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The Mentorship Blueprint

Mentorship is not a foreign concept to those who succeed in national security career fields. Most people understand mentorship is important, and they likely have several types of mentors on whom they can count. To establish this lasting relationship requires an individualized approach because each relationship is unique. What is required to create a unique relationship is not foreign, and this document serves to outline the best method to map out mentorship approaches and goals. Tried and true methods are gathered here to guide and develop the mentorship relationship, to help ensure it remains on course and productive with both quantitative and qualitative results.

Mentorship relationships begin with a sharing the mentor's experience, a long iterative phase of discovery and development, and lastly, a mentee's expansion in talents and skills. Following this blueprint, a mentorship relationship can reach new levels, elevate both members, and create lasting impacts. The pertinence of this stems from the necessity of mentorship. Approximately three out of four hiring officials (74 percent) say job seekers should have a mentor with whom to talk about whether their skills and experience match those required for jobs that match their interests. Unfortunately, only 40 percent of job seekers report having this source.¹

Mentor's Experience

Begin by sending a brief message introducing yourself. The message should be a short biography, of not only work experiences, but also what you see as strengths. This information will help the mentee assess what you, as the potential mentor, bring to the relationship. While doing this, consider what you want to get out of the mentoring relationship—***this is a two-way street***. A mentor will only take a mentee seriously if he or she is sincere in the search for mentorship. Do not find a clone of you; diversely mentor. The best mentorship relationships take a mentee who is strong and makes them stronger. Other great relationships are when a mentor seeks out someone who is struggling, and knows that he or she has the strengths that can help the mentee. Offering to help coach someone in that regard brings value to your own growth.

Starting the connection is key. Begin by listening and telling stories. These don't need to be about work but rather experiences that illustrate your values, your perspectives and biases. Place yourself in their shoes and understand, sometimes a mentor can be intimidating, especially if you hold a powerful or influential position. Starting off can appear rocky because

¹ THE CAREER ADVISORY BOARD Job Preparedness Indicator Study, DeVry University, 2013. https://www.careeradvisoryboard.org/content/dam/dvu/www_careeradvisoryboard_org/cab-2013-jpi-es.pdf (accessed May 4, 2020).

the mentee could be intimidated by the mentor. Stories about you or your experiences, particularly those that are about the mentee's age in stage, in life or career, can put mentees at ease. This beginning starts with an understanding of whom you both are now, and where you are at in the process of development. Assuring a mentee that you are willing to dedicate the time is both meaningful and relevant.

Historically, exemplar mentor relationships are bountiful. Bill Gates had Dr. Ed Roberts. General Dwight Eisenhower had Brigadier General Fox Connor. Steve Jobs had Robert Friedland. Elizabeth Taylor had Aubrey Hepburn. Mentorship relationships exist across the entire work spectrum. They are important because of their lasting impression on those who endeavor to serve in this role. Mentorship is different from sponsorship or championship. Mentorship digs deeper and gets to the heart of creating individuals from what they are to what they want to be.

Discovery and Development

Following an introduction, and the established start of a mentorship relationship, a framework is necessary for future mentorship sessions. This framing helps walk you through several months of discovery learning. With a growth mindset, as a mentor, this blueprint assists in easing the facilitation of a great mentorship relationship.

Discovering Strengths & Weaknesses

In any relationship, understanding what motivates someone helps to clarify how to work with him/her. In a mentorship both players can optimize the time together by understanding each other's strengths. A mentor typically has a solid understanding of whom he or she is, and with this knowledge, how best to help mentees discover their advantages. In the information space there are hundreds of personality tests or introspective ways to determine a person's best

self. The recommended, “Strengths Based Leadership” by Tom Rath and Barry Conchie, is one of the better tools to use in a mentorship relationship because it decodes strengths into usable approaches to discuss. Use the results to shape a plan forward with your strengths.

An additional four questions you can start with, when working with a mentor, looks at how they operate.

1. What are my strengths in the workplace?

Here you can shape and discuss if your mentee is good at planning, problem solving, thinking about problems and moving towards a solution. This question can illustrate how they are in terms of tackling work.

2. What are my strengths in working with people?

Find your mentees’ abilities to see themselves and how they deal with people. In their interactions are they a consensus builder or do they relate to people on a one to one basis? If your mentee is the rare breed that brings people together and demonstrates a visionary approach, show him/her the advantage of that strength.

