

Mastering Mentoring 9 Advocacy

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



Advocacy is one of the most valuable benefits of having a mentor. The mentor usually travels in different circles than the protégé, so there is an opportunity for the mentor to advocate for the benefit of the protégé.

At Lunch

It is common for a mentor to sit with a different (usually higher) group in the lunch room. In large organizations, there may be management lunch facilities. During the informal discussions that go on during lunch or breaks, there is plenty of opportunity for one manager to describe an opportunity for someone. The mentor can mention that she has a great candidate ready to move up.

The only caveat here for the mentor is to not over play the advocacy of the protégé. Mention the possibility of a good match only when there is an excellent fit, and refrain from making the same referral too often.

In Social Circles

The same dynamic can be effective in networking organizations or volunteer groups. The same precaution applies in these venues. If the mentor advocates for the protégé too often, then it does a major disservice to both people.

As a Reference

Sometimes the protégé may be in a career search mode. When this occurs, the mentor is in a perfect position to act as a formal reference. Usually the reference is given in written form. When this happens, a follow-up phone conversation is often desirable because it allows both parties to explore topic areas that may not have been obvious in the initial request.

Be Totally Candid

In advocating for the protégé, it is important for the mentor to be honest if there are some potential trade-offs. We all have strength areas, but nobody is perfect all the time. If the mentor mentions an area of opportunity for growth, it will actually enhance the level of trust because it represents transparency and candor. Of course, it does matter that the wart is minor in nature. If there is a serious area of doubt, then revealing it will work to the disadvantage of the protégé. In that case, there should be some coaching going on anyway.

Conclusion

The mentor can help the protégé in a number of ways provided it is done in the right spirit and quantity. Be particularly alert to the body language reactions when discussing another person with someone else. That is the easiest way to determine if you may be coming on too strong.

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