

Learning by Design

Facilitating Leadership Development through Mentoring

By Dr. Lois J. Zachary

Mentoring is a basic leadership competency that is now de rigueur for leaders of the 21st century. Effective leaders "enable others to act" (Kouzes & Posner, 2002) by strengthening themselves and strengthening others through mentoring. In its very best practice, mentoring is a reciprocal and collaborative learning relationship between individuals who share mutual responsibility and accountability for achievement of clear and mutually defined learning outcomes.

Invariably, when I invite organizational leaders to reflect on their most significant mentoring experiences, they recall a college teacher, activity advisor or counselor, who "really connected with them" and "shaped them into the leader they are today." Their mentors helped them become more comfortable, confident, and competent as a leader. These leadership stories are testimony to the fact that leadership lessons learned in college endure and continue to inform their practices as leaders to this day.

The college setting offers an ideal "holding environment" for guiding the formative developmental work of emerging leaders. It is a learning laboratory for bridging the gap between theory and practice and offers students multiple and diverse opportunities to build leadership competence while exercising leadership in a safe and supportive environment. The powerful combination of student readiness to learn and

"In its very best practice, mentoring is a reciprocal and collaborative learning relationship between individuals who share mutual responsibility and accountability for achievement of clear and mutually defined learning outcomes."

increasing self-direction, coupled with a campus culture that encourages and supports mentoring allows students "to consolidate each new sense of self so that [they] can maintain meaning and coherence in the world and yet remain open to a lifetime of fresh wonders" (Daloz, 1999, p.185).

The role of the leadership educator is to create readiness, provide a variety of multi-level opportunities and build in ongoing mentoring support to nurture leadership development and competence.

Creating Readiness

Leadership educators must think strategically and proactively plan their mentoring efforts in order to create a climate of readiness for mentoring. This requires that a clear purpose statement and itemized list of intended outcomes for mentoring be agreed upon and communicated to all stakeholders. A stable infrastructure must be put in place, one that ensures sufficient and ongoing financial, technological, human and

knowledge resources to anchor mentoring within multiple layers of the institution. In addition, it is essential to have the right people in place to support, manage and coordinate mentoring efforts and to develop a succession plan to sustain momentum over time.

Multiple Mentoring Opportunities

A mentoring culture is inclusive and intentional in its reach. It strengthens and supports mentoring capacity in whatever forms it

appears, whether informal, formal, or a blend of the two. Although some mentoring activity goes on in nearly every organization (Kaye and Jacobson, 1996), most institutions need to work at creating a culture that concurrently advances and supports multiple types of mentoring opportunities.

A college environment is a unique community. By nature and design, it is intrinsically a "learning community." In a college environment, mentoring has the advantage of having access to all of the expertise, resources and best practices that are inherent in a learning community. The key to success is to be able to tap into those human and knowledge resources.

Many colleges and universities pair students with a mentor to create structured opportunities for students to have a one-on-one mentoring experience. Others teach students how to seek and select mentors on their own. However, one-on-one mentoring is often ideal but not always practical. A group mentoring design can expand the program's reach. Several types of group mentoring are particularly well-suited to a college environment. Facilitated mentoring brings small groups of students together to work with a mentor who facilitates the learning around selected leadership topics over a specific period of time. Alternatively, peer group mentoring encourages students to be increasingly self directed. Groups of students who have similar leadership interests meet together and self-manage their learning, crafting a learning agenda and schedule to meet the members' learning needs.

Support

Whether a program focuses on one-on-one or group mentoring, leadership educators need to provide ongoing support to ensure that students have a successful learning experience. Support comes in many shapes and sizes and should embrace the mentor-

"Whether a program focuses on one-on-one or group mentoring, leadership educators need to provide ongoing support to ensure that students have a successful learning experience."

ing needs of the student, faculty, member or administrator. For example, one form of support is to prepare students for the experience. Students who are prepared and understand how the peer mentoring process works are more likely to achieve positive learning outcomes than those who are not.

Education and training set the gold standard for mentoring practice and help manage expectations of the experience. Faculty, students and administrators can all benefit from enhancing their mentoring skills, learning how to make the most of their mentoring relationships, and exchanging best practices. Continuous mentoring education and training needs to be strategically integrated into the leadership educator's overall training and development agenda.

Mentoring coaches are the individuals in an organization who are charged with supporting individuals and/or mentoring partners with just-in-time support to help them maximize the learning in their relationship. Leadership educators often find themselves in this role and thus they too need support to remain current and knowledgeable about best practices.

When multiple safety nets, proactive and reactive, are in place to address potential stumbling blocks and roadblocks, setbacks and negative consequences are minimized and mentoring efforts keep moving forward. Ultimately, safety nets add to the resiliency of a mentoring program by helping individuals and the institution deal adeptly with obstacles as they encounter them.

What Leadership Educators Can Do

A mentoring culture enriches all mentoring that goes on within an institution. Leadership educators need to continuously create readiness, provide multiple opportunities for mentoring and offer support to enhance mentoring. In a college environment, support is particularly critical to mentoring success.

Leadership educators can:

- Offer guidance, strategies and coaching for how to find mentoring partners, including specifics on what to look for in a mentor, how to approach a potential mentor, and how to get started on the right foot
- Provide ongoing mentoring education and training
- Supply specific information about how informal mentoring works and what to expect
- Furnish a mentoring tool kit or resources that include step-by-step guidelines, tips, and related articles
- Hold networking forums for those engaged in mentoring to share experiences and hear success stories
- Build a mentoring "community" bulletin board or website where individuals who are seeking mentors or offering to be mentors post their names and information about what they are looking for or can provide
- Mentoring provides a powerful leadership opportunity for students. It teaches them to reflect on their learning, to be consciously aware of their growth and development in the role of leader and, as Daloz reminds us, opens them up to a lifetime of fresh wonders. ■

References

- Kouzes, J. M. & Posner, B. Z. (2002). *The leadership challenge*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Daloz, L. (1999). *Mentor: Guiding the journey of adult learners*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kaye B. and Jacobson, B. (1996). *Mentoring: A new model for building learning organizations*. *OD Practitioner*, 23(3), 35-44.

Dr. Lois J. Zachary is president of Leadership Development Services, LLC, a consulting firm located in Phoenix, AZ offering leadership coaching, education, and training for corporate and not-for-profit organizations across the continent. Dr. Zachary is author of The Mentors Guide: Facilitating Effective Learning Relationships (Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000) and Creating A Mentoring Culture: The Organization's Guide (Jossey-Bass, Publisher, 2005).