Learning by Design
Facilitating Leadership Development through Mentoring
By Dr. Lois J. Zachary

Mentoring is a basic leadership competency that is now de rigueur for leaders of the 21st century. Effective leaders "enable others to act" (Konczes & Posner, 2002) by strengthening themselves and strengthening others through mentoring. In its very best practice, mentoring is a reciprocal and collaborative learning relationship between individuals who share mutual responsibility and accountability for achievement of clear and mutually defined learning outcomes.

Invariably, when I invite organizational leaders to reflect on their most significant mentoring experiences, they recall a college teacher, activity advisor, or counselor, who "really connected with them" and "shaped them into the leader they are today." Their mentors helped them become more comfortable, confident, and competent as a leader. These leadership stories are testimony to the fact that leadership lessons learned in college endure and continue to inform their practices as leaders to this day.

The college setting offers an ideal "holding environment" for guiding the formative developmental work of emerging leaders. It is a learning laboratory for bridging the gap between theory and practice and offers students multiple and diverse opportunities to build leadership competence while exercising leadership in a safe and supportive environment. The powerful combination of student readiness to learn and increasing self-direction, coupled with a campus culture that encourages and supports mentoring allows students "to consolidate each new sense of self so that [they] can maintain meaning and coherence in the world and yet remain open to a lifetime of fresh wonders" (Daloz, 1999, p.185).

The role of the leadership educator is to create readiness, provide a variety of multi-level opportunities and build in ongoing mentoring support to nurture leadership development and competence.

Creating Readiness
Leadership educators must think strategically and proactively plan their mentoring efforts in order to create a climate of readiness for mentoring. This requires that a clear purpose statement and identified list of intended outcomes for mentoring be agreed upon and communicated to all stakeholders. A stable infrastructure must be put in place, one that ensures sufficient and ongoing financial, technological, human and knowledge resources to anchor mentoring within multiple layers of the institution. In addition, it is essential to have the right people in place to support, manage and coordinate mentoring efforts and to develop a succession plan to sustain momentum over time.

Multiple Mentoring Opportunities
A mentoring culture is inclusive and intentional in its reach. It strengthens and supports mentoring capacity in whatever forms it
appears, whether informal, formal, or a blend of the two. Although some mentoring activities for stu-
dents go on in nearly every organization (Kaye and Jacobson, 1996), most institutions need to work at creat-
ing a culture that con-
currently advances and supports multiple types of mentoring opportunities.

A college environment is a unique com-
munity. By nature and design, it is intrinsical-
ly a "learning community." In a college envi-
noment, mentoring has the advantage of having access to all of the expertise, resources, and best practices that are inherent in a learn-
ing community. The key to success is to be able to tap into those human and knowledge resources.

Many colleges and universities pair students with a mentor to create structured mentoring activities for stu-
dents to have a one-on-one mentoring experience. Others teach stu-
dents how to seek and select men-
tors on their own. However, one-on-
one mentoring is often ideal but not always practical. A group mentor-
ing design can expand the program's reach. Several types of group men-
toring are particularly well-suited to a college environment. Facilitated mentoring brings small groups of students together to work with a mentor who facilitates the learning around selected leadership topics over a specific period of time. Alternatively, peer group mentoring encourages students to be increas-
ingly self-directed. Groups of stu-
dents who have similar leadership interests meet together and self-
manage their learning, crafting a learning agenda and schedule to meet the members' learning needs.

Support

Whether a program focuses on one-
on-one or group mentoring, leadership educators need to provide ongoing support to ensure that students have a successful learning experience. Support comes in many shapes and sizes and should embrace the mentor-
ning needs of the student, faculty, member of administration. For exam-
ple, one form of support is to prepare students for the experience. Students who are prepared and understand how the peer mentoring process is more likely to achieve positive learning out-
comes than those who are not.

Education and train-
ing set the gold standard for mentoring practice and help manage expecta-
tions for the experience. Faculty, students and administrators can all benefit from enhancing their mentoring skills, learning how to make the most of their mentoring relationships, and exchanging best practices. Continuous mentoring education and training needs to be strategically integrated into the leader-
ship educator's overall training and development agenda.

Mentoring coaches are the individ-
uals in an organization who are charged with supporting individuals and/or mentoring partners with just-
in-time support to help them maxi-


References


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