



Mentoring 101

What Every Leader Needs to Know

John C. Maxwell
Thomas Nelson Publishers © 2008
128 pages

Rating

7 8 Applicability
7 Innovation
7 Style

Focus

Leadership & Management

Strategy
Sales & Marketing
Finance
Human Resources
IT, Production & Logistics
Career & Self-Development
Small Business
Economics & Politics
Industries
Global Business
Concepts & Trends

Take-Aways

- Few people mentor others because it's hard work and most people focus on themselves.
- Organizations should prioritize mentoring employees who show future potential.
- You can't successfully mentor others if you don't understand people.
- Select positive, energetic go-getters to receive mentoring.
- Mentors should encourage those they mentor to pay it forward by mentoring others.
- Mentoring works best in a supportive environment.
- People learn best when they "hear, see, say and do."
- Successful mentoring calls for developing people, selecting the right mentees, building relationships, giving unconditional help, and more.
- While you should provide mentees with positive support, you must also be honest enough to have "hard conversations" with them when they need to improve.
- Take protégés into action with you, supply helpful resources, teach them what to do and help them progress to mentoring others.

Relevance

What You Will Learn

In this summary, you will learn: 1) How to succeed as a mentor, 2) How to recognize the best candidates for mentoring and for being mentored, and 3) How mentors can help their protégés become successful leaders.

Recommendation

Speaker, pastor, prolific author and entrepreneur John C. Maxwell offers a practical, results-oriented manual on the rudiments of mentoring. This down-to-earth primer is specific and systematic. Seasoned mentors can benefit from Maxwell's insights, and he gives new mentors a solid footing in the difficult but worthy task of helping up-and-coming professionals realize their full potential. Maxwell's compelling anecdotes add humanity and humor. He provides step-by-step instructions for every phase of mentoring. *getAbstract* recommends his primer to all would-be mentors and to experienced mentors as a refresher.

Summary

"Begin today to see and lead people as they can be, not as they are."

"If you want to succeed as a mentor, first seek to understand yourself and others."

Focusing on Other People

Mentoring does not come naturally to most executives. Most people's orientation is toward seeking success, not toward helping others succeed. But helping others get ahead builds a leadership base in your organization and strengthens your team.

Many people won't serve as mentors for these reasons:

1. **Insecurity** – Some executives fear that mentoring others will make someone else look good. The last thing they want is for others to shine.
2. **Ego** – Some bosses care only about themselves.
3. **"Inability to discern people's 'success seeds'"** – Many people don't succeed because they can't get in touch with the internal drive that inspires them. This includes the inability to see the success seeds others have but can't access.
4. **"Wrong concept of success"** – Success is reaching your full potential and helping others do the same. Some people believe success centers on money or status. They don't see that it includes the fulfillment that can come from assisting others.
5. **"Lack of training"** – Some people don't mentor because they have no idea how.

The Nine Steps of Successful Mentoring

To mentor successfully, follow these steps:

1. **"Make people development your top priority"** – It's easy to let people go when they fail to measure up. Mentoring them isn't as easy. Your organization's success depends on helping employees achieve their goals and their full potential. Then they're achieving the company's objectives as well.
2. **"Limit who you take along"** – You don't have time to mentor everyone. Choose the people with the most promise.
3. **"Develop relationships before starting out"** – Mentoring works best when the mentor and the person he or she mentors like each other.
4. **"Give help unconditionally"** – Mentoring calls for focusing on helping someone else. Don't expect anything in return.

“As you prepare to develop other people, take time to get to know each other. Ask them to share their story with you – their journey so far.”

“Once you begin to develop others, check to see that you’re not leaving obstacles in their path. Give them clear direction, positive support and the freedom to fly.”

“As you begin to develop people, think of it as being similar to a trip in a small private plane. If you try to take too many people along, you’ll never get off the ground.”

“As you develop people, remember that you are taking them on the journey toward success with you, not sending them. Stay with them until they’re ready to fly.”

