

Mentoring the Young Professionals: Some Reflections

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“The greatest good you can do for another is not just to share your riches but to reveal to him his own.”

- Benjamin Disraeli

Introduction

Human resource is the most active, decisive and vocal factor in production activities. Optimization of organizational resources enhancing production, efficiency and maintenance are directly influenced by the quality or efficiency and dedication of human resource. Given this importance of human resource in a knowledge driven society of today, it is imperative that an organization builds efficient and effective human resources by judicious application of various HRD instruments.

Counseling and Mentoring are the soft and potent HRD instruments to mould and bind the employees to organizational work, social culture, developing emotional bonds between employees, supervisors and the organization. This leads to devoted allegiance to the organization and spirit de corps amongst the staff.

What is Mentoring?

Mentoring is most often defined as a professional relationship in which an experienced person (the mentor) assists another (the mentee) in developing specific skills and knowledge that will enhance the less-experienced person's professional and personal growth.

What Does A Mentor Do?

The following are among the mentor's functions:

- Teaches a specific issue
- Coaches a particular skill
- Facilitates growth by sharing resources and networks
- Challenges the mentee to move beyond his or her comfort zone
- Creates a safe learning environment for taking risks
- Focuses on the mentee's total development

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Are Mentoring and Coaching identical?

No. People often confuse mentoring and coaching. Though related, they are not the same. A mentor may coach, but a coach is not a mentor. Mentoring is “relational,” while coaching is “functional.” There are other significant differences.

Coaching Mentoring Differences:

Scope	part of the job	outside line manager-employee relationship,
Focus	developing individuals within their current jobs	focuses on professional development
Interest	Functional	Relationship is personal
Driven by	individual’s manager	Both
Relationship	Finite	Relationship crosses job boundaries

Mentoring and Indian Mythology

The mentoring concept is as old as human race; every student has a teacher or guru to we can see many instances in our mythology where a mentor helps his/ her mentee realizes and attain their full potential.

Every student has a teacher / guru like Arjun had Dronacharya but the teacher also tutors other students similar to what Dronacharya did for the Kauravas and the Pandavas. In Mahabharat, we have read that Sri Krishna became Arjun’s mentor; he guided, advised Arjun at every step enabling him to go in the right direction and win the war. Whereas Dronacharya, who was Arjun’s guru taught him all the skills and lessons which he also taught his other students. This mentoring relationship teaches us a few things i.e.: Krishna as a mentor not only advised Arjun but also provided him guidance in each and every step. Whenever Arujn was doubtful whether he was doing the right thing or not, Krishna clarified his doubts. For example when Arjun casts his weapons down and tells Krishna that he will not fight. Krishna then mentors

Arjun and explains him his duties and leads him towards success.

The Mentors duty is also to protect the protégé from any imminent danger by giving him proper advice and nurturing his growth. For E.g.: Arjun had taken a vow to kill Jayadrath before sunset, failing which he would kill himself by jumping in a pyre. The Kauravas smartly hid Jayadrath from Arjun, so that Arjun kills himself. However Krishna, as a mentor took it up to him to protect his mentee by creating an artificial eclipse by using his Sudarshana Chakra to hide the sun, forcing Kauravas to believe the day was over and Arjun’s death was imminent. Then Jayadrath reappeared in joy, even as the sun emerged from the eclipse. Arjun killed Jayadrath.

Hence, it is even more important for a mentee to find a mentor who can guide and lead him towards success amidst present complexities of life and career.

What is so Special about Mentoring?

My friend Sam nicely summarized the uniqueness and benefits of mentoring

activity as under;

Mentoring has many an advantages for both the mentor acting as a sage and the mentee under his tutelage.

Mentor will great satisfaction derives seeing the mentee self-confident grow, no longer unsure of what he wants out of his personal and professional life as his self-awareness expands.

When in for the long haul, Mentor does enhance mentee's skills unlocking his true but hidden potential.

Without a desire to help the mentee at mentoring, good you will not be.

