I was recently invited to participate in a leadership panel at work on which the panelists, all senior managers in our organization, were asked to address questions about our own leadership influences and development and offer a bit of advice to developing leaders who made up the audience. The panel moderator asked us to speak to the influence of mentors in our lives and careers. The panelists were also asked to express our views on opportunities for employees to grow within our organization and the relationship between those opportunities and mentoring. As I prepared to answer the first question, I reflected on how, though having never benefited from a formal mentoring relationship, a number of mentors had shaped my life and career, as well as my leadership philosophy and approach. A number of mentors had shaped my life and career, as well as my leadership philosophy and approach. Some people, whose mentorship really mattered to me, were only passing through my life; temporary influencers who, just the same, left their mark on me. Sometimes those gifts were big, other times small, sometimes obvious, other times not-so-obvious and maybe even unknown to me at the time. Other mentors played a big role in my life and career and affected me obviously and profoundly. Sometimes those gifts were big, other times small, sometimes obvious, other times not-so-obvious and maybe even unknown to me at the time. Other mentors played a big role in my life and career and affected me obviously and profoundly.

The best mentoring relationships, the ones with the most meaningful and durable impact, are both mutual and reciprocal. By definition, the mentor should bring more experience to any mentoring arrangement than the mentee. However, in high-quality mentoring relationships, both mentor and protégé learn and grow from the relationship. It stands to reason that any protégé worth mentoring brings insight, experience, and talents to the table. Consequently, mentors in a high-quality mentoring partnership should want and expect to be influenced by their mentee’s perspective, and both people in the relationship should expect professional and personal growth. Our panel moderator asked us how individuals can develop themselves as leaders. I offered that I believe a person can grow as a leader, not only by being mentored, but by mentoring someone. I have found that, by helping someone become their ideal self, I connect with the person I strive to be. The most effective mentors, those who can help proteges achieve truly transformative change, approach their mentoring task with humility. A humble mentor is one that understands that, by exposing their own vulnerability and imperfection, they can provide a reliable, empowering role model; reduce the power differential between mentor and mentee; and open the door to their influence. This can present a challenge for senior leaders, requiring them to check their ego, be honest about what they don’t know, and model comfort with a reciprocal relationship. Focus on the whole person and extend the breadth of mentoring outcomes. Too often, mentors approach their assignment simply as a training program focused around the mentee gaining job skills or as a quick path to career advancement. However, my best mentors took me well beyond skill building and job seeking; helping to shape my character and values and release what is within them, focusing on the relationship, seeking mutual benefit, being humble in your mentorship, focusing on the whole person, listening, being loyal, and honest.

Effective organizations know that people perform better, advance faster, and stick around when they have effective mentors. That’s why smart organizations have embraced the concept of mentoring. Technically, mentoring is a professional relationship in which an experienced person helps a less experienced person develop specific skills and knowledge, thereby enhancing the less-experienced person’s professional and personal growth. However, good mentoring is more than a training program focused around the mentor gaining job skills or a quick path to advancement. I think of mentoring both as a powerful form of leadership and as a serious responsibility to another person. When we mentor someone, we commit to helping them reach their potential and come closer to the person they want to be. Consequently, mentoring needs to be taken seriously and done well. I recommend that, if you intend to be someone’s mentor, that you focus on the principles of helping your mentee identify and release what is within them, focusing on the relationship, seeking mutual benefit, being humble in your mentorship, focusing on the whole person, listening, being loyal, and honest.
THOUGHTS ON LEADERSHIP

Mentoring 101 – for leaders today and tomorrow

Think of mentoring both as a powerful form of leadership and as a serious responsibility to another person.

by Mike DeGrosky

I was recently invited to participate in a leadership panel at work on which the panelists, all senior managers in our organization, were asked to address questions about our own leadership influences and development and offer a bit of advice to developing leaders who made up the audience. The panel moderator asked us to speak to the influence of mentors in our lives and careers. The panelists were also asked to express our views on opportunities for employees to grow within our organization and the relationship between those opportunities and mentoring.

As I prepared to answer the first question, I reflected on how, through having never benefited from a formal mentoring relationship, a number of mentors had shaped my life and career, as well as my leadership philosophy and approach. Some people, whose mentorship really mattered to me, were only passing through my life; temporary influencers who, just the same, left a mark on me. Sometimes those gifts were big, other times small, sometimes obvious, other times not-so-obvious and maybe even unknown to me at the time. Other mentors played a big role in shaping me, shaped me, influenced me, helped me pursue my potential, and are influencing, me. First, is an article by Anthony K. Tian (https://hbr.org/2017/02/what-the-best-mentors-do). Rounding out the group is a second article by John and Smith on reciprocal mentorship and cross-gender mentoring relationships (https://hbr.org/2018/03/mentoring-women-is-not-about-trying-to-restore-themutm_campaign=hbrwomen_source-linkedinutm_medium-social). I recommend each of these articles to anyone contemplating a mentoring arrangement either as a mentor or a mentee.

As I read these articles and I reflected on my recent answers to our panel’s assigned questions, I recalled why I am such an advocate of mentoring. However, I also remembered that mentoring can be ineffective and even risky if not done well. What appears below is a fusion of ideas I assembled from the articles above as well as my own thoughts on mentoring based on my experiences both as mentor and protégé. I think of each as an essential mentoring principle.

I’ve been doing a little reading-up on mentoring lately, and discovered three excellent articles that resonated with me, and are influencing, me. First, is an article by W. Brad Johnson and David G. Smith (https://hbr.org/2018/01/the-best-mentors-think-like-michelangelo). The second is an article by Anthony K. Tian (https://hbr.org/2017/02/what-the-best-mentors-do). Rounding out the group is a second article by Johnson and Smith on reciprocal mentorship and cross-gender mentoring relationships (https://hbr.org/2018/03/mentoring-women-is-not-about-trying-to-restore-themutm_campaign=hbrwomen_source-linkedinutm_medium-social). I recommend each of these articles to anyone contemplating a mentoring arrangement either as a mentor or a mentee.

As I read these articles and I reflected on my recent answers to our panel’s assigned questions, I recalled why I am such an advocate of mentoring. However, I also remembered that mentoring can be ineffective and even risky if not done well. What appears below is a fusion of ideas I assembled from the articles above as well as my own thoughts on mentoring based on my experiences both as mentor and protégé. I think of each as an essential mentoring principle.

I think of mentoring both as a powerful form of leadership and as a serious responsibility to another person. When we choose to mentor someone, we are committing to helping someone reach their potential and come closer to the person they want to be. Leadership is a duty and, done well, requires a somewhat selfless commitment to others. This may be truer to mentoring than almost any other form of leadership, because mentoring is a serious responsibility to another person.

Be very loyal to your mentor. Organizations use mentoring to retain their high potential employees, to help them achieve their potential contribution to the organization, and to inspire