

Mentoring Future Nonprofit Leaders

Setting the Framework for Success – Part 1



"The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men (women) to do what he (she) wants done, and the self-restraint to keep from meddling with them while they do it."
- Theodore Roosevelt

Where have all the leaders gone? How do you cultivate a leader in a nonprofit? The state of organizational leadership today is at a critical point. How senior leaders act now will dictate what we experience tomorrow!

Observing senior leadership today, whether within the military (alarming, far too many senior officers are no longer cognizant of basic functional operations they are tasked with), within government (managers appear incapable of getting employees to work together, and accept an environment of dysfunction where you can't get rid of a bad employee), or within nonprofits (where a protectionist mindset to keep one's own job by mid-level managers causes a guarded interaction with others), would lead an outside observer to conclude that leadership development is evaporating before one's very eyes.

Far too often, great followers and future leaders are stymied by poor and ineffective organizational leadership development programs and opportunities. Recent studies by the American Business Institute, reinforced by a client survey by JMI, were revealing.

Shockingly, survey data consistently showed that the first thought of a man when promoted in the workplace is, "What must I do to get the next promotion and how fast?" whereby the mindset of a woman promoted in the workplace centers around, "What is expected of me in this new position to succeed?"

A simple solution is to establish an environmental mindset of growing successful future leaders and placing present leaders on notice by active participation in some sort of Leadership Mentor Development Program. Some effective guideposts for designing an effective mentoring approach to cultivate and grow true leaders are to:

1. Select solidly performing mentors who are at least two direct-report positions removed from the individual to be mentored. This positional space between mentor and mentee allows for greater interaction and giving on the part of the mentor.
2. Allow the relationship to have both 'formal' (measurement protocols and assignments) and 'informal' (conversational and relationship-driven) contacts.
3. Have predetermined objectives for both mentor and mentee and an objective means by which to measure and hold all parties accountable.

In their efforts to remain competitive, most nonprofits have actually created their present problems by expecting great leaders from within to step forward and lead teams to greatness. By creating environments of competition within, individuals have actually seen that what gets rewarded is what they should do, and for most this seems to mean "How do I attract the spotlight directly at me in a favorable manner?" and they do so at any cost.

The costs of the past will pay heavy penalties in our future unless senior leaders remove reality blinders and institute rigorous developmental programs to ensure a prosperous future.

"When the student is ready, the teacher will reveal themselves." - Unknown, as told by Jim Stovall, CEO, Narrative Television Network.

So how do you cultivate a leader within? In today's demanding work environment, everyone must have a little leadership within themselves, and at times a real leader needs to step forward and lead others to greatness.

This takes an active and systematic approach for developing those within a nonprofit. A model for an effective "Leadership Mentor Development Program" may incorporate a five-step approach.

Mentor Level One – An elementary mentor, whereby the mentor possesses patience and great basic knowledge of a subject matter, which needs to be instilled into another person.

Mentor Level Two – The graduation of the mentee to a secondary mentor who can provide opportunities for the mentee to apply this new knowledge or skill. This secondary mentor serves as a contact person for the mentee while they are being drilled in the application of this knowledge, and assists them in becoming both comfortable and proficient with this knowledge base.

Mentor Level Three – A post-secondary mentor who has the capacity to constructively challenge the mentee to seek new applications for this basic knowledge base and encourages them to seek greatness with it.

Mentor Level Four – A master mentor who has a well-positioned network of stakeholders and decision makers across organizational lines that can serve to promote and sell the mentee to others, unbeknownst to them.

Mentor Level Five – That level in which a mentee has grown and developed through the previous levels and has demonstrated a grasp and application of knowledge and experience, and has, therefore, earned the right to become a mentor themselves and grow another person. Now the process renews, with reverse mentor relationship ability!

This model may serve as a powerful template to dictate very specifically what the responsibilities may be for each level in the mentor-to-mentee development life cycle.

Another critical question lies with who has the right to serve as a mentor, now that there is an objective means for measuring the developmental progress of a mentee. Considerations in selecting, recruiting or accepting nominations/applications for mentors follow:

1. A willingness on the part of the mentor to invest time and energy into the mentee is critical for this growth relationship to develop present and future organizational leaders.
2. A person with a reservoir of knowledge, both in terms of formal and informal knowledge/training/skill attainment/certifications, that can be deposited into a willing mentee and thus enable a shorter learning curve to develop!
3. An accomplished and dedicated senior member who may be of the mindset that because of their tenure they are no longer valued and appreciated can be an ideal candidate. This participation opportunity may be just the prescription for renewed energy.
4. A person with genuine vested interest in the organization's success and core survival will be an exceedingly diligent mentor and take the mentee's interest to heart.

A fast track to failure in a Leadership Mentor Development Program is accepting any individual into participation who does not adhere to any of the above benchmark suggestions.

An Ohio State University study indicated that professional women in the workplace with mentor relationships were as much as 68 times more promotable and marketable in their careers than individuals with no mentor relationships. The question for organizations and for managerial leaders to ask is, "Can we afford not to invest in our personnel asset by not having a mentor program?"

"If a man empties his pyres into his head, no one can take it away from him. An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest."
- Benjamin Franklin

More to come in the next issue...

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