So, motivate yourself if need be that your communication and leadership

In the end will vastly improved be and along the way you will gain many a new and fresh outlook.

When mentoring, Confident and assured in manner be, Critiquing and challenging gently, at the same time listening actively

To understand better the mentee's psyche, and probe gently with open-ended questions that set the mentee thinking deeply, and

Share your views as the dialogue wend, making the mentee start seeing things from newer and different perspectives.

Wherever such mentoring climate prevails such an organization comfortably sails.

Having seen the benefits of Mentoring it becomes very clear that the youngsters need to be suitably mentored by their seniors so that they could give their best in terms of contribution. And let's not forget that a leader who lives his or her word and guides employees through major career

transitions isn't forgotten easily .Let's look at few cases of *how top guns of India Inc mentor their employees [source: TET, 3 May, 2013}*

1. Krishna Kumar Natarajan, CEO and MD, Mind Tree and Azim Premji (MENTOR), Wipro Founder and Chairman.

The Person behind the Role

PREMJI is an intense person who, despite being the owner, brings in a lot of commitment and intensity to his daily work and is particular about execution.

Where the Learning Came From

In 1982-83, I was a marketing executive at Wipro. Premji would hire all the executives and conduct review meetings for up to three hours each. One such meeting was just before I got transferred to Chennai.

Premji had asked me for a detailed presentation on the market approach in Chennai, target markets and customer identification strategies. I had not included details about a few manufacturing clients. Post the meeting, Premji pointed this out. The message: Wipro's founder was a stickler for detail and had prepared himself before the review as well.

Lessons Learnt/Develop

- An eye for detail.
 - DO thorough research before every meeting, even if you are not presenting.
 - Execution is crucial to every task.
2. Ganesh Natarajan, CEO and VC, Zensar Technologies and Harsh Goenka (MENTOR), Chairman, RPG Enterprises

The Person behind the Role

Ganesh Natarajan: Goenka is one of the

reasons I stayed with the company for 13 years. I joined Zensar from Aptech in July 2001, during the dotcom bust. I had expected to turn around the business in a few months but that did not happen. Exasperated, I went to Goenka to reason out why strategies were not showing an impact.

This is what he told me: “It is wrong to believe changes will happen overnight, and no one expects that out of you. You cannot be the monkey on a flagpole who has to perform all the time.”

I learnt that some strategies need patience, and reap benefits a few years down the line.

Lessons Learnt

- long-term investments along with short-term fixed ones are needed.
 - Results cannot be achieved overnight.
 - One needs to invest in employees.
3. Vivek Gambhir, MD Designate, Godrej Consumer Products and Adi Godrej(MENTOR), Chairman, Godrej Group

The Person behind the Role

ADI consistently leads by example, and has played a significant role in helping improve my effectiveness as a leader. Through his strong sense of fairness and integrity, his disciplined approach and laser focus on value creation, he has greatly inspired me and my colleagues. He is always accessible, is a wonderful sounding board & is ever willing to provide support.

Where the Learning Came From

OVER the past few years, we have been working on the transformation of the group.

The group has made several acquisitions and expanded rapidly into new geographies like Indonesia and Kenya. At the same time, we have divested non-core businesses so we can focus better on areas where we have a competitive advantage and drive our portfolio fully.

DURING the course of all this, there have always been discussions on whether we should deviate from our strategy or the merits of going in for an acquisition that is a stretch for our core business. Through these, Adi has been a guiding force, providing confidence, dealing with uncertainties and willing to roll up his sleeves and get down to business.

Lessons Learnt

- One of Adi’s favorite sayings is: “Sales are vanity, profit is sanity and cash is reality”.
- This has taught me the importance of focus and prudence.
- Keeping in mind our competitive advantages
- Finding a way to create a ‘win-win situation’ with our partners in business.

Mentoring Crisis

We all know that crisis is good. In the absence of crisis, most people assume, overestimate or underestimate their own capability and capacity and those of others. People move around either with an overinflated sense of themselves or a sense of inadequacy, looking up to colleagues or looking down upon them. In the absence of crisis, all that exists is speculation, assumption and imagination.