3. What are my strengths in dealing with information?

Mentees who are analytical in their process of information and detail-oriented versus those who think about the big picture, see the world differently. There are people who think creatively and work to dig into highly complex problems. Others like a linear approach with steps, sequence, and process.

4. What are my strengths in influencing others?

There are those who are simply drawn towards leadership and work to engage that strength. Others are more of an investigator and could use mentorship to see how this strength is important in many areas of a work environment. Some mentees have the strength to take a failing project and turn it into a raging success.

A practical example of how to conduct this exercise comes from my own experience where I used my strengths to assist one of my mentees.² With this mentee, our strengths were absolutely opposite of one another. I was able to appreciate his abilities and encourage him to proceed using the skills which he possessed rather than use the strengths which I found

² Executing / Achiever, Connectedness, Relationship/Positivity, Strategic Input and Strategic Learner. The mentee was Arranger, Restorative, Responsible, Ideation, and Developer.

successful.. For instance, my mentee's strength allowed him to theoretically make connections between what is and what can be. This strength of a creative imagination was exceptionally useful in a very linear and hierarchical organization. Encouraging this strength allowed him to break from convention and utilize his creative ideas to solve a very big operational problem within the organization.

Understanding weaknesses is absolutely as important as understanding strengths. With mentors, you've got to dig to ensure they understand the entirety of whom they are and sometimes the unvarnished truth of where they've got a hole in their swing. To understand a weakness is to look at the flip side of a strength. For instance, one exceptionally motivated mentee had the strength of competitiveness and the aggressive nature to win. For my mentee her win at all costs attitude developed a vengeance- like drive where seeing others as passive or as a loser came up frequently in our discussions. The interplay to understand this weakness assisted this mentee in ratcheting down the negative comments about others and using her strength to achieve great things in her career. In essence, the steps my mentee took in this exercise prevented the potential development of a toxic leader.

Building Authentic Leadership

Once a mentor understands the strengths of a mentee, he or she determines the best way toward moving to the next step, sketching out the framework to help the mentee to take the next step towards his or her end goal. The use of discussion traits and the mentor's guidance provides mentees with a visualization of what **courage, character, commitment, respect,** and **integrity** looks like and aids in their understanding of personal leadership development and vision. As you are mentoring, helping individuals discover building blocks to leadership strengthens their foundation. During development, mentees can discover examples of these traits succeeding or failing in the workplace. This aids also in the development of their own vision of how they exemplify and explain leadership to themselves.

Beginning with **courage**, a wonderful definition by General Ann Dunwoody, states simply that courage is, “having the guts to do the right thing for the right reasons.”³ Courage is important in many areas. In the classroom and in the boardroom, courageous acts exist. An example of mentoring someone to understand acting courageously in the workplace occurred amongst leaders in the national security field. Courageously, an intelligence analyst articulated and clearly presented information to a policy maker that his decision was flawed. The pressure to stay in line was intense, but in this example, teaching a mentee how critical this input was demonstrated to him that courage occurs on and off the battlefield. Courage to do the right thing, under pressure, is an area best discussed before a mentee encounters that situation.

The next leadership trait is **character**. The discussion of this trait should begin with the mentor using past examples. History is chalk-full of illustrations of when a leader with the strength of character made a difference in the outcome of someone’s life. Discussing the exemplary work of Thurgood Marshall, Malala Yousafzai, and even Benjamin Franklin, can pull forward decisions your mentee might consider in life. Work to teach mentees to listen to people around them. One great exercise to use for mentors is to have them enquire about leaders around the workplace, to people who they deem in leadership positions, and why they are successful. When your mentee reports that people reference their time in position or title, you can walk them through why referencing rank or longevity is an example of poor leadership and weak character. If a mentee has people reference their credentials, certificates, or education they may be around moderately successful people but not the best ones to follow. Your mentee is surrounded by great leaders of character when they enquire why these leaders are successful and their leadership talks about bringing value to others and opening the door for those they lead.

³ GEN Ann Dunwoody, *A Higher Standard*, (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2015), 97.

Another leadership discussion to hold with a mentee concerns the trait of **commitment**. David Brooks, in “The Road to Character,” discusses continually asking oneself what’s most important and mapping it out like a business plan.⁴ The trait of commitment to achieving something greater than yourself falls in line with this strategy. Providing mentees guideposts works to help them see how they serve and lead their lives with purpose and meaning. It is not impossible to start exploring this question with younger mentees because it will uncover what they value. As a mentor, by listening, value is added through the explanation of your strategy and context from your own authentic development of committed leadership.

