

CHRIS'LL DEAL WITH IT

episode notes



EP 12 - Mentoring Entry-Levels While Achieving New Levels

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Today's question covers what's often a difficult, and crucial early-career transition point:

My employer has hired several eager, entry-level employees for my department. Although I'm still early in my own career, they've assigned me to train and mentor them. I've been with the organization for four years, and have a reputation for getting things done effectively. What advice do you have on being an effective mentor, while not sacrificing my own development?

Important! Be sure you understand the assignment.

- Are you being assigned to simply teach a specific job responsibility or process?
 - Simple training doesn't fall under the guise of mentorship.
 - If it is a simple training, and that person later seeks out more advice - great. **But let them lead that request.**
 - You can't force mentorship on someone
- If they're specifically asking you to be the new employees' go-to resource for growth within the company: Congratulations, this makes you a mentor
 - But remain within the confines of the company aspects you're knowledgeable about.
- Realize that mentorship can take many forms - and are never all-in right at the start.

Breakdown:

1. Teaching elevates your learning
2. Invest in long term relationships
3. Everyone has something to teach
4. Maintain balance
5. Meet people halfway

1. Teaching elevates your learning

- Helps keep developed skills sharp
- It helps you not take the learning curves your company's complex operations for granted
- Sharing vs hoarding mindset - which makes us more valuable to our tribe?
- When data is being input or output, it's not being processed. Be sure to give them time to digest what's being said.
- Define a meaningful purpose for your leadership - Share it!
- Teach the why alongside the how

“Live what you teach and notice how much you learn” - [Greg McKeown](#)

2. Invest in long term relationships

- Never view mentorship as a checkbox item on your to-do list
 - Mentorship evolves. It doesn't have easily definable end dates.
 - No relationship has clear development path - mentorship is no different
 - A good mentor must earn trust first, which looks different to each combination of unique people. And it takes time, there's no way to shortcut that.
 - While relationships can certainly devolve, good mentorship experiences often evolve into close friendships, or at least strong professional connections.
 - If one of you moves on to a new organization, make it a point to stay in touch.
 - You never know how or when paths will cross in the future. Your boss today could be your employee in the future.
 - If anyone had a crystal ball or time machine, they wouldn't be wasting their time working for your organization
 - Take solace in the fact that life is unpredictable. So better to treat our new (and existing) co-workers as if we'd treat a friend.
 - It's often easier to give or receive advice from someone outside the organization - who also understands it in some capacity.
- People you train & develop relationships with become allies as they move on to different departments, business units, companies, industries
- Give more time where it's received with gratitude
 - On the flip side - make sure you relay your own gratitude towards those who took you under their wing early on & those who still give their time & wisdom
 - This doesn't have to be (nor should it be) grand gestures!
 - **People love knowing their experience, skills, time & contributions are appreciated. It's deeply human!**
- Forming good interpersonal relationships requires a certain degree of distance.
 - You can't read a book if you push it up against your face, nor if you hold it too far away.
 - No matter what sort of appeal the other person might make, you are the only one who decides what you should do.
 - If you're at capacity or over-leveraged - it's okay to make the mentee fit their needs around your schedule. But it will take flexibility to give them some of your time & attention.

- The reason I bring up these points is simple: Don't lose sight that this applies to those you mentor as much as it applies to yourself.
 - Ultimately, it's up to them to do the work. And they're going to do it in their own way.
 - Likewise, trust people's judgement. And their ability to develop character in their own way
- Another method to view relationships: Vertical or horizontal
 - **Vertical relationships** are hierarchical. I am above you in title, financially, status, ability, connections, whatever.
 - These relationships are highly driven by power dynamics, which can lead to the need to praise or receive praise.
 - These types of relationships can lead to feelings of inferiority
 - Or even worse, superiority: "You owe me"
 - We tend to treat many of our interpersonal relations as vertical, often without even noticing & unintentionally. Can lead to passive aggressive stances, feelings of unfairness, etc...
 - **Horizontal relationships** are "equal but not the same" for all people.
 - These are more collaborative, focused on mutually beneficial outcomes
 - If you can build these types of relationships, there will no longer be any room for inferiority complexes to emerge.
 - Both types of relationships exist in our society, and your company is no different.
 - Everyone's going to view relationships in different contexts
 - But powerful mentors recognize that they are not in a position of power. That they're not better than their mentee. That we're all just helping each other through our lives journeys.

