

When I think of mentoring, the first thing that comes to mind is someone to help me. It might be someone who has wisdom, experience, success, a book or prestigious title. If you look up the definition of mentoring, it usually relates to business and finding someone of higher status and longer tenure with a proven track record to share. Business people, teachers, coaches, trainers, financial planners... people who are recognized as experts in their particular specialty are usually very keen on approaching others to share wisdom, trade knowledge, or impart an intriguing concept. Some say this is mentoring. I ask, is there more?

Mentoring is a free sharing of experience and knowledge to benefit the other in a relationship, and by doing so, benefiting ourselves. The only reward is the satisfaction of knowing you have helped expand another person's knowledge base and possibly inspired him or her to innovate or expand. Have you found that you have been called to share that which you need to re-discover, or that part of you that may be lying dormant? Perhaps you have become static, uninspired, and by sharing with others, you may re-ignite something in your core, maybe even a dream or passion.

Now, when one is in the position of being a genuine mentor, and consistently providing excellent counsel and learning, we truly serve others and ourselves by remaining humble in that position. A good mentor gladly keeps his or her ego in check and the desire to learn and share as a top priority. Indeed we all have something to teach, and we all have something to learn. Colleagues and clients alike benefit in immeasurable ways by our desire to freely share knowledge and experience in the mentoring atmosphere of giving and receiving.

I have been accused, and happily so, of taking someone who prides themselves on thinking outside the box and suggesting an entirely new box. My, how the vision changes, the questions change! We can get very set in our ways, our established patterns, and our old ways of thinking. Our ears hear, but don't necessarily listen. Try some active listening. Repeat back to someone what they said; see if you get it all. Then taking it another step, share what you heard, read between the lines and interpret what you think they meant. When you get good at this, you not only share what you heard and what you think they meant, but also how you sense they feel about what they said. Now, my friend, you are open to better communication, you are open to being an inspired mentor, and you will have the thrill of learning, both from your mentoring relationship and, perhaps even more exciting, about yourself.

A symbiotic mentoring relationship is a gift we not only give others but also give ourselves. Be thankful for the gifts you have been given and those you have nurtured. But especially be thankful for your ability to share, counsel, teach, advise and learn.

Let's all be true mentors. Please take pride in the fact that you willingly give and receive knowledge in any situation, even when you are considered the trusted counselor or teacher. An important point I try to keep in mind is: a mentor, teacher or trainer who shows the student they are willing to learn from them builds confidence within the student and enables the student to develop a far deeper understanding of the subject at hand, and often feel awe at expressing themselves and being heard. That student now understands their gift as a mentor. I love the quote: "When the student is ready, the teacher will appear." I suggest we are best served when we are both.

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