

Leadership OnBoard

THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AS MENTOR

Mentor is one of many roles an executive director of a nonprofit organization plays. Some executive directors gravitate quite naturally toward mentoring. Others find themselves uncomfortably thrust into the mentor role. Even under the best circumstances, most executive directors, and mentors in general, are under-prepared for the mentor role.

"It is a well-known fact that the best mentors are mentees themselves!"

Benefits of Mentoring. Executive directors who prepare themselves as mentors increase their potential to enhance volunteer and staff growth and development while enhancing their own growth and development as professionals. They say they gain exposure to new and diverse perspectives, improve their coaching and listening skills, hone leadership skills, become re-energized professionally and have more satisfying and productive board/staff relationships.

Inventory Mentoring Skills. It doesn't matter how many times you've been engaged in a mentoring relationship, each mentoring relationship is unique. Adequate self-preparation offers an opportunity to develop your skill repertoire. Before you take on the role of mentor you will want to assess your comfort with requisite mentoring skills. These skills include brokering relationships skillfully, building and maintaining relationship, coaching, communicating, encouraging, facilitating, goal setting, guiding, managing conflict, problem solving, providing and receiving feedback and reflecting.

Self-Preparation is Key. It is a well-known fact that the best mentors are mentees themselves! So, once you've identified areas for improvement, you are ready to develop a mentor development plan for yourself. You may want to find a mentoring partner who can challenge your thinking, ask tough questions and facilitate your learning.

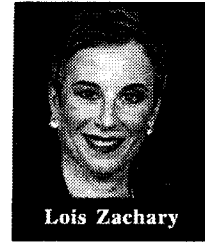
The kind of mentoring relationship you select should be guided in part by knowledge of how you learn best. If you thrive on having multiple opportunities for learning simultaneously, you may want to establish a personal board of directors for yourself. If a one-to-one mentoring relationship is more compatible with your style, there are also multiple options to consider in addition to the traditional mentoring relationship, for example, peer mentoring and reverse mentoring.

The likelihood of mentoring satisfaction and success is increased when mentoring partners have a shared understanding of the mentee's learning needs. Make sure you and your mentoring partner(s) understand, define and agree to the learning goals of the mentoring relationship. Establish objective measures to gauge success. Discuss learning styles. Failure to agree on learning goals and how to achieve them is a frequent cause of mentoring relationship derailment.

Brainstorm a list of learning opportunities with your mentoring partner when you begin your mentoring relationship. When you find a need to reenergize the relationship, pull out that list and explore these other options for learning together with your mentoring partner.

Do's and Don'ts. The following do's and don'ts can help ensure mentoring success and satisfaction.

- 1 Do establish points of connection early on in the relationship. Don't assume because you work together that you know each other.
- 2 Do develop sensitivity to the day-to-day needs of your mentoring partner. Don't forget to find out what else is on your mentoring partner's plate.
- 3 Do identify and utilize multiple venues for communication. Don't rely on face-to-face interaction alone.
- 4 Do set a regular contact schedule and be flexible. Don't forget that at the same time you are mentoring there are other demands on your mentoring partner's time, personal as well as professional.
- 5 Do check regularly on the effectiveness of communication. Don't assume that the messages you are sending are being received or understood.
- 6 Do make sure that connection results in meaningful learning. Don't forget to talk about the process, progress and learning going on in the relationship.
- 7 Do share information and resources. Don't overlook the importance of interaction and discussion about the information you share.



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Viewpoint: Leadership

Janet Napolitano
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As a practitioner of the law for many years, particularly as a practitioner of law that serves the public, I believe leadership is ultimately about attending to the community in which you live.

I also believe that leadership is the skill of allowing people to discover and cultivate their own best talents. There's a saying I once heard that a great leader is not born, a great leader perseveres. One of the most important, and sometimes overlooked, ingredients to success is just plain determination. You have to believe in your vision, your skills and the skills of the people around you.

