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### **Mentoring - one of the keys to success**

I've noticed that the companies that focus on people have long term success; however, I've been frustrated that many times this pattern and reason aren't obvious to those inside the business at the time. Then, years later with lower profitability and diminished sales growth, they wonder what has gone wrong. Since I've thought about this topic quite a bit lately, I thought I'd focus on one of the keys to success related to this topic - mentoring.

None of the companies I've worked with have formally focused on mentoring; however, the ones that have been successful had mentoring as a part of the culture (whether or not it was termed "mentoring"). Webster's defines mentoring as "to serve as a trusted counselor or teacher". I've found that finding mentors (and eventually serving as a mentor) is one of the best ways to learn and grow your skills and behaviors that are integral to whatever skillsets/ end results you want to achieve. I've been very fortunate to have several mentors over time, which is the '80/20' of how I've achieved my success to date. It doesn't have to be a formal program. All of mine were informal, ranging from mentors in subject areas of HR/ organizational development, Finance, Costing, Operations, IT, Business evaluation, etc.

Mentors or training programs? I've done both, and both have their benefits. However, the key distinguishing benefit of finding a mentor is that many people learn best through hands on experience. I've learned a tremendous amount through observation alone (yes, not all my mentors even knew they were my mentor!). If you observe what works and what doesn't work around you and then try to apply those skills, techniques and behaviors, it is amazing what you can achieve. This foundation can sometimes teach you more than a \$10,000 class; however, to take full advantage of mentoring, you should ask questions. If you ask questions of your mentor about what he/ she does, why, what works, what doesn't, etc, you'll learn a tremendous amount. Then, the key is to try it out - otherwise, it is just an interesting exercise. The ultimate is when you ask your mentor to provide feedback as you try out / learn aspects from them. It is vital to consider feedback in a positive way. I've found that feedback "works" when it is from a trusted source(s) - one that you know has your best interests at heart. Then, it is invaluable.

I thought I'd provide a few examples of how this has worked for me. Early in my career, I had a Finance mentor who encouraged me to learn the aspects of finance that related to operations (my background). Not only did I learn quite a few tidbits that came in quite handy in future jobs, I also ended up focusing my MBA on finance, which has provided several unexpected benefits over the years. I also had an outstanding HR / organizational development mentor who not only helped me survive through an "if you can survive through this people situation, you can survive through anything" but also gave me more knowledge than imaginable that is now one of the core principles for my consulting work - appreciating people's value and leveraging people. There are too many mentors to mention since I was fortunate to have mentors in IT, Costing/ Profit Drivers, Business evaluation, Operations, Logistics, Purchasing/ Negotiation (I can't tell you how awful I was at first with this subject - and was very fortunate to have an amazing mentor), Consulting, Sales & Marketing, and, most recently, Accounting/ compliance.

Give it a try, have an open mind and you'll be amazed with the results.

## Lisa's Tips: Leadership Qualities

I was teased recently of relating everything back to leadership, and I realized it is true - "it begins and ends with leadership" (as my HR mentor says). A few of the important qualities of leadership:

1. Communicate /Listen - The '80/20' of leadership is communication. Communicate frequently, tell what you can tell, tell them that you cannot tell them everything (people will understand) but you'll tell them as soon as you are able to. Do what you say you'll do (which turns out to be harder than it sounds, but absolutely critical). This will build confidence and trust. And, most importantly, listen.
2. Think big picture/ strategy - as a leader, one of the most important aspects of the job is to make sure the organization/ function and team is "on the right track". Involve your organization in the strategy, tie each person's goals to the strategy, make sure people know how they fit in and the value of their work.
3. Have an orientation to results - this sounds obvious but I've experienced many, many people who focus on other criteria such as time, form vs. function, etc. Throw out your old thinking and instead focus your attention on results. Then, reward results.
4. Focus on people - it is easy to get caught up in thinking about sales, machines, labor hours and the like. Take a step back and think about people. The right people are your #1 asset - value them, leverage their ideas and skills.
5. Execution - in the end, companies succeed or fail due to execution (getting it done). This really goes back to several of the other points because execution is reliant on people, focus, communication, and a persistent focus on results. As an example, 70-80% of mergers and acquisitions fail to yield the expected results. Most of them are due to poor execution. Be the exception.

## Recommended Reading

"[\*The Goal\*](#)" by Eliyahu Goldratt - I thought I'd refer back to one of the classics this month. Eli introduced the theory of constraints in this book. Although this sounds like a technical topic, he presented it in an interesting way. In essence, it shows you how to coordinate within a production setting to deal with common problems of production delays and low revenues. If you haven't already read it, it is worth a review.

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