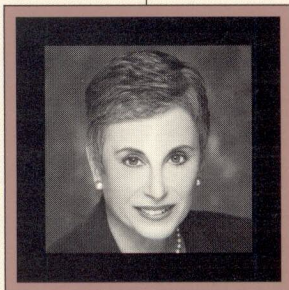


Turbo-charge Your Leadership Through Mentoring

Lois J. Zachary

In today's competitive business environment, the need for continuous learning has never been greater. At the same time, the hunger for human connection and relationship has never been more palpable. It is no surprise that mentoring has become a basic leadership competency. Leaders who do not learn and do not promote learning within their organizations often end up thwarting their own efforts to lead effectively.

It is the leader's responsibility to serve as a role model, to mentor the next generation of leaders, and to make sure that continuous opportunities for learning and development are provided. When leaders strengthen themselves, they simultaneously enhance their ability to strengthen others.



Getting in Touch with Yourself and Others

In *Leadership Jazz*, Max De Pree, chairman emeritus and former CEO of Herman Miller Inc., notes that a mentoring relationship is "one of the best ways to discover one's gifts and weaknesses." Interviews I recently conducted augment De

Pree's comment. One leader reported that the experience of mentoring someone outside her chain of command taught her that her division was not mentoring its people at the supervisory level effectively. As a result, she immediately addressed several key managerial inadequacies that ultimately increased the efficiency and quality of her team's efforts. Several mentors commented that mentoring relationships help them become more aware of their own communication and performance gaps. For example, one leader stated, "I learned to examine

myself and the way I react to situations and became more sensitive to the needs and issues of others." Another leader, in reflecting on what he learned from his mentor, commented, "My mentoring relationship has increased my self-understanding and helped me adjust my leadership style so I can be more effective." A team leader revealed, "I am now trusting my people and other managers and sending them the message that I need their help and they can be a part of my learning."

Joe Kanfer, president and CEO of GOJO Inc., continues to have multiple mentors in his life—some from within his own business and others from the corporate and non-profit world. Kanfer considers many of his direct reports to be mentors. He hires idiosyncratic people who are "courageous enough to speak" and teach him things about himself. "A courageous person can be a great mentor to the boss, if the boss will just take time to listen," he says. "By learning from others—observing them and being open—a CEO can learn what he or she needs to do better. You learn what your direct reports are better at than you; they have a lot to teach you."

John Steinbrunner, chair of Watson Wyatt's Global Contingency Planning Task Force, mentors younger associates because it gives him an

opportunity to stay in touch with their career aspirations and fears, develop the next generation of leaders, and reinforce his own learning.

Leaders like Kanfer and Steinbrunner find that through mentoring they continually gain exposure to new and diverse perspectives, improve their own coaching and listening skills, derive more meaning and satisfaction from work, and enhance—sometimes dramatically—the performance and quality of their leadership. The bottom line is that they achieve qualitatively better business results because they are more in touch with themselves and others.

Getting Started on the Right Foot

Learning is the primary purpose, process, and product of mentoring. Relationship is the glue that binds the partnership. What distinguishes mentoring interactions from mentoring relationships is the commitment to the learning and to the relationship. Mentoring, at its fullest, is a reciprocal learning partnership in which a mentor and mentee agree to work collaboratively toward achievement of mutually defined learning goals.

Preparation is critical to building and maintaining vibrant mentoring partnerships, forging the kind

of meaningful connection that sustains partnerships over time, helps the partners and the partnerships to deepen, and yields a significant return on the mentoring investment. It is tempting to skip over the preparation phase of the mentoring relationship, particularly for leaders who feel they have “been there and done that.” But taking time to prepare provides a signifi-

cant learning opportunity for mentors and mentees, regardless of whether their mentoring is done informally or as part of a formal program.

The lessons Steinbrunner learned from his mentoring experience at Watson Wyatt underscore the need for self-preparation. “Preparation is key,” he says. “Understanding (the learning goal) helps eliminate false starts and dead-ends, and makes for more effective mentoring relationships. Preparation has forced me, as a potential mentor, to reflect on the gap of experience between what I bring to a relationship and what the mentee brings in terms of experi-

ence. You should never take your experiences for granted in mentoring another person.”

