



The Mentor's Guide

Facilitating Effective Learning Relationships

Lois J. Zachary
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Rating

8 9 Applicability
7 Innovation
8 Style

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Concepts & Trends

Take-Aways

- Mentoring has become “collaborative.”
- Seven elements underpin the “learner-centered mentoring” paradigm: “reciprocity, learning, relationship, partnership, collaboration, mutual...goals” and “development.”
- Each partner must assume responsibility for certain parts of a mentoring relationship.
- Learning is the core of mentoring. Without it, mentoring can't exist.
- Mentors must guard against projecting their own experience onto their protégés.
- Self-reflection helps mentors understand how to encourage learning in mentoring relationships.
- People in mentoring relationships must make sure they maintain their distinct identities.
- Mentors should create a timeline of events that influenced them profoundly.
- People too readily assume that they understand others. Mentors need to guard against such assumptions.
- Considering their protégé's experience lets mentors get to know their partner better.

Relevance

What You Will Learn

In this summary, you will learn: 1) How the process of mentoring has evolved, 2) How to be a better mentor and 3) How both parties can make mentoring a success.

Recommendation

In this second edition of her original 2000 book, Lois J. Zachary presents a comprehensive guide to mentoring. She explores how mentoring has evolved and how its foundational principles match those of adult education. She describes how mentors and their protégés can learn about themselves and how that self-knowledge strengthens the mentoring process. She offers case studies and role-playing exercises participants can use to prepare for the mentoring process. By its nature, mentoring poses challenges because it involves adult learning. Zachary clarifies the mentor's role: Promote learning by focusing attention on the person being mentored. *getAbstract* recommends Zachary's insights to HR professionals, mentors, "mentees" and anyone considering a mentoring relationship.

Summary

"Every relationship faces obstacles, and the mentoring relationship is no exception. The challenge is to overcome them and learn from the experience."

"Mentoring is a process of engagement. No one can mentor without connection."

Mentoring's Potential Results

Mentoring relationships can have varied outcomes. Randy's company asked him to mentor Pat, a recent recruit. Pat wanted to make a good impression, and his relationship with Randy, a manager, started out well. Eventually, Randy got busy and had little time to mentor Pat. As a result, their relationship became purely transactional. They had no time for discussion, and Pat became unhappy with the arrangement.

Carmon and Jocelyn's mentoring relationship worked out differently. Jocelyn also wanted to make her mark. She approached Carmon, a well-respected manager, to ask if she'd act as her mentor. From the beginning, Carmon worked with Jocelyn to clarify her objectives. They agreed on guidelines that would govern their relationship. They regularly evaluated how their mentoring partnership helped meet Jocelyn's goals.

Jocelyn and Carmon used the idea of forming a partnership as the foundation for their relationship. Both sought to learn from working together. By contrast, Pat's failed relationship with Randy derived from earlier modes of education. In that obsolete dynamic, mentors provided insight and their protégés absorbed it. Mentoring has since become more "collaborative," as evidenced by Jocelyn and Carmon's successful relationship.

"Learner-Centered Mentoring Paradigm"

Seven vital elements together underpin the learner-centered mentoring paradigm:

1. **"Reciprocity"** – Each partner assumes responsibility for tasks in the relationship. They both gain from working together.
2. **"Learning"** – Learning lies at the core of mentoring. Mentors must develop insight into how their protégés learn and how to promote learning.
3. **"Relationship"** – Healthy connections between two people encourage mentoring relationships, but they take time to develop.
4. **"Partnership"** – Mentors and those they mentor must honor each other and respect the commitments they make.

“Most mentees will tell you that the most important way that a mentor can support them is to listen.”

“When you take the time to discuss the guidelines for your mentoring relationship...both partners know what to expect going forward.”

“Context influences how we perceive reality, what we see as possible and achievable. From it, we draw our identity and formulate our thinking and attitudes.”

“As mentoring partners, we each bring our own multiple contexts and create a new context of partnership, which itself influences our relationship.”

