

Should You Flirt with and/or Stalk Someone You Think Might be a Good Mentor for You? And, can Unethical Protégés Team with Unethical Mentors and Become Successful?

Management Professor Stephen Bushardt says “Yes”

In the CoB’s Peer Review Team’s AACSB Accreditation Report (available at www.usmnews.net), the Peer Review Team made the point that the CoB needs to provide support for a mentor-protégé program in order to promote a higher level of scholarly output. In the article below (available at www.timbersnursery.com) the CoB’s own Stephen Bushardt (professor of management) explains how ethical and unethical CoB faculty protégés can locate ethical and unethical CoB faculty mentors who can help advance their own careers, as well as the AACSB Accreditation profile of the CoB.

Picking the Right Person for Your Mentor

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A mentor is the key to higher management for the aspiring young manager. The trick is to pick the right one—someone who has the knowledge and influence you need

The role mentors play in guiding the development of aspiring young managers is receiving increasing attention. One writer suggests that "to have a mentor is to be among the blessed, not to have one is to be damned to eternal oblivion, or at least mid-level status." Yet another writer suggests "that behind every successful executive there is a mentor."

The evidence tends to suggest that mentors are indeed helpful as aides to advancement. In one recent study of 1,200 persons whose promotions were announced in the *Wall Street Journal*, as many as two-thirds reported having a mentor. In addition, the same study reported that those who have had a mentor earn more money at a younger age and are happier with their career development.

The general idea is that a mentor is the key to higher management for aspiring young managers. Unfortunately, life is not so simple. Managers with mentors do remain at mid-level status, and behind many who fail to become successful executives there is the wrong mentor. Clearly, some mentors are better than others; so aspiring managers should assume an active role in insuring that they have the best possible mentor available to them.

Criteria for selecting a mentor

Important criteria in selecting a mentor are (1) that person can help you, (2) he or she has your confidence, (3) you can help that person, and (4) he or she has a successful track record of mentorship. The four criteria are rather general and should be tailored to fit the needs of the aspiring manager, which is to say that the qualifications for a good mentor depend on the person desiring one.

If the mentor is going to guide a new manager's growth and development, the mentor should possess the communication skills necessary to provide constructive feedback. Providing feedback is an integral part of the mentor's role. Again, his or her feedback style should match your own needs. Some people are blunt, which is excellent for some protégés, but others prefer a gentle mixing of tact and information. Your selection of a mentor should match your own communication style or else communication may break down.

The mentor-protégé relationship is one where both parties tend to be using each other. In selecting a mentor, one should realize that the mentor will use you, but you should have confidence that the mentor is using you for your own good. However, if you feel that the mentor will use you and then discard you, then you have picked the wrong mentor.

3. You can help that person. The mentor is more likely to use his or her time, knowledge, and influence to help the young protégé if he or she is getting something in return. The young protégé can flatter his or her mentor in order to feed the mentor's vanity. Being selected as a mentor tends to be flattering because the protégé is recognizing the superior qualities the mentor possesses. But the aspiring young manager can also provide his or her mentor with an important information channel that extends beyond formal channels of communication.

In addition, the young protégé can help his or her mentor to look good in the eyes of others by helping to get things done. The mentor can delegate tasks to the protégé that can fulfill his or her obligation to develop this individual and free up his or her own time for other tasks.

4. The mentor has a successful track record. The old adage that experience is the best teacher tends to be true with mentors as well. The experienced mentor often feels more comfortable in the relationship because he or she has a better understanding of the role. The young protégé has a difficult enough task getting ahead in the organization without having to train a mentor who lacks experience and may, therefore,

have to learn by trial and error. In addition, an experienced mentor has a track record. The aspiring manager can identify those potential mentors who have successfully served in a mentor capacity by identifying their past protégés.

Experienced mentors, as opposed to inexperienced ones, tend to be more difficult to acquire because they are often sought by many aspiring managers. In addition, a word of caution in selecting a mentor: It is better to have one who is not involved with other protégés since this tends to reduce the amount of time and energy that he or she can devote to you.

Strategy

Once the aspiring young manager has evaluated the prospective mentors against the criteria for selection and decided who is the best one, he or she should formulate a strategy to cultivate that individual. Most managers describe the mentor-protégé relationship as being established by the mentor, that is, the mentor selects the protégé. This may be true, but the protégé can cultivate the desired mentor by developing a five-part strategy: Be visible, indispensable, competent, interesting, and project upward mobility. The implementation of the five-part strategy must be tailored to fit the prospective mentor as well as the protégé.

