



Transformational Leadership & Service Podcast

Episode 16 Transcript

What It Takes to be a Mentor

Mentoring is one of the hottest topics around today. We read about it in books and magazines. We hear it at conferences and in discussion groups. Some people wish to be one. Many of us have been convinced that all of us need at least one. But, who are these people? What have they got that I don't?

During a recent presentation to a corporate client, I was asked by one of the program participants if mentoring and leadership were actually one and the same. The answer I gave her that day was both yes and no. Let me explain.

Without question, a successful mentor must possess strong leadership qualities and skills. But, mentoring goes a step further. It requires a level of one-on-one involvement with individuals that even the best leaders sometimes never attain. In particular, there are three specific skills mentors must develop and hone.

Mentoring Skill # 1: Coaching

Good coaches are more than highly excitable men and women who seem to be able to sweat and scream precisely when the spotlight finds them. As a matter of fact, the best coaches do their most important work beyond the prying eyes of the public. In seclusion, they evaluate their organization's personnel needs, they understand the importance of placing the right person in the right position, they prepare a game plan for the competition and prepare their employees for the game plan. Finally, a good coach finds himself or herself on the sidelines encouraging the successful implementation of the created plan. Good coaching requires there to be a person for every role and for that person to be prepared to play their role flawlessly.

Mentoring Skill # 2: Counseling

Counseling is different than coaching in that a coach focuses on the overall team issues, while a counselor focuses on the issues of the individual members of that team. Which individual needs specific attention? What kind of attention is appropriate? How does he or she handle personal criticism/direction? How far is too far?

Most of us admit to being hesitant when it comes to getting too close to our employees, our team members, our followers. But, let's face the truth. If a person, in this case a mentor, has not taken the time to really get to know the person and his or her individual needs, how can that person ever hope to offer wise counsel? Even if they could offer wise counsel to someone they had spent little one-on-one time with, what motivation would the individual have to believe in and act on the counsel being offered?

Mentoring Skill # 3: Empowering

Simply defined, empowerment is willingly and knowingly granting your official power to others. Simple words, but a challenging concept, right? Not if you have planted your mentoring tap root in fertile soil.

If you have invested both the time and energy in proper coaching and individual counseling, then it's really not that hard to begin to let go of the reins, to begin to empower your followers. However, if you lay awake in bed at nights watching the overhead fan go round and round, it may be that you realize that you have taken some shortcuts with your leadership position.

But, it's never too late! There is still time to develop your skill as both leader and mentor. But, you can't ignore the differences. And you need to start today.