



## Mentoring others can help trainer develop leadership skills



### CAREER TRACK

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Often we think of mentoring as benefiting only the mentee or protégé. Therefore, when corporate executives, business owners or nonprofit organization leaders are asked to serve as mentors, they might tune into radio station, WIIFM — What's in it for me?

They might wonder how they will find the time to be responsible for another person's development.

Mentors may be surprised to find that mentoring can save time.

Approximately 80 percent of learning is completed through on-the-job experiences, and mentoring can provide more job experiences to the mentor as well as the mentee. The person who wants to accelerate his or her own learning is an ideal mentor. People who serve as mentors have skills, knowledge and characteristics that can benefit others. Sharing them regularly with others can strengthen the mentor's talents and prepare them for the future faster.

Leadership skills, knowledge and characteristics that are developed as a mentor focus on six themes. They include:

- Broader understanding of organization
- Credibility
- Patience
- Risk taking
- Appreciation of cultural differences
- Revealing the best in others

These leadership skills are demonstrated in a variety of mentoring situations that include examples from Fortune 100 companies, small businesses, and nonprofit organizations. Although anyone can serve as a mentor, this article focuses on executives and leaders in the mentor role.

### Workplace initiatives

A major service organization matches senior executives with high talented mentees throughout the company. The goal is to have the mentors learning about areas where they have no direct involvement. This exposure to other areas in the organization provides a broader understanding of the entire organization.

A human resource professional with a Fortune 100 company manages internal mentoring initiatives. In this program, 30 to 40 high-potential college graduates are mentored for three years. The company also implements a mentoring network. An executive meets with four to five people as a group each month. The executive acts as a mentor focusing on organizational topics such as stock prices, issues, organizational decisions and opportunities.

Increased credibility occurs when a person serves as a mentor.

John Tracy, a former SBC employee who led executive development and succession planning initiatives and now is president of Corporate University, witnessed hundreds of executives fast track their careers as a result of being involved in a mentoring relationship. Credibility is gained due to mentors increased visibility. They are perceived as resourceful and knowledgeable.

Lynn Weirich, co-owner of Business Financial Group and past president of the

National Association of Women Business Owners, experienced first hand the value of mentoring. When Weirich had an opportunity to be promoted in a previous job, many of the people in the organization were her mentees.

The workforce already viewed Weirich as a leader, which made it easier and quicker for everyone to accept her as the official leader.

Tony Hargrove, executive director of the Ella Austin Center, has refined the leadership skill of patience. By serving as a mentor to Eva May Watts, the deputy director/comptroller of the center, Hargrove has facilitated Watts' development. There were times when Hargrove had to be quiet so Watts would discover her own solutions instead of him telling her the answer.

Hargrove reminds himself that it is important to look beyond the program content and know that key relationships are developed and maintained by being visible and involved in the community. Showing genuine interest in Watts' success helped Hargrove become more patient with himself as well as with others.

### Learning from others

Leadership involves a certain amount of risk taking. Mentoring is not an automatic success program for the mentee. Mentors take a risk investing their time and energy in a mentee without a guarantee that the mentee will achieve their goals.

Appreciating cultural differences, or being "diversity-savvy," is a skill that leaders must exhibit. With a global and inclusive message in the workplace today, knowing how to assimilate staff into the organizational culture will improve the job performance

and satisfaction of both the mentor and mentee. Lynn Weirich's mentee at Business Careers High School has taught her about the challenges the student's family has had assimilating into the world of work.

Many people view Jim Matson, founder of Matson Multi Media and business owner for 35 years, as their mentor. Even though Matson considers himself an informal mentor rather than a formal one, he learns every day from the people who think of him as their mentor. Matson takes pride in revealing the excellence in others. Over the years he has gained skill and enjoyment of discovering the gems

in other people. He has developed the skill of recognizing the talents of individuals.

## Reaching out

Lynn Weirich started the first Income of Her Own Program in Texas, which was sponsored by the San Antonio Chapter of the National Association of Women Business Owners. Weirich and her team brought 100 high school women together with 30 women entrepreneurs. The one-day conference was an example of a mentoring program that revealed the best in

mentees and mentors in a brief period of time.

The return on investment for the mentor, mentee and the organization can be life changing. When executives or leaders who are asked to serve as mentors ask what's in it for them, they will find they can develop their own leadership skills as they help their protégé.

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