The trait of **respect** immediately brings to mind Aretha Franklin and her ability to turn one word into an epic song. It rings true today about the importance of respecting yourself and finding out what it means to your mentee. In the framework of leadership components, respect is critical to growing oneself and then applying to others. For instance, I’ve helped mentees understand respect by outlining, with them, what they hold as sacred in their life. For instance, when I’ve mentored people who are new parents, we often discuss the respect of this new massive change in their life. If *they* don’t set boundaries and demonstrate to others what is sacred in their lives and ask others to respect that, then no one will. The demonstrable area of treating oneself and one’s own time with respect provides a practical application of what’s most important. Extrapolating this more broadly and respecting others is merely a reflection of this same effort. How you treat yourself directly plays into how you treat others. Therefore, if you’re noticing behaviors in a mentee’s life, both internal and external, where her or she needs to shift, it’s incumbent upon you as a mentor to speak up and walk your mentees forward to where that negative behavior, comment, or attitude might land them in the future.

⁴ David Brooks, *The Road to Character*, (New York: Random House, 2015), 21.

The last and most critical lessons you can provide for your mentee revolves around the subject of **integrity**. Honesty and truth are critical when working with a mentee. If there is one area in which to dedicate a significant amount of time to, this is **the** area. One of the most desired qualities people are looking for in a boss is honesty. Having a strong ethical background can help you lead your mentee away from going down dark paths that would compromise integrity. When I began at the United States Military Academy at West Point, one of the bedrock principles drilled into us was that a “cadet will not lie, cheat, or steal nor tolerate those who do.” This simply and clearly let us know that our actions would be held to this standard. It was a rather high bar to which to hold oneself and when the culture met this expectation, it became the norm. When starting to discuss integrity, honor, and trust with your mentee harken to Albert Einstein’s quote that, “whoever is careless with the truth in small matters cannot be trusted with the important matters.”⁵ Lessons from a mentor where teams without trust were dysfunctional and fell apart are critical examples for mentees. This opportunity to stress integrity in the development of your mentee must receive focus and emphasis because trust matters.

Despite all that is said, perfection in leadership is not attainable. Discussing with your mentee examples of where leaders have failed or where there are cracks in the system helps. One example I use is about integrity and openness. Complete honesty is not always feasible. There are areas in our work where you serve as a mentor to someone but cannot be fully transparent due to the very nature of the work. For instance, within many business cultures, the subject of compensation has yet to receive full openness and transparency. As a mentor, you may decide to be open, honest, and truthful about the amount of pay you are receiving. Or you could decide to keep this information private. That being said, you can demonstrate

⁵ No author, *Leadership Through the Ages*, (New York: Miramax Books, 2003), 3.

transparency by explaining to your mentee your rationale for not being fully transparent. The explanation for your actions helps build a stronger, trusting relationship.

Exploring Challenges

Exploring challenges with a mentee begins the path of teaching self-reflection. Start with the question, “Where do you see yourself ten years from now?” and see where it goes. Ten years into the future is a long enough focus area where it’s unclear what exactly will take place along the path and visionary enough to allow for some desire into the future. Simply put, it’s time enough to put a valuation of your effort onto either a number of where you want your bank account to be, a particular lifestyle in which you will be living, or reaching towards a dream of something to attain. Getting a mentee to take that visionary step forward occurs multiple ways. The use of design theory works well here. Begin with where your mentee is right now and what he or she is going through. Then begin to project forward and identify possible lifestyles. This explores the hope and possibility for change, if needed, or the path to move forward along the trajectory your mentee is on.

If starting with a question about what future appeals to you, look for jobs, people, cultures that are inviting to a mentee. This is similar to provide a menu of options and brainstorming possibilities. With one mentee I explored four separate paths forward. We looked at jobs as a consultant, a coach, a public relations position, and a military officer. They all fit within her wheelhouse and each appealed to her in a different way. Next, we explored what kind of people she wanted to be around. Looking at different examples, we discussed personalities, cultures, and the attitudes of individuals in each of the projected areas which she might enjoy in the next decade. This easily cut out some of the options of a life path because she did not enjoy spending time with certain segments and cultures of one of the options. Again, knowing what mentees do *not* want to do is just as important in challenging them as what they do want to accomplish.

