

Mastering Mentoring 21 Upside Down

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



I think it is a good policy to have some of the mentor discussions be upside down. Granted, most of the time the flow of information will be from the mentor to the protégé. That's because usually, the mentor is the person with more experience.

For a small percentage of the time, mix things up and have some fun by turning the discussion upside down. That gives the protégé a way to experience what it is like to mentor another person, and should also provide some personal satisfaction.

From time to time, I think it is healthy for the mentor to say, "For our next meeting, would you be comfortable reversing the roles and have you teach me some things? There are ways that you can help me too." The protégé may feel inadequate to impart any specific wisdom on the surface. Looking deeper, there are a lot of ways a mentor can and should learn from the protégé.

Example

Let's suppose in this case we have a mentor who is 55 years old and is an accomplished leader. The protégé is a 25 year old with a lot of potential. The discussions will naturally be the mentor sharing experiences from the past (good or bad) and highlighting what was learned in these situations.

The protégé might feel shy about taking the lead on a discussion, but there is a lot to be gained by doing it. The protégé may see that the mentor is calcified in certain areas where there is potential for new growth. The mentor does not see the same opportunities as the protégé does.

Perhaps the mentor had good outcomes by reacting in a certain way when faced with a potential risk. That becomes the "safe" approach to the mentor because it has worked for him for years. The protégé might suggest trying a more radical path to deal with

impending risk that has the potential for breakthrough solutions that are far more productive than the mentor would likely experience.

Conclusion

Mixing things up in this way will also provide the opportunity for some levity and light discovery of new thinking patterns for both people. A mentor relationship should not always be heavy with content that is serious. The ability to keep things fresh and interesting will serve to enhance the value of the relationship in both directions.

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