

Mentoring Matters

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Volume 2 | Issue 2

In This Issue

Interview with Dr. Joanne Robinson

CME Best Practice Awards

What We Are Reading

Pictures from our Public Seminars

This Month's Blog Topics

Quick Links

[More About Us](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Visit our blog](#)

Join Our Mailing List!



Bringing Who You Are to Mentoring

In a mentoring relationship, difference matters in subtle and overt ways. Even when we mentor people who are "like us"-same culture, generation, gender, race, orientation, or anything else-they are still their own person, the sum total of much difference. "Who we are" shows up in our thinking, our conversation, our relationships, and our behaviors. We need to be aware of our "difference filters."

Awareness of these filters, and the knowledge that we can put them aside, opens up limitless possibilities for learning. In this issue we focus on cultural differences and how they show up in mentoring relationships.



Interview with Dr. Joanne Robinson

Director of Professional Learning for Education Leadership Canada



Last October we had an opportunity to interview Dr. Joanne Robinson. Robinson knows something about cross cultural mentoring. For the past few years she has been coaching and mentoring instructional leaders in countries likewise, Peru, China, Kuwait, Egypt and Australia. Her mission is to facilitate the development of exemplary school leadership for student success.

MM: How does mentoring show up in different cultures?

JR: In Ontario, it is connected to the reform agenda currently underway and in schools it operates from the seat of principal or vice principal. In other countries we help them understand effective leadership and work with them to support growth through mentoring. In the Middle East and various parts of Asia, for example, where they have very traditional educational settings, mentoring is hierarchical and authoritarian based. Mentors are someone who is known, and for the most part they are told they will work with others. In countries that have not moved that agenda forward so much, where education is linear and Socratic, their mentoring capacity gets sidetracked into hierarchical relationships.

MM: How do class distinctions get played out? Gender? Race? Sexual orientation?

JR: In Ontario we match according to perceived or self-perceived areas of needs, specifically in regard to leadership skills and competencies. Other considerations are not openly considered or drawn in as a factor because of the equity and inclusion philosophy of our Province. We insist on a no-fault exit strategy when mentoring relationships are struggling. In the in Middle East, gender differences are an issue. Women are very sensitive about whom they can have conversations with. They can only speak to their Bay'ah. There are no coed schools in these countries. In the public domain gender is a big issue. For the most part racial distinction or sexual orientation is not on their radar screen.

MM: How might an initial mentoring conversation look different across cultures?

JR: The differences lie in who initiates the mentoring relationship and who sets the agenda. In Asia, for example, the initial phases would take more time. Understanding the context and getting to know the person unfolds over time. Traditional cultures and norms is embedded in society and the school system and it is important that any new initiatives work within this context

MM: Where is the most support needed - depending on culture?

JR: You need to pay attention to the timeframe of the mentoring relationship, particularly in some cultures where relationship is the pivotal part of the culture. Mentoring takes place over a longer period of time. Another thing that is important is what goes on meta-cognitively. By that I mean, thinking about thinking. A mentor needs to understand that people make decisions differently depending on how they think and the context from which their thinking originates.

MM: What do people you work with see as stumbling blocks?

JR: In my experience, resistance to change shows up time and time again where there is a lack of understanding about why change is needed. Often there is unclear understanding of the vision of where we are trying to go or why we are trying to move forward. I also find that people in traditional school environments have a different mindset that doesn't take into account differentiation - differentiation in staff, students and in parents.

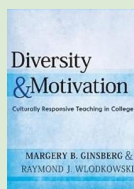
MM: So what key messages about cross cultural mentoring would be important to share with our readers?

JR: First, the structures that go with an effective mentoring program have to be clearly understood and focused, in order to have a successful outcome. Second, mentoring is not about focusing on our differences but on our similarities, our common focus. I would summarize it as sharing and breaking down the barriers that keep us apart.

CME Best Practice Awards

Do you have a mentoring best practice or know of someone who does? [If so, we'd like to hear from you.](#) We are offering an autographed copy of [The Mentor's Guide](#), [The Mentee's Guide](#), or [Creating a Mentoring Culture](#) to our first place winners. Second place winners receive a Mentoring Excellence Toolkit of their choice. [Click here](#) to send us your best mentoring practice in one of the following five categories: mentor, mentee, mentoring partnership, organizational department, or organization. Announcements of winners will be made on or about May 15, 2011.

What We Are Reading



[Diversity & Motivation: Culturally Responsive Teaching in College](#) by Margery B Ginsberg and Raymond J. Wlodkowski. A successful mentoring relationship is built upon a respect for diversity, recognition of individualized motivation and creation of a safe inclusive, blame free and respectful learning environment. The authors include case studies, step by step guides to constructing motivational frameworks, lessons plans and resources to aid in facilitating discussion.



[The Essential Guide to Training Global Audiences](#) by Renie McClay and Luann Irwin. Although this is a guide for trainers presenting to global audiences, this book has some wonderful nuggets that will be useful to you if you find yourself mentoring someone from a country other than your own.

Pictures from our [Public Seminars](#) in October and February.



This Month's Blog Topics

[Increasing Cross-Cultural Competency](#)

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A Note to Our Readers:

We believe that leaders cannot be effective without a strong and ongoing commitment to mentoring excellence. This belief, our passion for mentoring excellence, and our extensive experience in the field with organizations led us to create the Center for Mentoring Excellence. At our virtual center, www.centerformentoringexcellence.com, you will find mentoring tools and resources, expert advice and a forum for sharing best mentoring practices. We hope that you will visit us there and let us know how we can continue to help you raise the bar on mentoring in your organization.



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