5. **“Let them fly with you for a while”** – Mentees will learn best when they see their mentors in action. Explain, show as well as share what you are doing to teach by example.
6. **“Put fuel in their tank”** – Provide resources, including books, recordings and videos.
7. **“Stay with them until they can solo successfully”** – Make sure your mentees are ready before you let them strike out on their own.
8. **“Clear the flight path”** – Give mentees directions on what to do and how to do it. Then let them go. “All the training in the world will provide limited success if you don’t turn your people loose to do the job.”
9. **“Help them repeat the process”** – After you successfully mentor people, encourage your graduates to mentor someone else.

Picking the Right People to Mentor

If the people around you operate at peak efficiency, you will operate at peak efficiency also. Surrounding yourself with effective, efficient people is another sensible reason to mentor those on your team.

Determine which member will benefit most. Who offers the smartest investment of your time? If you’re mentoring several people, ask who can contribute the most to your firm.

When you select people for mentoring, look for those who can fulfill these goals – in order of their importance:

1. **“Make things happen”** – Action-oriented go-getters know how to turn ordinary things, events and occasions into something special.
2. **“See and seize opportunities”** – Few opportunities come with labels, so most people miss them until it is too late. Choose people who know how to spot opportunities before others see them and who can quickly leverage them into worthwhile endeavors.
3. **“Influence others”** – Mentor potential or junior leaders who have a positive influence on others. Look for those whose influence is expanding.
4. **“Add value”** – When you coordinate with potential mentees in a meaningful way, the results will become profitable. They’re like good-luck charms that always come through.
5. **“Attract other leaders”** – Mentor people who keep the company of leaders, not followers. They will have the pull that translates into a productive force.
6. **“Equip others”** – Don’t just mentor your mentees; inform them. Supply them with helpful objectives and help them develop goals to guide them. “A set of goals becomes a map a potential leader can follow in order to grow.”
7. **“Provide inspiring ideas”** – Mentor people with big ideas. You never know what new concepts they may share with you.
8. **“Possess uncommonly positive attitudes”** – Positive thinkers are more likely to move ahead despite obstacles.
9. **“Live up to their commitments”** – Motivational speaker Joe Griffith explains, “You cannot keep a committed person from success. Place stumbling blocks in his way, and he takes them for stepping-stones, and on them he will climb to greatness.”
10. **“Have loyalty”** – Select people you can depend upon and trust.

Help Your Mentees Succeed

To help people advance and accomplish their dreams, encourage them, acknowledge their good work and recognize them by expressing your gratitude. Use these additional ideas to show your people that you think they’re exceptional:

“Many times a potential leader gets mentored and...then he is left adrift, without any direction.”

“We naturally give ourselves the benefit of the doubt. Why? Because we see ourselves in the light of our intentions. [But] when we look at others, we usually judge them according to their actions.”

“The ability to find another’s seed of success takes commitment, diligence and a genuine desire to focus on others.”

“We exist temporarily through what we take, but we live forever through what we give.” (Douglas M. Lawson)

- **“See them as who they can become”** – Is a potentially great person on your team? You must spot future greatness and encourage those with special potential.
- **“Let them ‘borrow’ your belief in them”** – Perhaps you have colleagues with no confidence in themselves. Help them by demonstrating that you have faith in them. With encouragement and guidance, these people can tap into your confidence and build confidence for themselves.
- **“Catch them doing something right”** – It’s customary for supervisors to catch people doing something wrong and to call them out for their mistakes or indiscretions. Such negative encounters undermine people’s self-confidence. Instead, go out of your way to “catch” people doing something well or something admirable and praise them. Consider the positive ramifications.
- **“Believe the best – give others the benefit of the doubt”** – Most people give themselves the benefit of the doubt when necessary. But, given that, isn’t it only right to extend the same benefit of the doubt to others? That’s how you want to treat the people around you, including those you’ve chosen to mentor.
- **“Realize that ‘10’ has many definitions”** – What distinguishes someone and makes him or her a number “10” may differ considerably from what makes someone else special. Keep this in mind as you evaluate the people you lead and when you’re considering whom to help out with your guidance and expertise.
- **“Place people in their strength zones”** – You will do those you mentor a great service if you can help them identify their strengths.
- **“Give them the ‘10’ treatment”** – Always treat your team members as “10s,” even if they aren’t. You’ll encourage them to strive to excel at that level.