Prasad was the smartest leader in the company who always calmed people down

with a sermon or a wisecrack. He listened to all problems and always offered pithy solutions that made others feel they were rather stupid. He had been in the company for over 20 years starting as a management trainee and rising up to be Senior Manager. He had seen the company grow and knew everyone and everything about the company.

Prasad's car-pool friend and colleague, Jagan, had joined the company five years earlier and Prasad always made it a point to remind Jagan that he was a senior. Jagan was hired laterally to bring in new thoughts and ideas into a company that was finding it difficult to transition from the old to the new economy. Jagan recognized that Prasad was a misfit in the new order. Whenever Jagan broached the subject, Prasad would mock him saying, "What do you know?", "You just joined five years ago. I have been around for twenty years."

One day, the newspapers announced, that the company had been bought over. It had been done quickly and secretly and no one really knew of it. The new owners were known to be ruthless, preferring performance over seniority. Suddenly Prasad panicked as he could no longer pretend all was well. His worst fears had risen to his conscious mind and he could not turn away. Luckily, Jagan came to his rescue and reassured him. Crisis had provided Jagan the window of opportunity to mentor Prasad into shape.

Story of Uttara and Arjuna

There is a similar story in the Virata Parva of the Mahabharata providing an important lesson in mentoring. When Virata, king of Matsya, learnt that his cows had been stolen by the king of Trigarta, he rode out of his city with his army in hot pursuit of

the thieves. Taking advantage of his absence, the king of Hastinapur attacked his city. Of course; this was part of the Duryodhana and his associates to break their agnyathavasam so that they could be sent again to 12 years of *vanaprastha* (living in forest) and 1 year of *agnyathavasam* (living in disguise). And there was no one around, except women and children, to defend Matsya. Everyone was frightened. "Do not worry, I will protect you," said the young prince, Uttar, confidently, "I only need a charioteer for my chariot." An eunuch called Brihannala, who served in the women's quarters, offered to help since he had some experience. Though not happy to have an eunuch as his charioteer, the prince, armed with a bow, rode out to face the army of Hastinapur in battle.

But when Uttar entered the battlefield and saw the enemy before him, he trembled in fear. Before him were great warriors, archers and swordsmen, on horses and elephants and chariots. "There are so many of them," he squeaked. The eunuch-charioteer nodded her head and whipped the horses to gallop faster. "No, no. Don't go so fast. I did not realize that is how a hostile enemy looks like." The horses kept moving faster and closer to the enemy. "Stop," cried the prince, "Please stop." But the eunuch-charioteer kept going. In panic, Uttar, jumped off the chariot and began running back towards the city. On realizing this, the eunuch-charioteer turned the chariot around, caught up with the prince, picked him up and drove him out of the battlefield into the forest near the city, where she revealed that she was no eunuch but Arjuna, the great archer, in disguise. Arjuna/Brihannala promised that he would defeat the enemy and protect the kingdom of Matsya but warned Uttar never to reveal

this incident or his identity, not until the time was ripe.

And so, the enemy was pushed back, and Uttar returned to a hero's welcome. But the prince was not carried away by the praise; he knew the truth about himself. He was grateful to Arjuna for revealing to him the truth about his martial abilities, without taking away his dignity or reputation. Arjuna is the mentor. Uttar is the mentee. Arjuna is mature enough not to humiliate the young, inexperienced prince, focusing instead on his growth. Uttar imagines his capability and is ignorant about the true identity of his eunuch-charioteer, until he is faced with a crisis

How to Get the Most Out of Mentorship

Given the importance of Mentoring, all of us agree that we have to get the most of this HR initiative i.e., mentoring. In other words, what it takes to get effectively mentored. Here are *Four Strategies to Get The Most from Your Mentors*:

- a) **Listen at All Costs:** In business, it can be difficult listening to input, even if it comes from seasoned managers. To move the ball forward, you must be open-minded to new ideas and sufficiently thick-skinned so as not to take any negative feedback personally. In most of the cases mentees have difficulty in listening to the advice and will be eager to demonstrate that they could do things on their own. As a result, the annual off-site event and five-year strategic plans may become avoidable debacles that erode their credibility with the team right out of the gate.
- b) **Always Ask for Help:** A significant challenge experienced by a variety of mentees, is the ability to ask for help.

