

8 Tips for Successful Mentoring

The ability to succeed in one's professional endeavors often does not occur without some form of mentoring. Even the most self-driven and highly motivated individuals require guidance and seek advice from time to time. Based on the fact that mentoring is an essential part of officership, it is important to learn how to become an effective mentor.

Over the course of my professional career as an officer and clinician, I have had the privilege of working with and for individuals who took pride in mentorship. As a result of being exposed to excellent mentoring, I accomplished career milestones in a timely manner and have learned the importance of leading and empowering junior officers as they strive to accomplish their goals and pursue their professional aspirations.

Successful mentoring is one of the most important interpersonal components of building a powerful and healthy organization. However, it is important to note that successful mentoring is a process and skill set that is learned over time and requires practice. As you strive to become a successful mentor you should consider and apply the following tips:

Discuss and establish expectations up-front

Successful mentors are good communicators and planners. They understand the importance of establishing expectations in the early phase of the mentor/mentee relationship. It is important to make sure that the mentor and mentee are on the same page in regards to what is required of each other. Minimizing confusion and clarifying expectations is critical to establishing a healthy mentor/mentee relationship.

Lead by example

Always be willing to jump in the trenches and demonstrate how to travel the road to success. Respect is vital in mentor/mentee relationships and is often earned by leading and guiding. The old adage "Do as I say, not as I do" is definitely outdated. Leading by example builds respect and trust in the mentor/mentee relationship.

Be flexible in your thinking

Flexibility is the key to growth for all humans. Remember that the mentor/mentee relationship is an interactive process and that information should flow in both directions. Successful mentors lead, but also follow. Look for opportunities to learn from your mentee and encourage him or her to respectfully challenge you to remain current and knowledgeable. Successful mentors take pride in learning and welcome opportunities to grow.

Take care of yourself

The mentor/mentee relationship is primarily lead by the mentor. Therefore, it is imperative that mentors take care of themselves. Successful mentors acknowledge and recognize that they can't give what they do not have. Teaching mentees the importance of engaging in healthy behavior and delegating is an important element of the mentor/mentee relationship. Successful mentors understand that professional development can come to a standstill if emotional, physical or spiritual health is comprised on a regular basis.

Maintain a Positive Attitude

Any organization is only as good as the people who work in it. Successful mentors understand that they have the ability to set the tempo and standard for less experienced people. In some mentor/mentee relationships there will be some level of tension, conflict or disagreement. However, successful mentors realize that their attitude will influence how the conflict is resolved. Successful mentors strive to maintain a positive attitude when faced with adversity.

Take pride in helping others and be genuine

Successful mentors are compassionate about helping others because they realize that their success did not occur without the help of others. Develop a sense of compassion for helping others and guide them out of genuine concern for their professional growth and not out of obligation. Mentees are more likely to gravitate toward and connect with mentors who are genuine.

Be knowledgeable about career advancement opportunities and requirements

A key responsibility of any mentor is to assist mentees in their professional development. This requires mentors to be familiar with career advancement opportunities and requirements that are relevant to their mentees. While it is the mentee's primary responsibility to be aware of career advancement opportunities, mentors should also be knowledgeable. Successful mentors provide helpful and accurate information to steer mentees in the right direction.

Stay focused on the overall mission

Successful mentors lead and guide because they understand that successful accomplishment of the organization's mission requires everyone to contribute. They do not get distracted by "temporary" change or chaos. Successful mentors keep their eyes on the prize (mission) during change and assist mentees in doing the same.

Guiding and leading individuals who are less experienced can be very challenging, but also rewarding. Do you remember the time when you longed for support and guidance? As you move forward in your professional endeavors and enter into mentor/mentee relationships, please consider the tips outlined above -our future is in your hands.