Help People Become Better Leaders

Your job as a mentor is to help equip people to optimize their work experience and succeed in their careers. This involves specific training. People learn best when they “hear, see, say and do.”

Structure your training so that it covers these five steps:

1. **“Model”** – You do the work as your mentee watches. Make sure you do everything a specific work task requires. Work in the proper sequence to show exactly what he or she will need to do independently.
2. **“Mentor”** – Let the mentee directly assist you with the tasks in a particular process. Have him or her do part of the work. At this stage, explain not just “the how but also the why of each step.”
3. **“Monitor”** – Now the mentee does the actual work while you watch.
4. **“Motivate”** – At this stage, let the mentee handle everything alone. At the same time, encourage and motivate him or her to do quality work.
5. **“Multiply”** – Now that the person you are mentoring can handle tasks the same way you do, let the multiplier effect kick in: now the person who you trained is ready to teach other people.

A Supportive Environment

Employees do best in an environment where people support one another’s success. Provide this environment for your people – and your mentees.

Encourage employees to establish a robust “support system.” The system you organize should support your employees in five distinct areas:

“The best people to mentor don’t sit back and wait for opportunities to come to them.”

“As you pick people to mentor, focus on people who will...make the most of what you give and help you.”

“You don’t have to be a remarkable or unusually talented person to mentor others...It does take desire and a commitment to the process, but it is the most rewarding part of success.”

1. **“Emotional support”** – Make “yes, you can” the prevailing attitude in your organization. This creates an atmosphere of motivation and encouragement.
2. **“Skills training”** – By professionally training your employees in the expertise they need, you send a clear message that your organization will invest in their career development.
3. **“Money”** – Be generous and forthcoming in your pay policies. Remember, “if you pay peanuts, expect to get monkeys.”
4. **“Equipment”** – Your employees have to have the right tools and equipment to do their jobs. Make sure they get what they need.
5. **“Personnel”** – To meet your company’s goals, you have to have the right people.

Personal Growth and Professional Growth

Help the employees you lead become better people and leaders. Keep eight important considerations in mind:

1. **Development is “a long-term process”** – Meaningful change doesn’t occur overnight. Helping someone build a career takes time.
2. **“Discover each person’s dreams and desires”** – Your mentees’ aspirations reveal how you might best mentor them.
3. **“Lead everyone differently”** – Each person is unique. Adapt your mentorship to suit the individual you’re guiding.
4. **“Use organizational goals for individual development”** – How you train your mentees must correlate with the knowledge and expertise your organization requires of them.
5. **“Help them know themselves”** – Train your mentees to develop insight about themselves.
6. **“Be ready to have a hard conversation”** – The truth often hurts, but employees need to know what they have to fix to advance and grow professionally and personally.
7. **“Celebrate the right wins”** – The more strategic they are, the better.
8. **“Prepare them for leadership”** – Everyone will lead differently. Mentor accordingly.

Successful Mentees

Mentees aren’t the only ones who need help; mentors do too. You’re not competing with those you mentor. One proof of your effectiveness as a mentor unfolds when your mentees become as successful or even more successful than you.

1. **“Celebrate when others see success”** – Let your mentee decide what constitutes success and what deserves celebrating.
2. **“Celebrate successes others don’t yet see”** – Your mentee may accomplish something significant, but may not know about it or quite understand it. Explain and celebrate the victory.
3. **“Celebrate most with those closest to you”** – Include the people who matter to you when things go well.

About the Author

John C. Maxwell is a leadership expert, speaker, coach and author who has sold more than 19 million books. He is the founder of EQUIP and the John Maxwell Company.