world, but what are we to do? As our organizations evolve in an increasingly high-technology world, how can we be sure to include what *Megatrends* author

specifically, I decided to investigate two key variables that appeared to hold promise for developing people in a corporate setting: mentoring and achievement motivation.

Mentoring

The concept of sponsoring or mentoring is not new; it relates closely to the apprenticeships typical of craft trades. But mentoring, as viewed today, doesn't concern formal roles as much as it does relationships. Even though mentoring relationships often flourish in work settings, they can also evolve informally. Friends, neighbors, and relatives can all act as mentors.

Recent years have witnessed extensive

in turn helps the proteges as mentors become better able to stand up for rising employees and promote them for promising opportunities. Mentors can help proteges bypass the normal hierarchy when necessary.

Other studies on mentoring indicate that, for females and members of minority groups entering management, the chances for career success improve when these individuals obtain mentoring. Of course mentoring isn't the sole determinant. Several studies indicate that successful women or minority-group members who receive mentoring but who lack the motivation for high achievement find their ascents ascribed to politics alone. Conversely it appears that if they possess a high-achievement motivation but receive no mentoring, they might appear to be merely overly aggressive. Those who both receive mentoring and exhibit high levels of achievement behavior are the ones most likely to succeed.

Encouragement-and-promotion mentoring was the most significant predictor of protege success

John Naisbitt called "high-touch" people elements—elements we know are so essential? As HRD implementers, we all believe in including in our corporate cultures such concepts as fostering personal growth, discovering individual potential, and involving employees in their own career development. But how do we accomplish these worthy goals?

These concerns and questions led me to design a research study that attempted to determine the most effective means for achievement-oriented people have realistic developing organizations' people. More

research into mentoring, and most people readily agree that mentoring can be an important career-building factor. Mentors can help new managers learn the ropes in increasingly complex organizations. They can provide models for new managers who aren't sure how to tackle problems. It also appears that mentors can provide encouragement at critical points in proteges' careers and act as boosters to promote proteges' long-range interests.

Indeed, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, in her 1977 study *Men and Women of the Corporation*, suggests that the mentor relationship is a critical element in building effective careers. By assisting proteges' careers, mentors can build their own power and support bases within their organizations. Kanter also suggests that this power base

Achievement

Thus my study had to consider achievement motivation in addition to mentoring. Research into achievement motivation was identified as a field of study and refined in the 1950s. Research conducted then focused on how individual differences in the need to achieve affected performance or productivity levels. The working hypothesis was simple: As the strength of the tendency motivating an activity increased, the level of performance or productivity would also increase.

This early research created a generally accepted profile of the high-achievement-oriented person. These people's motives to achieve success are stronger than their motives to avoid failure. High-

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achievement-oriented people have realistic aspirations, are capable of delaying gratification, prefer moderate risk situations, and are very persistent. They are willing to seek high levels of responsibility for their own actions, set challenging but attainable goals for themselves, develop detailed plans to help them attain their goals, and seek and make use of measurable performance feedback.

Early organizational socialization seems to have a major effect on the level of achievement motivation managers exhibit. The amount of challenge presented to new managers shapes their perceptions of whether the organization expects them to achieve high levels of success.

It's important to note that managers can learn achievement-motivation attitudes and behaviors. It also appears that teaching managers to be achievement oriented increases entrepreneurial behavior and success.

The relationship

In light of the impact mentoring and achievement motivation can have on individual and organizational success, I was surprised by the lack of research into the relationship between the two concepts. Much of the existing research was fragmented or not directed specifically at the impact on both individual and organizational success. I wanted to know if leaders should include mentoring and achievement motivation as key elements in leadership strategies.

