

6 Keys to Highly Effective Mentoring

The mentorship relationship is unique in that the mentor doesn't just 'give advice,' but is also part of personal trusted relationship between two people where questions, advice, knowledge and discussion flow back and forth openly."

However, an effective mentoring program takes a commitment of time, resources and energy to get it right — and helping strong leaders become successful mentors isn't as easy as it would seem. Consider these 6 key qualities that can help you become an effective mentor.

1. Set a good example.

Often, this is known as "modeling," or the idea that one entrepreneur can thrive by finding inspiration in — and striving to emulate the traits of — a more successful entrepreneur. For example, mentoring is being encouraged as a way to help more minorities enter into the STEM fields. In broader terms, however, success begets success. "[Good mentors] help the mentee know you have been there/done that, have the scars to prove it—and will share experiences to help them not make all the same mistakes you made," says Dan Rose, Partner, Precision Dialogue, who's also a JumpStart mentor.

2. Be open to learning.

Extensive business experience doesn't mean a mentor knows it all—and the best ones recognize this. "Our mentors are life-long learners," Hughes says. "They're not resting on their laurels or uninterested in learning new things. It's invigorating for them to be exposed to both new technologies and fresh business models." For example, a mentee might religiously keep up with the latest advancements in a particular industry, or might have training in a specialized field or area of study. In fact, it's empowering, not to mention a confidence-booster, if an entrepreneur can share his/her own expertise with a mentor.

3. Your network's advice is as valuable as your own advice.

Nowhere is the phrase "it's who you know" more pertinent than it is in mentoring. Entrepreneurs being mentored are looking for advice and guidance, but chances are, they might not find one mentor with all the answers they're seeking. However, a well-connected mentor can help find someone who can help. "If I don't have the experience in dealing with a specific issue, it's likely that someone within my network does," Rose says. "In turn, this person can share their experience in dealing with similar situations, and the mentee will gain insight into at least one way to navigate their issue."

4. Share experiences, don't dictate actions.

"I believe in experience sharing following a Gestalt Language Protocol," Rose says. "It's non-threatening and non-judgmental. By illustrating what I did in a similar situation, the entrepreneur is able to decide themselves if this approach will work in their situation." He has a point—after all, not all entrepreneurs are good at taking direction or hearing that their great idea might need some tweaking. Illustrating options or putting a positive spin on news someone might not want to hear is a better way to deliver the message. Of course, not everyone is wired to communicate in this way—which is why team mentoring can be advantageous.

5. Lending an ear is sometimes more important.

Learning doesn't always come from being given the answer. Simply listening—rather than doling out advice or guidance—might seem counterintuitive to the otherwise-active mentor's role. However, giving an entrepreneur a chance to work through obstacles or puzzle out problems on his/her own is sometimes the best way to help someone succeed. "Everybody needs a good reliable sounding board, second opinion, and sometimes just emotional support," says About.com's Scott Allen. In a team-mentoring situation, listening is even more valuable. "A really good mentor recognizes the skills they bring to the table — as well as the skills the other people bring to the table — and interjects when appropriate," Hughes says, "but also does a lot of listening when their skills aren't particularly relevant."

6. Don't be afraid to get personal.

First and foremost, getting to know a mentee beyond the business is a good way to foster trust, a vital part of any mentoring relationship. However, getting the whole picture of an entrepreneur's world — "understanding the realities of their life," as Hughes puts it — also strengthens a relationship. "A great mentor is kind of like that teacher that you had in high school that was willing to go the extra mile for you — she or he will not only sit down and explain some things for you, but will also really take a personal interest in your development," Hughes says.

There's no one right way to mentor or be a mentor, of course. Different personalities and communication styles naturally make some mentoring methods more compatible than others. The key is always to find something that works with an individual's unique situation. As the *Harvard Business Review* also puts it, "Mentoring can take many shapes and forms — the key is to find the right kind of advice from the right person at the right time."

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