My friends in the incubator companies tell me that most of the startups lacked the willingness or ability to ask for help, resources or introductions to strategic partners. Nine times out of 10, a mentor will have a useful answer to any request, and if they don't, it may be worth re-evaluating whether or not that individual is a good fit as mentor.

- c) **Communication is King:** It will be extremely difficult to advise an entrepreneur /manager if they're not keeping the mentor in the loop regarding the state of their business. You can't advise on what you don't know. In mentoring relationships, mastering the proper velocity and relevance of timely communications regarding key business changes or updates is important. That includes properly framing issues, opportunities or questions, as well as justifying critical decisions.
- d) **Act on Input:** Taking action on specific input, advice or decisions is essential to earning trust from a mentor. Some managers are afraid of making key decisions or taking timely action. In business, when you learn to embrace change, you begin to create opportunity. May be it is the fear of failure that kept them away from making key decisions, and the few actions they did take were safe and not strategic or helpful to the organization.

What else?

Normally we hear from mentors ("I did this and I did that") and Gurus, very often. Not so common are the experiences from protégés (the other person in the relationship). So, here is a narrative (emphasis mine) from a protégé which goes

a long way in showcasing the importance and the need for mentoring:

Edward Stettner [The Ralph Emerson and Alice Freeman Palmer Professor of Political Science, Emeritus and former Associate Dean at Wellesley College.] was an exceptional person: wise, kind, modest and (infinitely) patient. He was never flashy, always dependable, compassionate, supportive, and influenced me in beneficial ways that I still continue to appreciate many years later.

In my four years at college, I often ran into his office all fired up, either from enthusiasm or indignation, talking a mile a minute. The state of the world, some new thing I'd discovered about Plato or Hobbes, some injustice I'd uncovered... Professor Stettner sat like a stone in the wind waiting for me to blow myself out. Then, he'd quietly suggest something that would bring perspective, and calm cogent thinking would ensue. In those four years he did that countless times, and over time I learned to do it myself.

He was always formal - it never occurred to me to call him anything other than Professor Stettner. He was never overly personal - I don't recall ever talking to him about boyfriends, parties, or trivia. He encouraged me, but was never pushy or imposed his own agenda. Importantly, he found ways to help me to pursue my interests within the college structure, either through courses or independent study, as well as outside school, encouraging me to spend a summer in Washington DC and to return for graduate study at Cambridge University. .

At a time when people strive to self-brand, to make a name, to gain more Clout, I look back and realize he was never like

that. First and foremost, above all else, he was a teacher. He was a solid and steady force in the turbulence of the odd transitional time of college, and I have never taken for granted how lucky I was to have him as my professor.

In his more than 40 years of teaching, Professor Stettner touched the lives of many like mine. His impact is, above all, a reminder of the power of one person. It is also an illustration of the value of educators. One person can make a difference in the lives of those around him or her, and that is something to be cherished and remembered as we all carry on.

Conclusion

The recipe of success for any knowledge economy organizations hinges on its ability to leverage human potential so as to deliver business results. Employee development and retention plays pivotal role in their growth. Encouraging the institution of mentorship will positively influence employee's commitment, contribution and continuity. With a mentor as their best friend, guide and philosopher, at work and at times of need, bright young employees are able to raise their performance bars continuously. Further, they will find their organization and work environment as one full of fun, excitement, achievement and reward.

Let me conclude with a great quote by John Wesley

“Do all the good you can, (By all the means you can; In all the ways you can; In all the places you can; To all the people you can; As long as ever you can).”

Sarve Jana Sukhino Bhavanthu