



It's been proposed that great leaders are made, not born. The same can be said about mentors, but the association doesn't end there. For many reasons, successful mentors and strong leaders rely on the same set of skills to get ahead.

Those Who Lead, Mentor

By Lois J. Zachary and Lory A. Fischler

The first decade of the century is behind us, and we are on the threshold of a new one, having learned many lessons about mentoring and leadership during the last 10 years. Perhaps the most significant is that study after study has shown that the majority of leaders attribute their success, in whole or in part, to the mentoring they received.

During the last 10 years, we've also amassed more data on the individual and organizational dynamics that demonstrate the benefits of mentoring:

- It stimulates the creation of relationships throughout the organization.
- It helps people feel more connected to the organization.
- It promotes career and leadership development.
- It encourages big-picture thinking.
- It supports diversity efforts.
- It is a way of managing knowledge within the organization.
- It facilitates the growth and development of high-potential leaders.
- It aids in the recruitment and retention of talent.
- It improves technical knowledge.

For all these reasons and more, mentoring is flourishing. It is apparent that leaders recognize mentoring as being worth their time and effort for all of the sound business reasons listed.

So what is it that successful organizational leaders depend on to achieve these results? Is it the amount of time, attention, and resources dedicated to mentoring? Is it the programs they put in place? We believe that the results

emerge from the steps that leaders take to ensure commitment to a high standard of mentoring practices, across the organization. And as with their own development, leaders adopt best-practice models to achieve results.

Leaders as competent mentors

While a leader's intention to mentor may be laudable, that leader must also be competent at mentoring. Many competency models are available, but we think that James Kouzes and Barry Posner's model, as described in their book *The Leadership Challenge* (Jossey-Bass, 2007), is the most intriguing.

Based on extensive interviews with leaders and their direct reports, Kouzes and Posner identified five exemplary practices that consistently enable leaders to achieve extraordinary results:

- Model the way.
- Inspire a shared vision.
- Challenge the process.
- Enable others to act.
- Encourage the heart.

These practices provide a coherent framework for mentoring future leaders and are also essential competencies for the leaders themselves. When the five practices are applied to mentoring, the Kouzes and Posner model becomes a valuable process tool for developing leaders.

Let's examine the five practices and some examples to see how each can contribute to developing a leader's competency at mentoring.



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Leaders model the way. Leaders set examples for others by consistently aligning their actions and values. Mentors, too, model the way. When leaders demonstrate competency in mentoring, it helps their mentees learn by example and become better role models themselves. Conversely, when leaders don't model the way, it can adversely affect the mentoring relationship, as illustrated in the following narrative:

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“I was excited when I learned that Jack, one of our most visible senior leaders, would be my mentor. At our first meeting, I asked Jack why he agreed to be my mentor and was flattered when he told me that he was always mentoring ‘up-and-coming’ leaders and had had his eye on me for a while. He abruptly switched gears and started talking about the recent changes in the company as a result of the economic downturn and how difficult those decisions had been to make. I wanted to ask him so much more about what influenced his decision making, but he kept looking at his watch, and it made me think that I might be overstaying my welcome.

“Just as our mentoring session was ending, Jack gave me several tasks to accomplish and report back on at our next meeting. I had been hoping to shadow Jack, meet with some of the other senior leaders, and learn from watching them in action. I left that first encounter feeling disappointed. Jack didn’t appear to be really interested in having any meaningful conversation with me.

“At our second meeting, I reported on the status of my assignments. Jack nodded as I summarized my results and occasionally interjected a comment about what I could have done better. I left the second meeting feeling even more disappointed than I was after the first one. Our time together felt more like a transaction. We really hadn’t connected with one another on anymore than a superficial level, and I still knew nothing more about him and his career path than I had four weeks before.”

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Jack, although well-positioned and well-intended, had no real understanding about the mentoring process and failed to develop and model his own competency as a mentor. He missed the opportunity to develop a meaningful relationship with a high-potential, future leader in the company.

Leaders inspire a shared vision. Leaders inspire a shared vision by exciting and energizing others. They hold out a vision of the possible. They hold up a mirror to help mentees see something more in themselves—the possibilities of their future. That vision inspires the mentee to work harder.

Mentors are in a unique position to open a mentee's eyes to new possibilities by offering insight to new leadership opportunities. A competent mentor helps a mentee stay focused on the big picture without getting mired in day-to-day concerns and details that can blind one to future possibilities. Mentors familiarize mentees with what may be expected in certain situations and help them see how they can work differently with a variety of individuals and form

new working relationships. When the larger vision is shared, it can empower and embolden others, such as Janice:

When Janice's boss left abruptly, she was promptly promoted from the position of assistant to that of manager. She felt overwhelmed and underprepared. She didn't believe that she had what it took to lead her group and assumed everyone else felt the same way. "My personal lack of confidence made me want to prove to my peers that I actually had what it took. I implemented a series of changes, dictated new policies, and gave orders to employees. In very short order, I managed to alienate everyone.

"One day, Craig, a senior leader in my organization, dropped by and asked to talk to me. He told me he could see that I was struggling in my new position, and he also let me know in no uncertain terms that he believed in me. We talked in depth about the position and what it would take to be successful. He then described all the qualities I demonstrated when I was in my previous position and helped me to see how I might leverage them in my new leadership role. He inspired me and helped me to see new possibilities for myself."