3. Everyone has something to teach

- You likely haven't ever gotten training on how to manage people.
 - Very few of us ever do - including your managers!
 - There's no single playbook, so the onus is on you to learn: Get a mentor with strong leadership qualities, and/or read some books on the topic.
- There are nearly infinite resources on the topic of leadership. Personally, I focus on continuous improvement in my understanding of philosophy, psychology, skills development, etc...
- Leadership, at its core, is about understanding people. For me, becoming a better, more informed human being therefore makes me a better, more informed leader.
- 2 books that informed me quite a bit:
 - [Lead Yourself First by Raymond M. Kethledge & Michael S. Erwin](#)
 - [The Courage To Be Disliked by Ichiro Kishimi and Fumitake Koga](#)
- We play roles in each others' stories. A small impact in yours could be a major turning point in mine.
- Advocate for diverse opinions
- Recognize your own blind spots & biases
- Protect mentees from savvy co-workers who might see them as an opportunity to shirk their own responsibilities
- You may be in a situation where you're being asked to mentor someone older than you. Age isn't everything, but it definitely is something. We're hard-wired to defer to older people.

- It can be awkward for them, learning from someone younger.
- You should do this for anyone, but especially in this situation: Identify which qualities of that person are admirable, or that you aspire to?
- My advice here is to lean into the differences. Make it more of a two-way street where they feel valued for their life experience,


4. Maintain balance

- You must support current management structures
 - Honor the methods, processes & history of the company and people who came before
 - Understand that fully before making judgements & changes
 - And teaching is a great way to fully understand an aspect of your business
- Strive to avoid double-standards in how you communicate up versus down
- Criticize in private, praise in public
- Provide a map: The more broad & detailed it is, the easier to chart their development path
 - But avoid too much detail where it stifles their capacity to explore along the way
 - They might even want to chart a new path or have different destinations in mind
- Resist the urge to appear pristine: Point out when you make mistakes.
 - Be sure to illustrate how things are handled when things go wrong - not just when a process goes smoothly!
 - Focus on fixing problems both internally and with clients.
- Assess skill & job imbalances to maximize engagement & productivity.
 - Don't just identify if a person's job responsibilities aren't a good match for their skills. Assess the needs & weaknesses of your organization, and if your mentee's talents could help, feel free to point out connections.
 - Remember: All your management likely knows of these new employees is what they can remember from the interview process. They will definitely listen when a trusted employee helps identify undercover skills or unseen connections within the company.
 - Put another way: Often people are hired to plug a hole in the ship. But those people might just be capable of being a lookout to avoid more rocks, or have a knack for building a tighter-knit crew, or eventually helping to steer the boat in a better/new direction.
- **Remember that everyone is the hero of their own story.** So learn each of their internal narratives:
 - What drives them?
 - What motivated them to take the role or join the company?
 - What's going to motivate them to stay
 - What fears do they have about their new role? The company? Membership?
- Be mindful of your own internal narratives. The importance (or lack thereof) of your mentorship efforts.
- Remember that for anyone, starting a new job is likely filled with some anxiety. It's exciting, sure... But it can be hard to see ahead to the future - which would make anyone nervous.
 - Your advice & teachings can act as a sort of time machine, let them see some of those future potentialities. Or like I said earlier, add details to their map to aid their journey.
- Don't split your personality if you're dealing up the org chart of down it. Be yourself always.

- Consider a mentoring journal, or a place to keep notes.
 - Be careful to avoid cataloging personal information on your mentees.
 - One interesting idea comes from Peter Drucker: Feedback Analysis. Write down what you expect to happen as a result of an action, file it away for a few months, then come back & review to gauge how reality compares to your expectations.

Pinkcast 4.26. Here's Peter Drucker's simple method for improving your performance. | Daniel H. Pink

LINKS AND FURTHER READING: Drucker's article, "Managing Oneself," is worth a read. This summary of Drucker's thinking includes his point about what he calls "feedback analysis."

 https://www.danpink.com/pinkcast/pinkcast-4-26-heres-peter-druckers-simple-method-for-improving-your-performance/?utm_source=Dan+Pink%27s+Newsletter&utm_campaign=0caa9f971b-September+6+Pinkcast&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_4d8277f97a-0caa9f971b-313701441



5. Meet people halfway

- What works for you won't necessarily work for them
- Don't overcompensate for their weaknesses
- Help when requested, but resist the urge to impose. We each have enough of our own tasks in life. No reason to work those belonging to others.
- Knowledge resides in the body & the soul, not just in the mind. Therefore, we have to learn by doing, not just telling.
 - Have mentees work problems, face resistance.
 - Seek out opportunities to challenge them.
 - We rarely get perfect situations, so focus on dealing with imperfect ones.
 - This is why focused not just on the how but the why can help newbies make appropriate, justifiable decisions.
- People don't respect titles for very long. Actions get respected far more than words
 - This transition happens a lot faster than you think.
 - Don't underestimate people's capacity for sniffing out bullshit.

Episode 12 Quote:

Associate with people who may improve you, admit people whom you can improve. The process is mutual; Men learn as they teach. - Seneca