5. **“Collaboration”** – Both partners must work together to strengthen their relationship and share what they know. They must agree on what the protégé wants to learn and how they can together achieve those objectives.
6. **“Mutually defined goals”** – Mentors and “mentees” must define their goals at the inception of the program and continually evaluate them during their relationship.
7. **“Development”** – Mentoring seeks to boost mentees’ acquisition of knowledge and skills that add to their capabilities.

Mentoring Is “Based on Principles of Adult Learning”

American adult educator Malcolm Knowles (1913–1997) was a pioneer in the use of learner contracts and the development of the Humanist Learning Theory. He enunciated the fundamental drivers of how adults learn and discussed the concept of self-directed learning. Mentoring today embodies many of his ideas. Knowles suggests that:

- Adults can optimize how much and how well they learn if they have a role in analyzing, designing, carrying out and appraising their own learning.
- Facilitators must encourage an environment that promotes learning.
- Adults become more willing to learn when they want specific knowledge.
- Adults want to direct their own learning.
- Individual experience provides a rich source of information for adult education. Adults learn from their own experiences and those of other people.
- Adults want to use what they learn as quickly as possible.
- Adults learn best when they feel a need to learn.

“Learning Styles and Cognitive Frameworks”

People learn in their own unique ways. Mentors should learn their protégés’ style of learning, adopt it and work with it. These styles are often based on individual cognitive frameworks, or ways of learning. Educational psychologist William Perry (1913–1998) explained the cognitive frameworks that shape how people make sense of the world. He listed:

1. **“Dualism”** – People adopting this framework tend to see things as black or white. Learners who use this approach see their mentors as authorities who hand out knowledge.
2. **“Multiplicity”** – People with this perspective believe everyone has his or her own version of the truth. They rely on their emotions rather than on a rational examination or discussion. Mentors should help these learners evaluate their options objectively. They need to discuss how to integrate the data they encounter.
3. **“Relativism”** – Those who learn this way understand that people all have different viewpoints. They examine and compare these viewpoints. Learners see their mentors as one potential resource. Mentors can help these learners analyze and clarify their thinking.
4. **“Commitment”** – This framework differs from the others because it describes ways of being rather than ways of thinking. Mentors can encourage learning by helping their protégés integrate “thinking with acting.”

Adult Learning Concepts

When Swiss-American biologist Louis Agassiz (1807–1873) worked as a professor of natural history at Harvard University more than 100 years ago, he asked a student to examine a fish. The student soon lost interest. To keep himself occupied, the student drew the fish. As he did, he found attributes he hadn’t noticed. Agassiz praised the student and

“Sometimes mentoring partners prefer to avoid closure because they fear hurting the feelings of their mentor partner or are otherwise anxious about terminating the relationship.”

“Many mentoring relationships end because one of the partners has a shift in personal priorities that changes the balance of the relationship.”

“Plan the process of coming to closure, taking into consideration how it will play out both when closure is anticipated and when it is not.”

“Technology can accommodate most types of mentoring relationships. However, being virtually connected with your mentee doesn't necessarily mean that you've connected on a deeper level.”

dared him to find more things he hadn't noticed. Agassiz encouraged the student to examine the fish from different angles. He didn't give the student a solution. Instead, he provided the student a chance to explore his own way of thinking.

Adults assimilate knowledge best when they have a chance to think through what they've experienced. Stephen Brookfield, author of 16 books on adult education, studied critical reflection and adult learning. He suggests that critical reflection grants insight into your assumed premises, so you can act more effectively.

“The Mentor's Journey”

Mentors must consider the roads their own lives have taken. This reflection can give them a greater understanding of the rhythm of their lives. Yet mentors must guard against projecting their experiences onto their mentees. A mentor's failure to “differentiate between self and other” means that his or her protégé could learn mechanically and not explore themselves. Mentors can undertake this three-step exercise to reflect on their lives:

1. **“Gain self-awareness”** – By reflecting about themselves, mentors can better understand how to encourage someone else's learning.
2. **“Understand the mentee's journey”** – Mentors have their own experiences, and they can't help bringing their history to the mentoring relationship. However, mentors must focus on their protégé's experiences to avoid unintentionally coaching someone else to become a replica of him or herself instead of reaching his or her potential.
3. **“Gain perspective”** – Mentors must reflect upon their mentees' journey and their own.