Leaders challenge the process. Leaders step out into the unknown and search for opportunities. They innovate, experiment, take risks, and welcome new ideas. They foster a climate that supports outside-the-box thinking and openness to learning. A mentor's role is to challenge a mentee to stretch—to do things he hasn't done before, take risks, and explore new ways of thinking and working. Stretch goals can produce significant growth and development. Mentors insist that mentees use their goals to get to the next level. As an experienced mentor, Greg knew the importance of mentees having challenging goals.

Greg was looking forward to mentoring one of the junior, high-potential employees as part of the company's succession plan. For their first meeting, he asked his mentee to bring along an idea about the goals he wanted to work on. Greg found that most of the items on his mentee's list were tactical issues that required little or no effort. Two of the goals surrounded learning more about the organization, and another was to read a book on leadership.

Greg put the list aside and looked his mentee in the eye. "If we are going to make this relationship worthwhile for both of us," he said, "this list needs to be reworked. I want to see two or three things on here that, if you were able to accomplish them or achieve them, would move you to the next level. They could take you to my position." His mentee nodded, and Greg could see that the light bulb turned on for his mentee.

Leaders enabling others to act. By leading "through" others, leaders strengthen their peers and form strong, collaborative relationships—this is also at the very heart

of mentoring. Leaders know that they can't accomplish anything without engaging those around them. Their focus is to help others to be successful. Good leaders and good mentors create a collaborative partnership of mutual respect and provide ongoing feedback to lend support to their mentees. One of the most important things a mentor can do to enable others to act is listen:

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Carmen was relieved when the downsizing list was posted and her name wasn't on it, but many of her colleagues' names were right there. She could see that her department had been trimmed from 10 people down to 3. She could feel her tension rise and wondered how all the work was going to be accomplished. She also feared that another layoff could close the department altogether, and the organization would outsource their service.

The combination of nervousness about losing her job and being overwhelmed by the workload made it difficult for Carmen to focus at work. Her productivity suffered as she tried to pick up her former colleagues' paperwork and learn their processes. She was expected to get all the work out in the same timeframe as before and had no idea how to start. Sheena, her manager, stepped in at just the right time.

Sheena and Carmen sat down to talk about the downsizing, the stress, and the challenges ahead. Sheena shared what she knew about the company's strategic thinking and encouraged Carmen to voice her own concerns. Together, they brainstormed strategies for managing priorities and tackling the new workload. Sheena suggested that Carmen research some new software packages that might fast-track the job load. They agreed on a timetable for touching base. Carmen felt supported and encouraged to look for new ways to get her job done, with latitude for experimentation and space to surmount the learning curve. It was a good beginning.

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Leaders encourage the heart. In these stressful and uncertain times, when lean, mean business principles rule the day, encouraging the heart often gets the short shrift. And yet, this practice is so very important to both achieving results and maintaining relationships. Without encouraging the heart, it is difficult to inspire others to high performance. A mentoring relationship is strengthened when the mentee knows that the mentor genuinely cares about her. Mentors believe in the abilities of their mentees, set clear expectations, and provide ongoing feedback. Mentors motivate by celebrating progress and milestones:



As Leah's mentor, Steve initially focused their time on building a supporting, caring relationship. He knew that Leah was nervous about assuming her first management position and wanted to help her feel comfortable as she launched into her new job.

Steve shared a story about his own experience running his first staff meeting and how nervous he was. He recounted all the mistakes he made at that time. Leah felt at ease with Steve and spent time with him going over her objectives and planning for her first staff meeting. They agreed to meet the afternoon following the meeting to talk about how it went. Leah was delighted to report that her meeting went smoothly. Steve, with great humor, presented a gavel in honor of her first success. They had a big laugh together.



Mentoring must be a leadership competency

Good intention is not enough to make a leader a good mentor. Practice, performance, and a desire to improve are also important. Mentoring is qualitatively better if those mentoring future leaders demonstrate competency in each of the five exemplary practices and use them as a roadmap for guiding the growth and development of emerging leaders. Leaders need to understand how each practice impacts the mentoring process and to realistically assess their own competency level relative to each one.

Taking the five exemplary practices to the organizational level

Kouzes and Posner's five exemplary practices can also be applied as a model at the organizational level. Here are specific things leaders can do to promote mentoring in their organizations and ensure organizational mentoring success:

- Leaders model the way by engaging in mentoring themselves, by developing their own skills as mentors, and by engaging in multiple mentoring relationships.
- Leaders can inspire a shared vision by talking about what good mentoring looks like and how it can lead to organizational success. Leaders who raise the bar on their own mentoring and leadership performance add value to the organization and set a standard to which others can aspire.
- Leaders who strive to achieve high-level results challenge the process through mentoring. They look for multiple and varied ways to achieve organizational results. For them, only mentoring that applies best-practice models will suffice.

- Worth heeding is the old saying, "strengthening others begins by strengthening yourself." To help others grow and develop, mentors need to take responsibility for their own growth and development first. Enabling others to act requires creating a supportive environment in an organization and making sure that an appropriate amount of time and resources is in place.
- Leaders encourage the heart by taking time to celebrate mentoring success and by recognizing those that participate in mentoring relationships. They know that leaders motivate and promote the practice of mentoring by sharing stories of success. Mentoring success depends on competent leaders.

When leaders are personally and organizationally committed to mentoring and demonstrate competency in the five exemplary practices, they strengthen their own capacity to lead, support the growth and development of others, and contribute to continuous learning in the organization. **T+D**

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