

Mastering Mentoring 22 Embrace Diversity

by **Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD**



Some people have asked me if it is a good idea to mix genders or other elements of diversity in a mentoring relationship. It is common that most pairings of mentors and proteges involve people with similar characteristics, but I think that approach leaves a whole lot of richness off the table.

Think of it this way: every person is unique. The thing that makes us similar is that we are all human beings and we are all in the process of learning and growing. The mentoring process is all about getting to know the other person in depth in order to help that person along. It makes no difference if the people are of different genders, different religions, different races, different sexual preference, different nationalities, or different anything.

My Own Experience

I have had numerous mentor relationships over several decades, and I honestly do not see any substantive difference between working with a male or a female. I have also mentored several people from a different race or sexual orientation from me. It is not important to have the physical attributes match. What is important is that there is a desire to get to know the other individual as a person and be of assistance helping that person move forward.

I think it is an advantage working with someone quite different from me because it gives me the opportunity to experience how a person from another background is experiencing life and a career. If I only mentored people like me, I would miss all that richness and learning.

In really great mentoring relationships, it is sometimes hard to tell which person is the mentor and which one is the protégé. It is easy to see the ball being passed back and forth from one person to the other, even within a specific discussion. I have a friend who

is close to me in terms of age. I think we both play the role of mentor at different times. It is just a natural relationship that has great value to both of us.

Conclusion

Do not think of mentoring in terms of matching up people with similar characteristics. Rather, pair people together who truly like and respect each other. Let the demographic differences add an additional type of value to the relationship. Always seek to contribute as well as absorb information and ideas. A good mentor relationship is always bi-directional.

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of: The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals, Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online, Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind, and Trust in Transition: Navigating Organizational Change. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations.