



Mentoring Executives and Directors

David Clutterbuck and David Megginson
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176 pages

Rating

7 ⁸ Applicability
⁶ Innovation
⁷ Style

Focus

Leadership & Management
Strategy
Sales & Marketing
Finance
Human Resources
IT, Production & Logistics
Career & Self-Development
Small Business
Economics & Politics
Industries
Global Business
Concepts & Trends

Take-Aways

- Executive mentoring should align with and support organizational objectives.
- Executive mentors or coaches listen, ask hard questions, advise and challenge those they mentor.
- Mentors encourage and support their protégés, in part by exploring solutions, but they leave it up to the mentees to do their own work to achieve change.
- Mentees should know themselves and what they need before seeking a mentor.
- Mentors and protégés should find each other; firms should not assign mentors.
- Factors in this relationship include how often the two meet and what they discuss.
- Many executives eventually have multiple mentors, including those focusing on career guidance, wellness, spirituality, relationships and skill building.
- Mentors are normally senior to their mentees, but peer-to-peer executive mentoring also works.
- Most senior executives mentor other senior executives.
- Firms should use internal and external mentors in accordance with their needs and goals.

Relevance

What You Will Learn

In this summary, you will learn: 1) Why executives and directors need mentors, and 2) What factors create a successful relationship between mentors and those they mentor.

Recommendation

Human resources experts David Clutterbuck and David Megginson – and the experts they interviewed – stress the importance of mentoring and coaching at the executive and board level. Mentors who work with executives and board members may delve into career guidance, competency building, relationships, wellness, spirituality and many other areas. Coaching also can encompass a variety of relationships, goals and outcomes. Written in 1999 and updated in 2011, this book has some ideas that seem dated. However, its mentoring principles are timeless. Its 22 case studies explore the benefits of becoming a mentor and illuminate what having a mentor does and can do for leaders and board members. *getAbstract* recommends this bright, short read to anyone interested in mentoring.

Summary

“Mentoring supports a process that is about enabling and supporting – sometimes triggering – major change in people’s life and work.”

“Mentoring is a powerful intervention, but it is not magic. For it to work there needs to be sufficient time spent for a relationship to be established and issues to be explored.”

Not Just for Up-and-Comers

Mentors guide leaders through their duties, obstacles and changes. They provide support and encouragement to their mentees – even those who are already high-ranking corporate leaders – by helping them reach new insights, see different perspectives and acquire deeper knowledge of themselves and their goals.

The higher you climb up the corporate ladder and the more responsibility and stress you take on, the greater your need for mentoring will become. Executives and members of boards of directors must devote time to “personal reflection.” They must think about what they’ve learned, process it and gain insights leading to better decision making for their organizations.

For this reason, executives and directors should seek the guidance of mentors. But leaders seldom take the time to reflect – and the few who do, tend to do so alone.

Executive Mentors and Executive Coaches

Executive mentoring has grown due to greater pressure and demands on executives and a time squeeze that can deny them balance between home and work. Senior leaders need assistance in “career planning,” in making the transition to roles with greater responsibilities and, for entrepreneurs, in managing the stages a small firm passes through as it grows.

A cadre of “professional mentors” helps satisfy this demand. These professionals differ from professional executive coaches, but the lines blur.

Executive mentors listen intently and actively, and offer feedback. They tell hard truths. They offer counsel after asking probing questions, and they help mentees work through their problems and issues. They offer career guidance and often introduce their clients to people who can help advance their careers. Mentors coach their protégés to be more aware of behavior-related concerns and help them improve their interactions.

“Wise CEOs and directors have sought counsel and reassurance from sources outside their organizations since organizations began.”

“Whether mentoring is focused on the individual or on the broader needs of the organization, it needs support from the very top.”

“We must understand the characteristics and needs of the mentee in order to find out what the mentor needs to do and know.”

“Mentoring needs to be a process which encourages new perspectives, changes ways of thinking, deeper self-knowledge.”

“Elder Statesman”

Some executives seek coaching for behavioral or performance issues. Others need the wisdom of an elder statesman. Others benefit from having a “reflective mentor” who challenges them to work on their problems and offers advice. Executive mentors focus on behavior and emotional intelligence by helping protégés know themselves better.

