

**LESSON 36:** Business Performance

# The Value of Mentoring

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**REASONS FOR MENTORING**

As a business owner, the investment in mentoring has even more significance than it might for others. Someday you will need a succession plan, and a mentee might be the answer. In addition, a wise leader should always be developing leaders to help grow their leadership team with well-trained talent.

If you have ever had a teacher, a coach or a former boss invest time with you in the past, you likely realize the value of mentors. They can speak wisdom into a young person's life that can shape their future. Our communities also need people willing to invest in our youth, helping point them towards a path that is better for them and better for our community.

If you have been blessed by being mentored by someone, you should also consider passing that gift along to others. Even if you gain no personal benefit from the relationship, as followers of Jesus, we are called to disciple others. A great way to do that is through a mentor-mentee relationship.

Many years ago, Rick felt led to participate in a Big Brothers program. He was assigned a troubled 12-year-old named Wayne who had endured the hardship of multiple stepfathers. Wayne became involved in drugs at a young age. For years Rick met each week with Wayne, often wondering if it was making any difference at all.

Eventually Wayne joined the Marines and received an accounting degree in the evenings. When asked why, he said because Rick had an accounting degree. He later went to work for Rick. During that season, Wayne prayed to receive Jesus as his savior and learned how to be a CFO. Rick had an impact on Wayne's life both vocationally and eternally because of his willingness to invest time in mentoring someone else.

## REVERSE MENTORING

Another benefit and reason for mentoring younger people is what you can learn from them. Reverse mentoring is a term that has been used to describe a bi-directional approach to mentoring. Many may go into a mentoring relationship viewing it as giving wisdom and guidance to another without considering the possibility of gaining knowledge and wisdom in return.

We are living in a fast-paced, changing technological environment. Young leaders have been raised on technology and social media. They can provide knowledge about areas of business that many seasoned leaders find to be a challenge. Remembering that you might learn something from your mentee can help establish a relationship that possesses humility and openness and result in a more receptive mentee.

The benefits of a reverse mentoring program are many.

- Closes the knowledge gap for both parties. For example, older employees learn social media from the younger person, and the younger person learns business terminology and industry practices from the older employee.
- Empowers both emerging and established leaders.
- Brings different employee generations closer together—eliminating the “us versus them” mentality by fostering more inclusivity.
- Increases retention of the younger workers by providing them with the transparency and recognition that they are seeking from management.

## KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL REVERSE MENTORING PROGRAM

- Both parties need to be prepared to learn.** The senior leader needs to make a conscious and intentional effort to find and work with a younger mentor. Senior leaders also need to be ready to learn, be open to new ideas, willing to try something new, and, most importantly, be prepared to make mistakes.
- Be humble.** The older generation must be humble enough to set aside their perception of authority and privilege brought on by age and experience. The younger employees must be humble enough to realize their knowledge and awareness of the current cultural climate is not an end-all to good leadership.

- Purpose.** Both parties must agree on the purpose of mentorship. Purposes might include sharing skills on technology, data, information, insight or even the ever-changing mindset about privilege.
  
- Identify norms for the relationship.** Norms should include how to communicate, when and where to meet, language (using informal terms as opposed to formal hierarchical terms), and, most importantly, confidentiality.
  
- Understand when the mentoring relationship has come to its natural conclusion.** In other words, when the initial purpose is met, it is time to move on to something else.

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you had any experience in either being mentored or mentoring others? What benefits did you experience?

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2. What feelings or concerns surface when you consider the idea of mentoring someone else?

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3. If you were to choose to mentor someone, what might be some of your reasons why, and what considerations would you have in selecting someone to mentor?

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## STRUCTURED VS UNSTRUCTURED

Now that you hopefully see the value in becoming a mentor, you may be wondering what your time with a mentee should look like. There is no rule book for mentoring relationships. Each relationship should take shape in a way that works for both parties.

However, some try to make their meetings too structured, while others may make their time together too unstructured. As you choose to begin working with a mentee, it would be helpful to have an initial meeting to discuss how they learn best. Some may be creative types that do not do well with a structured, disciplined approach, while others will not do well without structure.

The key is to develop a relationship with trust and love at the center. Howard Dayton, founder of Compass, a financial ministry, began mentoring one younger leader each year for the past ten years. He chose a somewhat structured approach. He has four books for the year that they read together. They discuss their readings every other week, then they have a more unstructured time of discussion and determining how Howard can best help these mentees. He has strategically chosen certain books to help build a strong spiritual foundation.

Other mentors are inclined to be very unstructured, just meeting and discussing whatever life issues that may surface. Although this can be fruitful, as a mentor, you might consider having a theme or question to guide each discussion. This can be helpful in encouraging your mentee to move forward in a positive manner rather than simply rambling through life. Remember, as a follower of Jesus, our ultimate goal should be to help lead others into a deeper relationship with Jesus. We want to intentionally equip them to know and obey God's Word in love and truth.

## HOW TO BEGIN

It is time for you to select someone to mentor. You may have some obvious choices in your workplace, like a young intern or new employee, but many do not know where to start. Prayer is always a good place to begin. Pray and ask that God would bring someone into your life with whom you know you should invest time. If you keep your eyes open after praying that prayer, I am confident you will begin to sense certain people with whom you can invest your wisdom and experience.

To be a mentor in today's business world requires action on your part. **Mentoring is not simply telling people what to do. It requires time, effort and patience.**

Here are five action steps you must take to be a good mentor.

1. The first action is to **BUILD** a relationship. Why would anyone want to learn from you unless you have taken an interest in them and shown them what you have to offer? These potential mentees need to respect and want to learn from you.
2. Second, you need to **RECOGNIZE** their strengths and weaknesses. Your job is to help them reach their potential, and the first place to start is to consider their skill set and passions as well as weaker areas and downright dislikes. What would they say they are good at and enjoy doing? Do they have outside interests such as sports or gaming? Do they display personal characteristics that could be beneficial to a business career? Are they hard working or easy going, gregarious or quiet? Do they display leadership qualities?
3. Third, you need to **EARN** their trust. Earned trust is displayed once they start coming to you for advice and to help. There is a difference between an employee who works for you and does what you ask, versus an employee who comes to you for advice about bigger, more important issues.
4. Once trust is earned, you can begin to **IDENTIFY** goals and start to outline and select specific actions they can take that will move them forward in their goals. It is this step where your business wisdom becomes important to them; they can see how it has impacted your life and how they can apply it toward reaching their goals.
5. **CHECK** in. You have built a wonderful relationship, and it is up to you to occasionally check in and question them on their progress—to hold them accountable for the choices they are making. Many of the best mentoring relationships last a lifetime.

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which approach do you feel would be most effective for you to be a good mentor—structured or unstructured?

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2. Out of the 5 steps to becoming a good mentor, which do you feel are most critical?

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3. How do you feel about building an intentional relationship with someone who may or may not bring value to your career, but might impact them deeply?

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4. What steps will you take in response to this lesson?

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