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TURNING LEADERS INTO POWERFUL MENTORS

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I'd grab my notebook, dash out of the office bounce up the stairs, and enter the hall where my mentor's office was. I'd walk in the office saying "Hi Linda," and prepare for my one hour of enlightenment. We talked about the inner workings of the organization.



Years later, I was the mentor and the same process was repeated. Luckily, my mentee and I became friends so we dutifully continued our meetings, but we weren't always talking about work related topics. Those topics had dwindled. Looking at just the mentoring, I'd have to admit it was helpful, but not powerful.

Fast forward a few years and I'm once again a mentor. However, this time I've spent over twenty years coaching leaders, so when my mentee and I are done discussing the usual topics I can't help but throw quite a bit of coaching into the relationship. I include a few assessments to help my mentee uncover his strengths and challenges. We have several very deep, insightful discussions; for both of us. He starts telling the organizers of the mentoring program how powerful his meetings are. They come to me and ask what I'm doing differently. It makes me ponder the differences.

Most mentoring programs are designed using a training paradigm. The expectations under this paradigm are that the mentor and mentee will discuss topics that will increase the mentee's knowledge, skills, abilities and behavioral awareness. So the leaders dutifully discuss company politics, how to get things done in the organization, how to present to different stakeholders, how to work with a difficult leader, or how to manage a conflict situation. All of these and similar discussions cover important topics.

If we just keep to the training paradigm, the topics will start to wane in about 4-6 months. The discussions will become more forced as the partners search for things to talk about.

However, if we add another paradigm to the mentoring, we can create much more impactful experiences. By combining the training paradigm with a personal change paradigm, we add the expectations of discussing behaviors, beliefs, personal insight and awareness.

Ok, before you start squirming at the thought of having these discussions, recognize that they don't have to be as subjective as you are probably worried about. Coaches have these discussions every day. They are based on data that the leader either shares or is shared through validated assessments. If the coach administers the assessment and talks to the person on how to interpret their results, it is a helpful discussion. However, if the coach has taken the assessment him or herself, has worked to improve their own behaviors, and has made significant change, then the coach can add a different dimension to the discussion and the conversation becomes powerful.

This is also true of leaders who serve as mentors. If the leader has done their own insight and personal growth work, they are a more mature and effective leader. They can share their journey of personal change with the mentee and guide the mentee through their own self-reflection and discovery.

Just as in any change model, the leader can only take others as far as he or she has gone in accepting change. If you want leaders to be powerful mentors it is important that they not only have the knowledge, skills, abilities and general behavioral awareness to be great leaders; it is also important that they are leaders who seek out feedback and challenge their own behaviors and beliefs. Not only will they share their skills, but they will also share their insights and encourage the mentee to look within for change.

To create impactful mentoring programs, start now by creating an organization built on both a training and personal change approach. Create a culture of feedback. Ensure leaders at all levels of the organization get both competency and behavioral feedback to make them amazing leaders and mentors.



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