When mentors and mentees prepare before they agree to a mentoring relationship, they gain clarity about what it is each is looking for in the relationship and what each is willing to contribute to it. As a result, their learning is more signif-

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icant and focused, their time is better spent, and their satisfaction with the relationship is higher.

Selecting a Mentoring Partner

Before deciding where to go to find a mentoring partner, some thought should be given to defining what you are looking for. Some of the more common attributes are leadership potential, expertise, accessibility, availability, professional interest, affiliation, cultural background, gender, and leadership style. Ranking the criteria helps limit the field so that you can use your current network to expand your search or more

easily identify someone you want as your mentor. If someone asks you to mentor them, having criteria will help you assess whether or not this is the right mentoring relationship for you at this time.

Sometimes it takes several initial conversations with different people to find the right learning fit and a relationship that will serve to turbo-charge your leadership. Here are several factors to consider in finalizing that selection:

- Do ask yourself whether your potential partner will challenge your thinking and encourage you to constantly raise the bar for your own growth and development.
- Do base your decision on whether or not you feel there is a good *learning fit*.
- Do consider whether your potential mentor has the expertise, experience, time, and willingness to help you achieve your learning goals—or whether you as a mentor have the expertise, experience, time, and willing-

ness to help another achieve his or her goals.

- Do consider if you would feel comfortable in a learning relationship with the potential mentor or mentee.

Preparing the Relationship

There is a direct correlation between the quality of partner preparation and the development and growth of the relationship. Each partner coming to the relationship

is unique. This uniqueness affects the dynamics of the relationship. It is easy for mentoring partners to make erroneous assumptions about each other unless mentor and mentee take time to prepare the relationship together.

Partner preparation is a mutual discovery process that helps prospective partners assess whether or not a learning fit exists between them. The initial conversation between the mentor and mentee merits specific attention because it sets the tone for the relationship. Preparing

for a mentoring relationship need not be time-intensive but it does involve dedicating time to it.

The goal of the initial conversation is to establish connection and determine if there is a learning fit. It is important to establish rapport, exchange information, and identify points of connection. Potential mentoring partners will want to share past mentoring experiences. It is during this conversation that the mentee, perhaps for the first time, articulates personal learning goals, expectations, and desired outcomes. It is also appropriate for mentor and mentee to share their needs, assumptions, and expectations candidly and talk about respective learning styles.

The initial conversation (which may in reality be a series of conversations) helps potential mentoring partners determine whether or not they feel comfortable working with each other and decide whether they want to move forward.

Initial Conversation Agenda

- Take time getting to know each other.
- Talk about mentoring and your mentoring experiences.
- Explore mentee's learning goals.
- Determine relationship needs, assumptions, and expectations.

The initial conversation between the mentor and mentee sets the tone for the relationship.

- Define the deliverables.
- Discuss individual assumptions, needs, expectations, and limitations candidly.
- Consider options and opportunities for learning.

The natural tendency is to zero in on chemistry when meeting a prospective mentoring partner. If the chemistry doesn't feel right the inclination is to go no further. The initial conversation should be more than a litmus test for chemistry, however. It should help mentoring partners gauge interest, understand motivation, check for understanding, and determine if there is a good learning fit.

mitment in those he mentors, takes the mentee's drive into account, along with his own ability to fill the mentee's knowledge gap, when deciding whether or not to get involved in a mentoring relationship.

Turbo-Charging Your Personal Leadership

Leaders should periodically ask themselves two challenging questions. First, *Who is mentoring you right now?* You can find someone you can learn from at any stage of your career. No matter your position or experience, as Joe Kanfer attests, you can still find people who are better than you in some areas, people you can learn from.

ment in a myriad of ways. Learning is accelerated, deepened, and broadened. Mentoring partners gain new perspectives and feedback that help clarify and challenge their thinking. Leaders feel more in touch with their people and their people feel more in touch with them.

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For Marilyn Winn, senior vice president of human resources at Harrah's Entertainment, a person's desire for self-improvement and commitment to Harrah's determines her decision about mentoring. She also likes to mentor women who are assistant general managers or vice president candidates. John Steinbrunner, who also looks for com-

Second, *Who are you mentoring?* You are missing opportunities for leadership if you are not mentoring the next generation of leaders.

For both mentors and their partners, the learning and relationship building that results from successful mentoring can turbo-charge leadership growth and develop-

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