



Top Mentoring Myths Revealed

In a recently released book called “Made in Canada Leadership: Wisdom from the Nation's Best and Brightest on the Art and Practice of Leadership”, Henein and Morissette surveyed 295 exceptional leaders in a variety of industries and the #1 resource they recommend for future leaders is getting a mentor. Due to the high rate of change in our world today and because we are all going to have multiple careers in our lifetime, it is up to each individual to be their own career activist. People used to rely on the organization they worked for to map a career path for them, today it is up to each person to take charge of their personal and professional development.

As popular as mentoring is in the world of business, education, career and other fields, there remains many misconceptions about it. This article intends to bring some clarity to the term.

Myth #1: Mentoring is strictly for people with academic, social or other challenges.

Mentoring is for individuals who want to learn new things, develop their skills and make connections with people who are in the same field or share similar interests. Career-focused mentoring programs tend to search out students, graduates or individuals within specific industries who are motivated, who can commit to program requirements and have a desire to build their career.

Myth #2: Mentees have to be younger than their Mentors.

Although this is often the case, it is not true all of the time. Mentors are people with more experience who lend advice, guidance, encouragement and support to an individual with less experience. There are many situations in which a younger Mentor might be matched with an older Mentee. A professional with many years of experience in the workforce may look to a younger person for tips on the latest technology. Similarly, someone starting a second or third career may be older, yet have less experience in their new field, than a younger Mentor. Regardless of age, both Mentees and Mentors learn new things and develop their capabilities in a mentoring relationship.

Myth #3: Mentoring takes a lot of time.

A best practice of 2-4 hours per month for a period of 6 months or more is often used in formal programs. This has been proven to be the time needed for the development of an effective mentoring relationship and for 4-6 goals to be accomplished. With the increased demands on everyone's time it is easy to build flexibility into a mentoring relationship by choosing to communicate via in-person meetings, over the phone or online (or a combination of all three) – whatever works best for the individuals.

Myth #4: My boss will be/is my Mentor.

In some cases, this is true. However, it can be difficult to have your direct supervisor as a Mentor. For mentoring to be effective, there must be an environment of trust, honesty, balance, confidentiality and open dialogue. Mentees may not feel completely comfortable sharing their doubts, fears or future career plans with their current boss. Mentors on the other hand, may feel conflicted when they cannot separate information disclosed by a Mentee when making decisions about performance reviews, giving a promotion or a raise to the employee. When you have a Mentor-Mentee relationship with your boss it is great, however, an external Mentor may be able to offer objective advice as an individual outside of your organization on such topics as office politics, seeking advancement or dealing with a difficult client.

Myth #5: Mentors are always Executives.

Many business and professional mentors are in an Executive role, but anyone willing to share their knowledge, skills and experience can be a Mentor. Mentoring programs are becoming increasingly popular in business, service sectors, education, professional associations and private organizations as volunteer opportunities, for the purpose of career enhancement and promotion and as a way to on-board new employees.

Mentoring is an excellent way to learn more about an area you are interested in and to develop career opportunities for yourself. As a Mentee, it is a situation whereby you can receive advice and feedback about personal career goals from an individual who has likely walked in your shoes at one time or another. As a Mentor, you can experience the satisfaction of helping a colleague reach new levels of potential and practice your support and leadership capabilities. Mentoring participants who invest a small amount of time and an open heart always find rewards in the experience.

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