Visibility. The aspiring young manager should assume roles and take part in activities that increase his or her visibility to the prospective mentor. In order for the mentor to select the young protégé, the mentor must have the opportunity to observe him or her. So remember, if you can choose your job, select the one that provides the greatest visibility to the desired mentor.

If you are not able to change jobs in the company, you can volunteer for various social committees or participate in professional organizations that provide visibility. If the prospective mentor belongs to various community civic clubs, membership in these organizations can provide the desired visibility. If the prospective mentor is an avid churchgoer, the aspiring manager can join the same church as a means of obtaining the desired exposure. The key element of the visibility strategy is to provide the prospective mentor with an opportunity to see you in action.

Competent. The reality of organization life is that many positions do not provide the opportunity for the aspiring young manager to demonstrate his or her leadership and organizing skills. And it is essential that the prospective mentor be aware of the competence level of the protégé because mentors tend to select protégés whom they perceive as competent. Your level of competence should be communicated through

your performance on the job. If this is not possible, then any position that provides visibility will do.

If the aspiring manager is a member of a local civic organization to which the prospective mentor belongs, he or she can volunteer for those activities that provide high visibility and do an excellent job. One young manager who spent several years on a job and had an excellent performance record failed to advance. His superior and desired mentor did not see him as promotable material--that is, not until attending a church picnic with his wife. The superior was impressed with the effectiveness and success of the gathering and later learned that the young manager was responsible.

Indispensable. In cultivating the prospective mentor, the young protégé should take steps to encourage the mentor to depend on him or her for getting tasks completed and for information. By becoming indispensable, the aspiring young manager has the opportunity to further demonstrate competence.

In addition, the increased contact provides additional opportunity to use the mentor's time for your own benefit--to develop trust and confidence, which improves communication. If through increased contact, distrust and suspicion develop then this probably is not the mentor for you.

Interesting. Mentors, like most people, enjoy those who share similar interests. In cultivating a mentor, you should find out his or her interests and hobbies. If the prospective mentor likes golf or collecting beer cans or antique cars, the young protégé should polish his or her knowledge of these areas or perhaps take lessons. One young protégé had a prospective mentor who collected antique clocks. On becoming aware of this interest, the young protégé purchased an antique clock and sought the advice of the prospective mentor on the quality of his find. After spending an entire Sunday in the prospective mentor's workshop, a mentor-protégé relationship was born.

Upwardly mobile. In cultivating a mentor, you are essentially asking for an investment of his or her time and energy to guide your development and growth. Be sure that you communicate this by the way you dress as well as by your behavior. Look and act the part of an upwardly mobile manager. If you fail to communicate your aspirations, you may end up with a good friend but not a mentor.

The mentor-protégé relationship is often discussed as a magical click that just happens. But most successful people realize their success occurred

because they made it happen. Chance and magic have no place in the life of an aspiring executive, but mentors do; and you can make it happen.

1. The person can help you. In selecting a mentor, it is important to select someone who has the knowledge and influence needed. The mentor must be in touch with the formal network of the organization as well as the informal ones. Otherwise, this person could guide your career into a dead end. Furthermore, the mentor should possess the wisdom to see beyond the immediate situation. After all, he or she is helping you to build the foundation and direction for a career that may cover 30 years or more.

In addition to knowledge, the mentor needs to possess the personal and positional power and influence needed to push your career forward. This power and influence ideally should permeate beyond a narrow segment of the company. The mentor should be a person who maintains connections throughout the industry as well as the community. If your career is stymied in the organization, a strong mentor can help you move in such a way that future advancement can occur either within the company or outside it.

2. He or she has your confidence. If your mentor is going to work for you, that person should be someone whom you can trust. If the mentor-protégé relationship is to thrive and be effective, good communication is essential. This requires a sharing of similar values. If you have high ethical standards, make sure your mentor shares these values; otherwise, it is doubtful that the relationship will be beneficial. On the other hand, life is replete with examples of unethical mentors and protégés teaming together. These relationships often work because both participants share the same value system.

In any event, the aspiring young manager must be aware of his or her own values before selecting a mentor.