Mentors should use structure and models, and equip themselves with relevant examples and cases to share with those facing specific issues. This helps mentees consider their behavior and emotions, and provides them with tools and examples for systematic improvement. Mentors discuss their protégés’ current challenges and future goals.

Barriers

Mentors help mentees identify barriers and overcome them. Common barriers include learning how to manage stress, complex relationships and self-doubt. Leaders need to learn best practices, including techniques for directing others. In deciding the best course of action to address each challenge, mentors should work through the various options with their protégés. Mentees will attain the best results if they know what they want and the type of mentor they need. They must be eager to learn and to commit to the process.

“Case Studies”

Due to a lack of research and material about mentoring for executives and board members, case studies provide the best insight into the executive mentor/executive mentee relationship. These case studies span the public and private sectors:

- **Richard Field, Chairman, Dyson Group** – Field’s numerous mentors include professional colleagues and physical, intellectual and spiritual mentors who are senior business leaders and family members. He wanted his mentors to encourage, befriend, coach and judge him. Field confirms that mentoring brings value to his life, no matter how senior he becomes. He mentors other people, some of whom pay him. He helps them “realize their potential.”
- **Carl Eric Gestberg, ABB Sweden** – ABB has integrated a formal, internal mentoring program into its development apparatus and competency framework. This reflects its corporate philosophy that mentors and mentees should teach each other and that mentoring programs should align with organizational goals.
- **Sir John Harvey-Jones, former CEO, ICI** – Sir John believes that mentoring works best when the mentor comes from outside the protégé’s organization. In his experience, this reduces bias, precludes no topic from discussion and provides a greater likelihood of honest feedback. Protégés need mentors to help them see their flaws. They must own their issues and not rely on their mentors’ involvement. Mentors should dive into mentees’ challenges to devise plans and help them self-improve. Mentors and mentees should select each other. A firm should not assign two people to have a relationship. Mentees must absolutely trust their mentors. Mentors gain from the relationship, Sir John argues, by gaining a better understanding of what’s going on in the organization from a less-senior leader’s perspective. Most companies undervalue mentors. They should reward and recognize them for developing future leaders.
- **Mike Pupius, Royal Mail** – Pupius has mentors in multiple life areas – fitness and health, learning, career guidance and family – and appreciates them all. He praises peer mentoring groups, including the four-person Renesse Group, in which he participates. The members met at a management workshop early in their leadership careers. All four have reached senior executive positions in different firms. They attribute much of their success to the group. For more than 10 years, they have met at regular intervals to coach

“There is a balance between never interfering, judging or advising and the fact that any conversation with a lot of listening leads the other person to new thoughts and plans.”

“Whereas the coach uses his or her experience to guide the executive along a particular track, the effective mentor allows the learner to manage the process of drawing down on the mentor’s experience.”

“My belief is that mentoring is not about trying to change others – this creates a quick fix, which does not last.”

“There are no rules about whether mentor and mentee should be similar or different. They could be either, so long as you know which it is.”

and mentor each other. Members meet off-site for a day and a night, including meals, to discuss each other’s work, life, career opportunities and challenges. They share ideas, recommend books and articles, serve as useful contacts and offer job leads. They revisit one another’s career goals, as originally recorded in the management workshop where they met years prior. Members challenge each other. Between meetings, they seek each other’s help and get together in pairs. The group’s longevity and each member’s career success attests to the value of peer mentoring.