Exploring challenges also considers mentees' current work environments. Start by listing out areas where, if they were given three wishes, they would improve the workplace and what change they'd like to implement. Then break down the three lofty wishes into goals, using realistic management objectives. With this a tried and true method, results keep a mentee focused on taking on the challenges of change and making it happen. By placing specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely (SMART) objectives towards the goal for change, you've challenged mentees to achieve an accomplishment that they'd held as only a wish before. This provides a time-bound and an accountable activity for you to explore with them as you serve as their mentor.

When looking at broad questions with a mentee and exploring well into the future, a clear path sometimes forms. The most important part of challenging mentees is that you're providing them optional blueprints for building a bridge into the future. You may give them the hammer, the nails, and even supply the wood. What's important here is that the mentees build the bridge. They'll have to do the hard work of constructing this forward path ahead of themselves. Do not do it for them because it fails to provide them the learning experience they richly need to achieve success.

Transformative Steps

With goals in hand, support mentees through this new approach. This is especially important if they are starting a new job or entering a new field or profession. My recommended reading for any mentees transitioning is Dr. Michael D. Watkins' books on "The First 90 Days." Additionally, I've often recommended "The First 90 Days in Government" to those starting any job within a

sector that coordinates with national security.⁶ The nine steps below are each explored with advice to use when mentoring someone through the nine steps during the first 90 days:

1. **Job expectations** – Help mentees understand their new position and the expectations that come with it. Mentoring someone into a new position with two direct reports and his or her first manager opportunity requires a different approach than mentoring someone who is taking on the responsibility of leading a 500-person organization. Shaping an understanding of objectives and the differing level of importance required for each is pertinent for a mentee to understand.
2. **Strategy to Situation** – Have your mentee explain initial impressions. Remember this is within the first 90 days of a job. Does the organization need to turn around or realign? There are drastically different processes and procedures to conduct either type of change.
3. **Learn** – Explore with your mentee the perceived or real challenges. Explore the areas of resources, barriers to growth or commitment, and most importantly, if there are issues with trust in the workforce.
4. **Early Wins** – Map out and define one-year goals with a mentee. Often this occurs through changing the culture. A mentee requires a focused approach toward cultural change. To create early wins in this department, ensure that quarterly and attainable steps are outlined and also accounted for during your mentorship.
5. **Build the team** – You're mentoring someone to serve as a future leader. In this aspect, you are paying it forward. By helping your mentee see the best path towards building his or her own team, you're adding to the environment of collaboration. Work to explore the strengths of your mentee and how to build a lasting team.
6. **Create alliances** – Encourage your mentee to work with people you know and trust. You're opening doors for them in different ways and creating a greater network. Building new alliances in the workplace allows for a much smoother transition in 90 days. Additionally, working to have them maintain an optimistic spirit and understand the silver lining to any situation remains important.

⁶ Peter H. Daly and Michael Watkins, *The First 90 Days in Government*, (Boston: Harvard Business School Press), 2006).

7. **Achieve alignments** – When alliances are solidifying, a look at the alignments of systems and policies should also occur. For instance, using systems thinking and work internal and external to the organization can help a mentor look at those who will help them achieve change. If mentees are simply networking for transactional connections, work to dissuade this behavior.⁷ Instead, look at the goodness that they can use with others to achieve change in a transformational manner.

8. **Avoid predictive surprises** – In any new organization a mentor serves best by helping the mentee avoid the landmines. Having already attended the course at the school of hard knocks, a mentor understands the advice of ensuring deadlines are met and time is of the essence in the first 90 days. Help your mentee know the end of the month report is due at the end of the month. Rather simplistic but absolutely critical. Be their truth teller when needed. Your trusted shove forward is better than a kick in the rear at work.

9. **Manage Yourself** – New and even seasoned managers can often neglect self-care. Especially when charging forward into a new position, it is critical to ensure your mentees not only take care of the people they lead but also take care of themselves. The sooner people recognize this the better. Ensure, even after the first 90 days, they know that they are always the best manager of their career and of their own success.