Developing a Timeline

Mentors should list a timeline of events that profoundly influenced them – whether negatively or positively. They should examine what helped them grow and enumerate the hurdles they encountered. They should include unplanned events that affected them. Mentors also ought to document the people who helped them grow and explore the lessons they learned. As they think about how their mentors shaped their thought processes and explore the lessons in their timelines, they can reflect on how they want to mentor.

“Miriam's Timeline”

Miriam, a health care executive, wanted to mentor women who sought career change. She created her timeline. She had begun her career by completing an associate degree at a community college and taking a job with a utility company. After a decade, the company promoted her to manager. A few years later, her daughter died in a hit-and-run accident.

Soon after that tragedy, Miriam earned a nursing degree and, in time, became a nursing director at a local hospital. Her timeline acknowledged seven significant incidents: “two marriages, a divorce, the death of her daughter, going back to school, specific job promotions and her 40th birthday celebration.”

Miriam recognized three breaks that helped her progress and develop. These included a positive mentoring experience, opportunities her company offered her to educate herself, and her second husband's encouragement and support. She also faced obstacles, including work, colleagues who sought to obstruct her education and her first husband's lack of understanding of her aspirations.

Through examining her timeline, Miriam realized that several people she hadn't previously recognized had helped her. She saw how much she had changed. Miriam understood more

clearly why she wanted to be a mentor: She felt grateful and sought to share her good fortune.

“Reflecting on Your Mentoring Journey”

Cultural anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson – daughter of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson – wrote a memoir, *Composing a Life*, in 1989. She describes how she evolved due to her interactions with women friends who each contributed to the development of her personality.

Mentors should create a “mentor timeline” that identifies the people who strongly influenced them and then examine what they gained from each of their mentors. They can contrast what they liked most in these relationships with what they didn’t like, and then they can consider what they learned about being both a mentor and a protégé. Mentors should identify lessons they learned while experiencing both success and failure, and then think about what quandaries they face regularly and what they have learned from them.

“The Mentee’s Journey”

People often assume they understand others. Mentors need to remain cognizant about what differentiates them from their mentees. Madeleine wanted someone to take over her role in a condominium association. Gordon volunteered, but Madeleine didn’t think he was capable. Worried about what she believed to be “gaps in his knowledge,” she offended him by how she prepared information for him. Madeleine didn’t know Gordon had an MBA and had owned two construction companies. If she had researched his background, their relationship might have turned out differently.

Mentors should consider their protégés’ experience to gain a better sense of who they are. This equips mentors to explore their assumptions and to consider anything that might affect the mentoring relationship. Mentors should identify gaps in their understanding about their mentees and ask questions to fill those gaps.

Mentoring Challenges

Both parties in a mentoring relationship must maintain their distinct identities. As mentors gain a sense of their own and the other person’s journeys, they can compare where both stand on their respective timelines, understand how they differ, and assess how this affects what protégés want to learn. Mentors must learn what actions to avoid in order not to harm the relationship.

Niles worked as a teacher and then joined his city’s government. He volunteered as a mentor in a school-to-work program. He attempted to construct timelines for himself and for a potential mentee, Juliana. Niles wanted to become a lawyer. He recognized he might not have enough time to meet Juliana’s requirements and informed her and the mentoring coordinator. They appreciated his frankness and devised ways of meeting both his requirements and Juliana’s objectives.

“Engaging in feedback – asking for it, giving it, receiving it, accepting it and acting on it – is a vital part of enabling growth for your mentee.”

“The learning that adults do arises from the context of their lives.” (University of Georgia professor Sharan Merriam)

“An old African proverb says, ‘If you want to travel fast, travel alone; if you want to travel far, travel together.’ At its core, that is what mentoring is: traveling far, together, in a relationship of mutual learning.”

About the Author

Lois J. Zachary is president of Leadership Development Services LLC, a consulting firm. She also wrote the bestsellers *Creating a Mentoring Culture* and *The Mentee’s Guide*.