



Mentorship

By Thomas Lee

One of the most important and meaningful things to do in today's world is mentorship—to become a mentor to someone. Becoming a mentor could also mean working with several people, or a group.

WHAT IS MENTORSHIP?

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines a mentor as “a trusted counselor or guide.” True mentoring is more than just answering occasional questions or providing help. It is about an ongoing relationship of learning, dialogue, and challenge. Mentoring is a process that always involves communication and is relationship based.

Another definition says mentoring is a process for the informal transmission of knowledge and the psychosocial support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career, or professional development. Mentoring entails informal communication, usually face-to-face and during a sustained period of time, between a person who is perceived to have greater relevant knowledge, wisdom, or experience, and a person who is perceived to have less.

Now, both of those are excellent, intelligent definitions to what mentoring actually is. But I want you to think about this: Why do you know and remember some things the way you do? Could it be because someone took time to teach you? Isn't being a mentor, and mentor-

ing someone, somewhat like being a teacher, too?

THE LID LIFTER

At the APPA 2012 conference in Denver, Colorado, Joseph Han and Cheryl Hanson, both from Idaho State University, presented a class called Unleash the Potential in Others. They used the analogy of a glass jar with a lid on it and you having the opportunity to become a lid lifter. What is a lid lifter? It is a person who creates an environment to help discover and unleash potential in others. It is becoming a mentor.



Do you consider yourself to be a mentor to someone? Do you think it's possible? Think back to someone who has been a mentor to you. Someone (and very possibly, more than one) during the course of your life took time to show you how to become the person you are today. Even if only in small ways, your work

ethic and professional personality were influenced by someone who felt it was important to advise and teach you what they found to be important.

What did they do to help you or leave the impression on you that you have? I have had a few mentors in my life, but one sticks out more than the others. He was an assistant fire chief when I was a 21-year-old-rookie firefighter, and why he took so much time to become the friend he has become, I will never know. But I am forever grateful that he did. He served as a role model who offered acceptance, confirmation, protection, and his friendship. He listened, observed, counseled, coached, and was always challenging me to be a better person. He gave me a chance to succeed, believed in me and what I was capable of doing, and always had (and still does) a word of encouragement. He has an outlook on life that is unique from any other person I have ever met. I can only hope to be just like that to someone else.

You too can be a mentor to someone else. We need to always be on the lookout for opportunities to mentor someone when we can. As a professional, you have considerable knowledge in your field that you can share with others. Being a mentor involves leading with integrity, self awareness, and a commitment to looking honestly at yourself. When we acknowledge others as people and build a rapport with them, it can become a great source of enjoyment.

WHAT IS EFFECTIVE MENTORSHIP?

Effect mentors assume a position of

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respect and patience, guide rather than tell, and provide challenges that stretch the capacity of the mentee. They do this by listening, reflecting on experiences, asking questions, encouraging a sense of ownership, gently challenging, and affirming the experience of the mentee.

Effective mentoring occurs in an environment of confidentiality, in both parties can be candid and self-revealing to each other without fearing for the publication of the content of their conversations. It is absent of summary judgments and evaluations about personality and character. Instead, mentoring focuses on skills and personal qualities effective for career success.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BEING A MENTOR?

They can include satisfaction and fulfillment from seeing someone advance, renewal of interest in and commitment to one's own career, recognition of one's own professional skills by the mentee, increased satisfaction in one's own job or position, and recognition from peers and administrators for service.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF BEING MENTORED?

They can be greater career and job satisfaction, greater sense of efficacy in one's professional skills, and more predictable career advancement. In a college or university setting it can be reduced faculty turnover, increased sensitivity to issues of gender, culture, and diversity, more systematic socialization to campus culture, and greater loyalty to the institutional mission.

Still think you can't do it, can't be a mentor to someone? You can! If you could only sense how important you are to the lives of those you meet—how

important you can be to people you don't even know. There is something of yourself that you can leave at every meeting with another person. There is no greater joy—or greater reward—than to make a fundamental difference in someone's life.

Recognize yourself. You have the potential to help others. Take responsibility. Show others what they can do and what they can become. Be open to criticism and questions. Don't be afraid to support someone. Have the want, the need, and the desire to help someone.

Become an authentic leader. Authentic leaders are genuine people who are true to themselves and to what they believe in. They engender trust and develop genuine connections with others. Because people trust them, they are able to motivate them to high levels of performance. Rather than letting the expectations of others guide them, they are prepared to be their own person and go their own way. As they develop as authentic leaders, they are more concerned about serving others than they are about their own success or recognition.

WHAT CAN A GOOD MENTOR DO?

Believe in them—give them confidence

Encourage them—give them hope

Share with them—give them resources

Trust in them—give them the opportunity.

Someone may see what they are capable of, but few people realize their full potential. What is the difference? A mentor!

Consider this: You might be the most important person someone knows. ☎

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