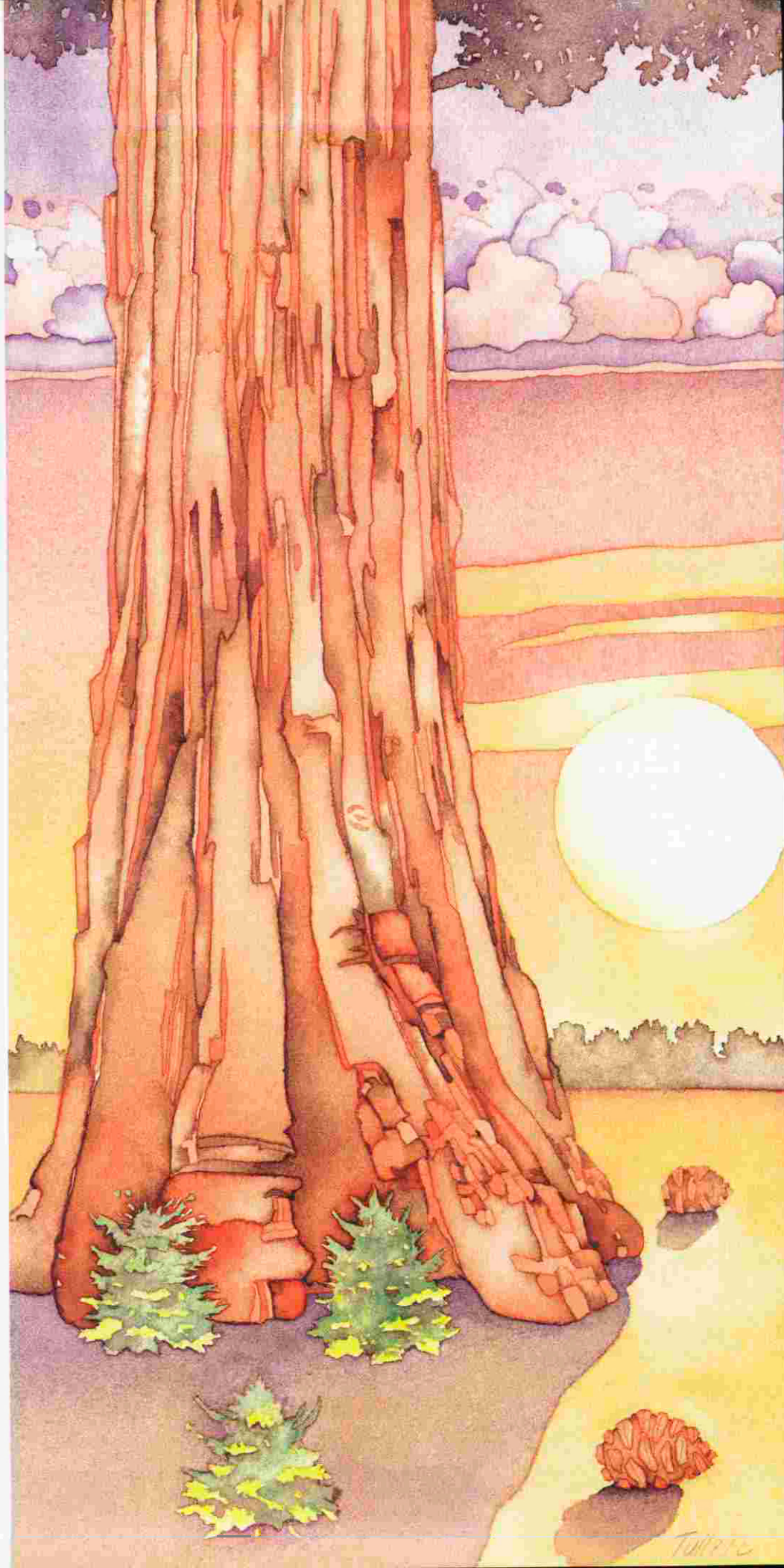
Many studies indicated to me that effective leaders' styles often feature both an achievement orientation and a high concern for people. Thus it makes sense for them to look for other high achievers to mentor. In fact, I believed that much of the behavior that high-achievement-oriented new managers exhibit tends to attract mentors.

But the early studies only suggested these conclusions; I sought a real correlation. My goal in formulating this study was to attempt to get clear-cut evidence that mentoring and achievement motivation can predict career success.

The study

Specifically my study investigated the extent to which mentoring and achievement motivation could predict managers' career success. I designed the study to collect data on the managers' level-of-achieving tendency, the extent managers received mentoring, and the amount of mentoring managers in turn gave others. I also collected data on educational level, seniority, age, and career expectations

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since previous research shows that these variables can affect career success.

