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Mindful Mentoring

Business and Operations//

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Being a mentor surpasses the responsibility of new hire orientations and campus tours. Meaningful mentoring is a deeper relationship between two faculty (or staff) members, focused on revealing and amplifying strengths, patiently guiding, and inspiring. It is a big responsibility, one that should not be taken lightly, and—if paired correctly—can positively influence not only the mentee, but also your overall school culture.

Mindful mentoring isn't a trending concept in the HR world or a refreshed concept to empower businesses; it's a model that's been used with great success throughout millennia. For the mentee, the mentor is one of the most important people in his or her life. This is someone who they can let their guards down with, share perspectives, ask "silly" questions, and lean on for insight and knowledge that formal education didn't address.

Consequently, some schools have built mentoring programs and incentives into their faculty and staff contracts. Typically, employees are paired outside of their generation (eg., Boomers with Gen Y), and are required to dedicate an allotted amount of time per week together. These programs are usually monitored by the Division Head, Department Chair, or School Head and incorporated into formal reviews. These programs are as unique as the school missions and cultures.

Although mentoring is vital for professional (and individual) growth, often there is little guidance for the mentor. What does it take to be not just a good mentor, but also a truly inspirational mentor? Here are some collected tips from HR professionals across the Internet.

Practice mindfulness.

Living in the moment or being mindful is not just for those studying yoga. Practicing mindfulness can help increase attention spans and general awareness—which are the first steps in active listening. Mentors need to be capable of sitting patiently, in the current moment, fully focused on their mentees.

Have A++ listening skills.

Being a mentor requires a keen ear skilled at honing in on areas that can be grown. Listening is key communicating. Sometimes suggestions aren't even needed because the mentee may be able to answer their questions simply by hearing themselves talk through the issue out loud. But, even when they don't resolve their own issues, the key role of the mentor is to listen in an atmosphere where trust and safety is secured and then inspire the mentee to approach the situation from differing angles they are comfortable with.

Take on a mentee you respect professionally and personally.

Mentorships are deeper than coaching relationships. They often venture into aspects of personal lives because of the problem-solving, self-growth nature of the bond. Because of this, it's vital that mentoring teams be compatible.

Be willing to grow as well as inspire.

Great mentors understand that this relationship is about give and take from both directions—a vulnerable partnership. Just as there is so much to give, there is often just as much to learn. Mediocre and poor mentors take on the task as a way of putting themselves in the spotlight. Great mentors aren't focused on how this relationship makes them look to others or their boss—they're genuinely dedicated to passing the torch of excellence on to other motivated, dedicated, young professionals.

Be committed.

Mentor relationships are most effective when they evolve over a year. Both the mentor and the mentee should be committed to the journey. All relationships need time to mature and evolve. These connections are no different.

Mentors need mentors!

There is no end to self-improvement, learning, or growth except death. Mentors learn a great deal from those they're mentoring, but they too can have mentors who encourage them to reach further and who inspire them to think differently—and it doesn't have to be another member of your faculty or staff. There are numerous online networks for mentors offering collaboration, secure listening, inspiration, and even social interaction.

You don't need a formal mentoring program at your school to embark on mentoring someone. It's helpful if such programs are supported by your administration; however, creating a professional relationship with a colleague doesn't require a documented program. And, your first steps in becoming a mentor could be the inspiration your school needs to create such a program!

Additional ISM resources:

The Source for Business and Operations Vol. 9 No. 9 [*Are You a Reluctant \(or Unwilling\) Mentor?*](#)

The Source for School Heads Vol. 12 No. 4 [*How to Be More Than A Leader—Be A Mentor*](#)

The Source for School Heads Vol. 10 No. 9 [*Coaching the Coaches and Mentors*](#)

Additional ISM resources for Gold members:

I&P Vol. 38 No. 12 [*ISM's Relational Coaching Model*](#)

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