- **Allen Yurko, CEO, Siebe** – Yurko’s parents were his first mentors. His father ran a successful business and brought Yurko into it at age 13. His mother encouraged his learning. Yurko gained a mentor who was two levels higher up in his organization. This person acted as his career advocate and helped Yurko achieve a succession of promotions in his 20s, all the way up to a senior executive position. Yurko feels that he succeeded partly because he looked at job opportunities in light of working under the right CEO, and less to gain a particular position or join a certain company. If he respected the CEO, that person could become an important formal or informal mentor. At Siebe, Yurko connected with his last and most important mentor, then-CEO Barrie Stephens. Yurko attributes his mental toughness, supportive nature and focus on employee development to the mentors he chose – and who also chose him. Today he enjoys mentoring others.
- **Michael Fowle, KPMG** – Fowle formally and informally mentors others. He notes that people who build successful careers at KPMG – a major consultancy in accounting, a competitive industry known for high burnout and short careers – find mentors early on. Fowle, a KPMG partner, helped create and launch its enormously successful “head teacher” mentoring program. It helps train leaders through business consulting. The program has grown from a few participating mentees to hundreds. Fowle stresses deep listening and probing questions. He tells mentors never to take on a mentee’s problems. He believes protégés can improve only by solving their issues for themselves, though with a mentor’s guidance and support. Mentors gain friendships and new perspectives from mentoring.
- **Sir Christopher Ball, Chancellor, Derby University** – Sir Christopher acquired his first mentor by asking him directly to be his mentor, in public, at an event where he heard his future mentor speak. Their informal relationship helped Ball work through career choices and advancement. He’s added other mentors, each becoming a friend over time. Ball, who now mentors others, says everyone needs a “learning plan” and a mentor to help achieve it.

The main challenges in executive and director mentoring include:

“Organizational Issues”

Mentoring changes people – and their organizations – no matter how it’s done or who does it. Executive mentoring should align with broader organizational objectives and development plans. And, it should have executive support. Ideally, CEOs should mentor others in the organization. Consider both external and internal mentors. External professionals cost money, but mentees may feel more at ease talking to them about switching firms or careers, or needing more family time. Internal mentors help build a culture of mentoring. Because they know the firm, they add important context and perspective. Internal mentors add value to corporate networks and career advocacy. Companies need both internal and external mentors. To strengthen an already sound culture, internal consultants offer the best fit. To fix and rebuild a poor culture, external mentors deliver better results. For every executive and director to have a mentor, external professionals might be too expensive, but a mix might be affordable.

“Mentoring often gets to the edge of spiritual issues when it addresses life purpose.”

“It is very hard to be honest with yourself, so you need someone else to review things with you.”

“For the individual taking time out to ponder, reflection can be seen as a dialogue with oneself.”

“Mentee Role Behavior”

Start with the protégé, the most important person in the relationship. Determine what he or she needs before identifying a mentor. Some mentees who are at the top of the corporate ladder may turn out to be less coachable than others. These high-power mentees need strong mentors. Others are defensive and need mentors who balance strength with latitude. Executives and board members will need different mentors at various stages of their lives and careers.

“Mentor Role and Behavior”

Mentors vary in their skills, experience and the abilities they bring to the table. They may seek a variety of returns from their efforts, including remuneration. Almost universally, effective mentors have credible experience, excellent listening skills and the ability to pose challenging, probing questions.

Individual mentors approach their work differently. Some focus on “life purpose,” others on relationships, careers or, less often, specific skill improvement.

Worthy mentors prepare for each session and tend to follow a process, even if loosely. Professional mentors, and most other mentors, gain friendships, intellectual stimulation and fresh learning from their work, as well as the satisfaction of knowing that their efforts contribute to a stronger organization, especially when they mentor top executives and board members. Few companies pay internal mentors, but everyone should recognize their contribution.

“Relationship Issues”

Mentors may share similarities with their mentees in terms of their profession, company and industry, and may also occupy positions to which their protégés aspire. This helps establish rapport and common ground. However, mentors can succeed even when they have little in common with their mentees. No one can expect the relationship to go easily all the time. By their nature, mentoring relationships have to manage confrontation and raise uncomfortable questions to explore issues, skill gaps and personal improvement.

A mentor and a mentee should separately record each category of discussion they want to cover and the percentage of time they want to spend on each area. Together, they should compare priorities and reach an agreement. Mentor-mentee relationships often start and conclude, then re-spark after the mentee experiences a crisis. For the relationship to last, the pair must build trust and mutual respect.

Duration

Mentors and executive protégés typically meet for two or three hours every one to three months. Many pairs agree to evaluate the relationship after one year and then to re-evaluate annually. Relationships can last many years and evolve into deep friendships.

About the Authors

David Clutterbuck of Clutterbuck Associates runs the European Mentoring and Coaching Council. **David Megginson**, professor emeritus at the UK’s Sheffield Hallam University, founded its Coaching & Mentoring Research Unit.