As I began I faced one crucial question: How do you measure career success? I settled on four initial criteria: the rate of wage growth, total career wage level attained, rate of position change, and total career position level attained. I also combined the rate of wage growth and rate of position change to produce a fifth success variable—speed of career success. This variable didn't concern how far people had moved in wage or position; it only focused on how fast they had progressed in these areas. I thought this variable would help me identify fast-track people.

I obtained a sixth measurement of career success—range of career success—by combining total career wage change with total career position change. This variable concerned itself with how far a person moved in his or her career, not with how fast. This variable would help me identify steady-track career-success people.

The seventh career-success variable—overall career success—came from combining the speed of career success and the

tract the findings. The response rate of more than 80 percent also set it apart.

The findings

This research established that mentoring was a significant predictor of career success for fast-track career-success people as well as for the less spectacular steady-track form of career success. Mentoring received from others or mentoring given to others played a part in all seven types of career success. Mentoring *given* to proteges was a significant predictor for six of the career-success variables. Mentoring *received* from others was a significant predictor for five of the career-success variables. Both mentoring given to others and mentoring received were significant in four of the career success measures. When both types of mentoring predicted a single success variable, mentoring received from others always emerged as the more important of the two.

The number of mentors or proteges a manager had was not a significant predictor of career success. The quality or intensity of the relationships—not the quantity or extensiveness—made mentor-

tively promoting proteges and their skills to others. They openly expressed pride in their proteges' successes, helped them develop a sense of confidence in their ability to produce results, took personal interest in the development of proteges' careers, praised protege efforts in the presence of fellow workers and upper management, and stood up for them in meetings if controversy arose.

Interestingly enough, organizational-guidance mentoring, with a manager providing to proteges a role model of how to function in an organization, was not a significant predictor of mentors' career success. Managers who mentored this way helped proteges learn the organization's values, ground rules, and expectations of the organization. They also demonstrated for proteges ways of tackling problems and how successful leaders behave. These types of mentors also helped proteges become committed to their careers and helped them realize they could function effectively in the organization.

I expected this type of mentoring to be the most significant, but successful people said this was not so, perhaps because good organizations provide clear-cut and available career charts, development programs, job descriptions, and standards of performance for all management positions. When an organization defines its standards of success so clearly, maybe one needs a cheerleader, coach, and counselor more than a model or example.

By assisting proteges' careers, mentors can build their own power and support bases within their organizations

range of career success. This variable measured individuals who moved both far and fast in their careers, as measured by position and wage change.

To test the assumption that mentoring and achievement motivation could predict career success, I selected for study a large service-industry corporation. I drew from a population of 716 a random sample of 300 male managers and distributed to the subjects an extensive 158-item instrument; 258, or 86 percent, of the sample responded. This instrument contained two mentoring questionnaires—mentoring given and mentoring received—designed and validated for this study and a commonly accepted instrument to measure achieving tendency.

This study went beyond much of the existing research. It looked at the relationship of both mentoring given and received, and it examined both steady-track and fast-track success. Methodology also differed: I controlled other known predictors of career success by including them in the study and used sophisticated statistical procedures to establish the validity and reliability of all research tools and to ex-

ing a significant predictor of career success.

Several intriguing concepts about how mentoring takes place emerged from the study.

For mentors

Successful mentors assist their proteges in two basic ways: they provide career counseling, and they encourage or promote.

Career counseling represented the most common form of mentoring. Managers provided to proteges active, available counsel and support on career decisions. Proteges could rely on their mentors for support during times of stress and uncertainty. Mentors made themselves available to talk to at all times, provided career guidance on an informal basis, supported proteges' efforts to advance in their careers, and influenced proteges' careers in a positive way.

The encouragement-and-promotion form of mentoring was less significant in predicting career success. Encouragement-and-promotion mentors were described as positive and encouraging, ac-

For proteges

Encouragement-and-promotion mentoring was the most significant predictor of protege success. Successful proteges had mentors who encouraged them and actively promoted them and their skills to others. They indicated that their mentors praised their efforts in the presence of fellow workers and upper management, influenced their careers in a positive way, supported and took a personal interest in efforts to advance their careers, and recognized their potential as effective managers.

