

## **7 Key Qualities of an Effective Mentor**

The desire to succeed can be overwhelming. It keeps people awake at night; it drives them to arrive at the office early and stay late on Fridays. However, there is one common, major problem that derails many entrepreneurs and professionals with high aspirations: dealing with new, major obstacles. Despite the most earnest effort and best intentions, most people need help when faced with such challenges.

You probably found someone to act as your mentor: your boss at your first job, a professor during college, or a family friend. This person provided advice and helped navigate the trials and tribulations of starting a career.

And now, it's your turn.

### **But where do you start?**

Mentoring often begins in an educational environment, with a fellow student who is further along in the same program (a "peer advocate"), or between an instructor and a student. Mentorships can also be community-based, part of a church group or other organization designed to offer professional advice and guidance to those who've expressed an interest. Equally effective may be a managerial-subordinate pairing in either the same or different departments. But, depending on the goals of the mentoring relationship, the mentor and mentee don't have to be in the same industry.

Mentor pairings can be sought out through an established program or independently, and one-on-one meetings should take place on a consistent basis.

A mentor-mentee pairing requires work, commitment, and follow-through on both sides if it's going to succeed. So, what aptitudes should you demonstrate to make sure that the mentoring you offer is effective and has lasting value?

Consider these seven key qualities that can help you become an effective mentor.

#### **1. Ability and willingness to communicate what you know**

It goes without saying that as a mentor, you're regarded as an expert in your field or area of responsibility. But it's one thing to know what you're doing; it's entirely another to be able to clearly explain what you know and to be willing to take the time to do it. Forget the jargon, the acronyms, and the buzzwords. Being clear

when you communicate the lessons you've learned, or the strategies or guidance you're offering, is essential, as it is your level of desire to communicate the intricate details in a way that makes sense and that your mentee can understand and learn from.

## **2. Preparedness**

Being a mentor means making an important serious commitment to someone, so give your mentee and the process the respect he or she deserves. Show your faith in your mentee's abilities and in the process by preparing for each mentoring session. This isn't a stream of consciousness deal or a "go ahead and pick my brain" process. Yes, it's important for your mentee to actively participate and even take the lead in these sessions. But you should ask your mentee what topics or subjects he or she wants to talk about beforehand, and once you know, you should outline the key points you want to focus on ahead of time, and have a plan ready for imparting your details in an effective and expedient way.

## **3. Approachability, availability, and the ability to listen**

Your mentee must feel comfortable approaching you for advice or consultation; however, he or she must keep your availability and your schedule in mind. So, it's good policy to establish a set day and time for regular sessions or meetings. In this hurry-up-and-make-it-happen world, it's important to be prepared and make the most of the time you've got with your mentee. You owe that to him or her, to the process, and to yourself. And once these time parameters are established, you must keep your commitments wholeheartedly and be ready to listen well and with an open mind, along with providing counsel and advice.

## **4. Honesty with diplomacy**

Any questions that aren't addressed can lead to concerns and problems, so you owe it to your mentee to be candid and straightforward with him or her. Dispense with formalities and really help facilitate an open, even lively dialogue - a give-and-take - and don't beat around the bush in offering your constructive feedback, good and bad. Say what you think your mentee needs to hear from you, not what you think he or she might want to hear. Be willing to debate and discuss in a tactful way. Provide useful, honest guidance while ensuring that your mentee takes the reins and make his or her own decisions as to next steps or the best course of action.

## **5. Inquisitiveness**

Being a mentor also means you should continue learning about what's going on in your industry or business, your school, your community, or the world at large. Remember: What worked a decade ago may not be optimal today, and what works today may not work as well one, two, five, or more years from now. So, continual learning is essential if you plan to continue to be an effective mentor. Always keep an alert eye on trends, topics, and developments that may impact you or your role, both now and in the future. And if your mentee asks you something you don't know the answer to, do yourself and your mentee a favor and follow up to find the answer.

## **6. Objectivity and fairness**

Remember that a mentoring relationship differs from a friendship. Yes, you like your mentee and care about seeing him or her succeed, but that doesn't mean you have to socialize with your mentee or follow or friend him or her on social websites like Twitter and Facebook. LinkedIn, specifically designed for business networking, may be a more appropriate connection to establish with your mentee. Also, ensure that there's no hidden agenda or ulterior motives involved in this relationship. Outside of the mentor-mentee relationship, you don't owe your mentee any favors, and he or she doesn't owe you anything except his or her thanks. Equally, others who know you and your mentee don't owe either of you anything. You can be an advocate for your mentee while still retaining your objectivity and fairness and not unfairly influencing any process either of you may be involved in.

## **7. Compassion and genuineness**

Just because you must maintain your objectivity and fairness doesn't mean you can't show your compassion. In fact, your mentoring relationship probably won't work if you don't show your interest and desire to provide one-on-one help and guidance. You must also be selfless about sharing what you know. Keeping your goal in mind – to remain worthy of someone's trust, model positive behavior and successful performance, and offer guidance and advice toward reaching a specific goal – should be the compass that guides all your actions as a mentor.

If you want to become a mentor and you belong to any groups or organizations, inquire as to whether they have a mentoring program. You may even learn a thing or two from the experience.

