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## Mentor Them!

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Does the word "mentor" conjure up images of long engagements and complex processes? If so, it's not the kind of mentoring we're talking about. Employees need mentoring from their managers and often that simply means they want more *time* with you. They want some coaching, feedback, advice and straight talk from you about what they need to do to get ahead.

Here are some simple "to-dos" to help you move into that mentoring role easily and provide a way for you to remember the essentials.

### So What's a Mentor to Do?

**Model:**

Be aware of your own influence as a role modeling, and point out others who are good role models for your people.

**Encourage:** Support your people in the risk-taking that is essential to their growth.

**Nurture:**

Get to know your people's unique skills and capabilities. Work with them to do the most with their talents.

**Teach Organizational Reality:**

Tell it like it is. Help them avoid those organizational minefields that are never written about in any policy manual.

### Model: Be Aware

Interestingly enough, your people want to know that you don't always have all the right answers all the time. So our question is -- how real can you afford to be? We think the answer is "pretty real." For example, let's say you were unable to hold to a predetermined agenda at an important meeting. Debriefing with an employee ("Here's what I think happened -- did you see how I was sidetracked by Max's question?") is a wonderful way of mentoring.

If you believe that your people need to see you as having the answers and making no mistakes, then this aspect of the mentoring process will be the most difficult for you. Modeling as a mentor means watching for opportunities to show how you've coped and giving permission to others to do the same.

### Encourage: Support Your People

Encouragement truly is all in the eye of the perceiver. For example, an employee says, "He never

encouraged me," while her manager says, "I encouraged her all the time." How can you encourage effectively?

Some managers encourage naturally, through casual conversations. Here's the easiest approach to offering encouragement, just in time. It consists of three steps:

1. *Recognize*: Notice something.
2. *Verbalize*: Say something.
3. *Mobilize*: Do something.

Any of these three steps individually will provide encouragement, but all three combined are much more powerful. For example: Liliana gives a beautifully designed flyer to her manager and says, "I've been doing some fiddling with that new graphics program and the laser printer."

- *Recognize* -- Manager: "Hmm, looks great. I didn't know you like this kind of stuff." (Good)
- *Recognize and Verbalize* --  
Manager: "This is really good. Is this something you'd like to do more of?" (Better)
- *Recognize, Verbalize, and Mobilize* --  
Manager: "If you like this kind of work, why not let Marc in Graphics know, and while you're there, find out when he's offering his next graphics course." (Best)

Impromptu mentoring of this type is even more important if you have limited time to meet with employees. For many employees, these simple interactions will send a strong message that they matter.

## **Nurture: Ideas & Relationships**

When employees come to you with suggestions or ideas about how they might approach something differently, do you immediately say no? Do you kill an idea before it is even off the tongue? (Tell the truth.) We hear that employees feel put down and turned down far more than their managers are aware. And that makes leaving easier. Instead, try listening to the entire idea; try playing with it as a "what if." Ask for more information. Sleep on it; mull it over. Think, "Isn't that interesting" before you think, "It will never work."

Nurture relationships too. Get to know your employees and give them every opportunity to get to know you. Managers who seize every opportunity to nurture the talented people on their team are the managers who will keep those people.

## **Teach Organizational Reality**

Everyone knows at least one sad story of a technically brilliant employee with everything to offer who derailed because of political blunders, lack of interpersonal skills, or ignorance of the unwritten rules. Countless corporate advice books suggest that academic brilliance alone does not make success.

Daniel Goleman talks about the importance of EQ (emotional quotient -- your ability to monitor your own and others' feelings), while Paul Stoltz refers to AQ (adversity quotient -- your ability to deal with bad luck or plans gone wrong). Others point to arrogance, insensitivity to others, or managing upward instead of down as career stoppers. Your ability and willingness to tell it like it is can save a career, perhaps for the benefit of your own organization.

Employees need to know your point of view. They want to know your take on how people get and give resources; what kinds of influence strategies work and don't work; and what certain senior leaders want and don't want in their reports, presentations, and meetings. And they want to know this before they walk into a minefield, or, at the very least, they want to be able to look at something that didn't work and understand why!

So if you are nodding your head, consider using one of your own staff meetings to open a dialogue about your own lessons and insights. Here are some questions to consider:

- What have you learned about what counts in this organization?
- What most surprised you about the culture?
- What was the most difficult culture shift for you to make?
- What are the ways to get in really hot water here?
- How do people derail themselves?
- What do you know now that you wish you had known earlier?

People have a hunger for frank conversation in organizations today. Because of the intense competition, few employees feel that they can really express themselves or ask the questions that are on their minds. Most people claim they do not like playing politics. But because it's a reality of corporate life, a mentor watches out for the organizational well-being of a protégé. A mentor educates and protects a protégé from stumbling. A manager who is intent on keeping talent can adapt some of these principles.

Your employees want you to teach them the ropes, and they know their careers will suffer if you don't. They want you to tell your own stories. Your failures and your success stories provide valuable insights that just don't come in other ways. Managers who share their experiences establish great rapport with their employees and find that there is a strong payback in productivity and engagement.

## **Let Them Mentor You**

Want to know one of the best ways of mentoring? Let your people mentor you. Let them tell you what they know. Ask them to tell you how they see the world. Let them coach you about how you might be more effective in their development. Observe. Stay open. You'll be amazed at how much you'll learn. And in the process of learning, continue to model, encourage, nurture, and teach organizational reality.

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