Receiving organizational guidance was not a significant predictor of success for proteges, perhaps for the same reasons that influenced organizational guidance given. Had the study examined ineffective or poorly organized corporations with unclear expectations and career patterns, this form of mentoring might have emerged as a more significant predictor.

Achievement motivation was a significant predictor for only one of the seven career success variables: the rate of annual

wage change. Remember, I studied mentoring only in highly successful organizations. The companies involved reward and attempt to develop high-achievement motivation while screening out low achievers. The sample of managers was way above the national norm for managers' achievement motivation. Indeed, low achievers would have a hard time surviving in such a goal-oriented herd of go-getters and there were few in the sample.

So it should come as no surprise that achievement motivation predicted career success in the fast-track rate-of-annual-wage-change category. These people were highly educated, possessed a great deal of seniority for their relative youth, and definitely expected substantial wage increases in the next five years. They were extraordinarily oriented to high achievement. But these managers did not receive significant levels of mentoring of any kind!

Nonetheless, aggressive fast-track managers tended to give career-guidance advice to others. This surprised me—I thought people like this would be too absorbed in their own careers to mentor others. But as I discussed the study results with various senior executives, they immediately recognized the profile. They said this type of manager "has high amounts of technical training, [is] over-aggressive, often intimidating. . . . talented, but too young at this time to take on a high position. . . . smart, skilled, but lacking in experience, people skills, and maturity." That these managers provide career counseling may indicate attempts to develop people despite the fact, or perhaps because of the fact, they did not receive mentoring themselves. Perhaps, as Kanter indicated, they mentor others to build a power base.

People who have gone both far and fast in their careers also indicated that mentoring was a significant element in their careers. The profile of these high-achieving managers portrays a highly educated individual who received encouragement-and-promotion mentoring and provided career-counseling to others. In other words, top achievers represent what many describe as effective leaders. Their effectiveness lies equally in their motivation to achieve and their ability to give and receive concerned guidance.

Implications for HRD

This study's findings should interest organizations concerned with the best ways of developing their human resources. To this point, few companies have invested heavily in developing mentoring and

achievement motivation as career-enhancing skills for their employees.

My research shows that mentoring given and received can predict career success, along with other factors such as educational level, wage increase expectations, and, to a lesser degree, achievement motivation. Depending on the manager and his or her career pace and stage, different mentoring factors could predict success.

How can HRD practitioners use this information? Four ways stand out.

■ Encourage mentoring for new and

thing, the tree feeds from its environment through its strong, deep, wide-ranging roots. But it doesn't just take from its environment; it also gives. By providing shelter and nutrition to neighboring plants and animals, the sequoia contributes 80 percent more to the forest environment than it takes. It drops its branches and needles to feed other life, enriching the environment in which it lives. My study suggests mentoring and achievement motivation do the same thing. As people receive mentoring's benefits, they grow and achieve. They also develop roots in their

Mentoring received from others or mentoring given to others plays a part in all types of career success

early-career managers. HRD departments can play a valuable role in fostering mentoring programs.

■ Develop courses on how to mentor. These might include training in how to encourage and praise proteges, ways of promoting others' strengths, and how to provide career counseling. Proteges also need training in how to attract and work with mentors. This training might focus on the skills indicated as vital to achievement motivation.

■ Examine the educational levels required for success at each career stage and find ways to provide this important success predictor to as many managers as possible. Tuition reimbursement and in-house adult education programs should increase the probability of career success.

■ Include achievement-motivation training in management-development programs. Even though achievement motivation was a significant predictor only for rate of wage change, the high incidence of achievement in this sample indicates that achievement motivation could play an important role in career success.

The sequoia connection

Successful people say they have been mentored in the past and that they mentor others now. As HRD leaders we must do what we can to encourage mentoring as a means to further transform organizations into environments that constantly nurture and develop employees.

I like to compare mentors and the mentoring process to sequoia trees. The sequoia grows to be hundreds of feet tall and lives for more than a thousand years. Why does it grow to such proportions? For one

organizations and begin to mentor other achievers, thus giving back more than they received.

But there's something else about sequoias and mentoring that carries equal importance, and it is so obvious that I missed it for years. A sequoia never stops growing. As long as it lives, it develops and contributes to everything around it. That is the real meaning of mentoring and achievement motivation. Both will help you and your organization continue to grow.