Consequential Changes

As in any organization, change is hard, and incredibly worthwhile. Consequentiality and lasting change depends upon how you help frame change to your mentee. Benjamin Franklin stated it clearly when he said, “there are no gains without pains.”⁸ A mentee working towards changing managerial style, the organization he or she is leading, or simply working on self-development, requires focused attention on change. In mentorship, changes are critical. A great resource to share with your mentor is Angela Duckworth’s seminal work, “Grit.” Dr. Duckworth

⁷ Luck is created through relationships and network. Who you are, passion points, see abilities and capabilities. You won’t get there on your own. Develop networks, multiple cups of coffee. Gets closer and closer. Think about you when you have opportunities.

⁸ Benjamin Franklin's Famous Quotes, The Franklin Institute, <https://www.fi.edu/benjamin-franklin/famous-quotes> (accessed on May 9, 2020).

discusses both the passion and perseverance surrounding those dedicated to a task. She also states that “the development of grit is not just about the quantity of time devoted to interests, but also the quality of time. Not just more time on task but better time on task.”⁹ Mentors are best served when they work with mentees to understand what that deliberate practice looks like and how to make change work.

The consequentiality of that change exists when mentees understand how critical it is to themselves or an organization. Providing them with feedback is necessary because once the level of the challenge meets the level of skill of mentees demonstrates they’re at the sweet point of expansion. Working to encourage their continued growth occurs when you encourage both reflection and then refinement of their developed processes that work. You’re offering life skills to this mentee that will be used well into the future. If they are falling short in their challenge, be candid and honest about where they are and where they want to go. It could simply be that they do not possess the skills required for the job. Your mentee may be a person who thinks grandiosely and is not realistic in the steps necessary for such a large challenge. More times than not, mentees are thinking too small and could challenge themselves with even greater efforts. Be the light to lead them toward that change.

Talents Recognized

The last step following the successful journey of your mentorship is to focus on the areas a mentee is best prepared to enter. Through discovery and focused time developing, a growth mindset now is the time to celebrate the strengths of your mentee. Looking at where he or she has come from and what he or she has learned will help you have them focus on the next steps. Talent recognition is key to discovering future paths. When people recognize their talents, they can profit from them. That’s why Upwork, Etsy and Fiverr keep thriving. Look at those websites

⁹ Angela Duckworth, *Grit*, (New York: Scribner), 118.

and see the diversity of talent there. Talk to your mentee and see where he or she can also profit from their talents.

Application of strengths and talents in different areas is the final and lasting step of a mentorship relationship. When a mentor positively monitors a mentee's performance and confirms the areas where he or she best performs, that mentee can look for ways in which to improve his or her strengths. With this, he or she will develop faster than when focusing on weaknesses. Because in the end, even more people than you expect are helped by a mentee's new talents. Others' lives may be changed because you helped your mentee grow. Mentoring is reciprocated in the future and the talent you've helped someone develop will further enhance some other person in the future. That's the key to great mentoring. As Jon Bunyan stated, "you have not lived today until you have done something for someone who can never repay you."

Concluding the Mentoring Relationship

All good things eventually come to an end. Mentoring relationships can continue throughout a lifetime, but most mentoring programs last a year and move forward when either the mentor or mentee move in a different direction. Recognizing this begins when you ask yourself the following questions:

- Did your mentee reach his or her goals and feel confident in closing out this relationship?
- Did the mentee need to adjust the goals given the feedback you received?
- Can this mentee focus on new or revised goals?
- Is the mentee willing to keep receiving mentorship at this point? Do you want him or her to?

Come to an agreement on the status of your relationship and move forward from there.

When ending a mentoring relationship, you want to be as polite and amicable as possible, which means no ghosting. Work towards a conclusion and stay in touch. Periodic touch points, if conducted bi-annually, work well to keep the relationship active and connected. Adam Grant

graciously stated about people who give, as mentors do, “get to the top without cutting others down, finding ways of expanding the pie that benefit themselves and the people around them.”¹⁰

A mentoring relationship develops talents, uncovers gifts, or discovers strengths, which are worth more than diamonds. To discover them, a mentee needs to dig for them. No one can dig to find what makes another really tick. Once found, remove the dust, and help your mentee polish them. The more we take care of mentees, the more we can recognize the other diamonds in others’ lives. Talents and gifts, similar to diamonds, will shine brightly and increase with value over time. Because you took the time to help another search for their talents, gifts and strengths, the return of your investment may be more than what you could *ever* have imagined.

¹⁰ Adam Grant, *Give and Take*, (New York: Penguin), 358.