

*"Good teaching is one-fourth preparation and three-fourths theater."*

- Gail Godwin

Last month I wrote on Developing Leadership in Gymnastics Organizations. Successful businesses are full of strong leaders and continually strive to nurture leadership skills in all their employees. Another way to create leaders is through mentorship. With the difficulty nation-wide in finding good qualified Gymnastics professionals, organizations should consider career development within their organization...

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## Mentorship in Gymnastics Organizations

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By definition, a Mentor is a close, trusted, and experienced counselor or guide. A mentor is further defined as a teacher, tutor, and coach. Mentorship is defined as the influence, guidance, or direction exerted by a mentor. Much like a coach guides and assists their gymnasts; mentors provide direction and assistance to others.

Modern use of mentor refers to an experienced, senior leader or manager who develops younger, less experienced leaders and provides career counseling and sponsorship to these individuals.

Mentorship contributes to the development of these future leaders. Mentorship is a two-way street. The mentor must be willing to share knowledge, training, and experience in a trusted and respected atmosphere. In turn, the individual receiving the mentorship must trust and respect the mentor, while being open and receptive to the process. Caring is the core of mentorship. A mentor may care as a parent cares. We must remember that mentorship means taking some risks, to include allowing our mentee to make mistakes during their training. Mentors risk disappointment, failure, and rejection.

We need to clarify their goals and help develop long-term career strategies toward advancement. We should also aid in developing their short-term career plans. We must share our knowledge and instruct them in technical, leadership and management skills.

Mentoring is a tool that organizations can use to nurture and grow their people. It can be an informal practice or a formal program. Mentors demonstrate, explain and model. Mentee's observe, question, and explore. The following assumptions form the foundation for a solid mentoring program.

- **Deliberate learning is the cornerstone.** The mentor's job is to promote intentional learning, which includes capacity building through methods such as instructing, coaching, providing experiences, modeling and advising.
- **Both failure and success are powerful teachers.** Mentors, as leaders of a learning experience, certainly need to share their "how to do it so it comes out right" stories. They also need to share their experiences of failure, i.e., "how I did it wrong". Both types of stories are powerful lessons that provide valuable opportunities for analyzing individual and organizational realities.
- **Leaders need to tell their stories.** Personal scenarios, anecdotes and case examples, because they offer valuable, often unforgettable insight, must be shared. Mentors who can talk about themselves and their experiences establish a rapport that makes them "learning leaders."
- **Development matures over time.** Mentoring - when it works - taps into continuous learning that is not an event, or even a string of discrete events. Rather, it is the synthesis of ongoing event, experiences, observation, studies, and thoughtful analyses.

- **Mentoring is a joint venture.** Successful mentoring means sharing responsibility for learning. Regardless of the facilities, the subject matter, the timing, and all other variables. Successful mentoring begins with setting a contract for learning around which the mentor, the mentee, and their respective line supervisors are aligned.

### **The Mentoring Relationship**

An important element of the mentoring relationship is setting and facilitating clearly defined learning objectives. The process may begin with a first meeting where both parties can discuss their expectations. More detailed objectives can be defined and adopted as the relationship evolves. At the first meeting start-up issues, expectations, and initial goals should be addressed.

### **On-Going Communication**

Regular communication is important in order to effectively maintain the mentor-mentee relationship. The closer the communication, the more likely the program will be successful.

### **Evolution of the Relationship**

After the first meeting between mentor and the mentee has occurred, the role of the mentor in regard to coaching, counseling, facilitating, and networking will begin to take shape. Both parties should come well prepared to all meetings so that the relationship can develop smoothly.

### **Phases of a Mentoring Relationship**

The mentoring relationship typically has four distinct phases:

- *ORIENTATION - BUILDING THE BASE*

During the early stages, both the mentor and mentee are getting to know each other, and building trust. At this time, both the mentee and the mentor are developing expectations of each other. The interaction, which occurs at this stage, will lay the foundation for a strong and beneficial relationship.

- *THE MIDDLE PERIOD*

The middle phase is typically the most rewarding time for both mentor and mentee. The mutual trust, which has developed between the two, can give the mentee the confidence to challenge the ideas of the mentor, just as the mentor will challenge the mentee's ideas.

- *DISSOLVING THE RELATIONSHIP*

Typically, the relationship begins to draw apart after a year or two. It is important, at this stage that the mentor step back from the formal relationship to discuss together with the mentee how they wish to continue their relationship.

- *REDEFINING THE RELATIONSHIP*

The mentor-mentee relationship enters a new phase, where both parties can regard one another as equals. They continue to have some form of interaction, although it is now on a more casual basis.

### **Mentoring - Potential Pitfalls**

Mentoring relationships do not always succeed. Some of the most frequent problems with mentoring relationships include:

- *'MISMATCH' BETWEEN MENTOR AND MENTEE*

A mismatch between the mentor and the mentee can be a cause of failure in the relationship. One or both members of the relationship may feel uneasy with the other, or they may not be able to achieve the level of friendship necessary for rich communication. Under such circumstances it may be necessary to assign the young mentee to a different mentor. If the problem is identified during the first six months of the relationship the change can usually be made in an amicable way with no hard feelings on either side.

- *UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS*

Problems in the relationship can also occur if the mentee expects or demands too much from the mentor. It is important, therefore, that expectations are clearly defined from the beginning. The mentee should not expect the relationship to meet every need, nor for it to continue indefinitely.

- *BREACHES OF CONFIDENTIALITY*

In order to develop the type of relationship in which the mentor can be effective, he or she must first be perceived as trustworthy and able to keep confidences.

Since both parties in a mentoring relationship typically realize and accept the fact that a high level of trust is essential in order for an effective relationship to develop, there is little evidence of breaches of confidentiality. However, codes of conduct regarding the confidential nature of the relationship should be clearly defined and understood by both parties at the beginning of every mentoring relationship.

### **Benefits for Mentee's**

- A non-threatening learning opportunity;
- Improved self-confidence;
- Developing business expertise & technical knowledge;
- Challenge;
- Support and reassurance;
- Networking/partnership opportunities;
- Coaching; and
- Listening and reassurance.

### **Benefits for the Mentor**

- Increased motivation;
- Challenge;
- New insights and perspectives;
- An opportunity for self-development;
- Increased self-esteem & pleasure;
- The opportunity to positively influence the next generation;
- Increased peer recognition; and
- The opportunity to improve communication.

### **Characteristics of a Good Mentor**

All successful Gymnastics coaches do not necessarily make effective mentors; certain individuals are more effective in the role of developing others. Whether or not an individual is suited to the role of mentor may depend on his or her own stage of development and experience. For example, a fairly successful individual may have had a specific, or limited, background and may not have enough general experience to offer. Prior to entering into a mentoring relationship, the mentee should assume the responsibility of assessing the mentor's potential effectiveness.

The qualities, which are essential in an effective mentor, include:

- A DESIRE TO HELP - Individuals who are interested in and willing to help others.
- HAVE HAD POSITIVE EXPERIENCES - Individuals who have had positive formal or informal experiences with a mentor tend to be good mentors themselves.
- GOOD REPUTATION FOR DEVELOPING OTHERS - Experienced people who have a good reputation for helping others develop their skills.
- TIME & ENERGY - People who have the time and mental energy to devote to the relationship.
- UP-TO-DATE KNOWLEDGE - Individuals who have maintained current, up-to-date technological knowledge and/or skills.
- LEARNING ATTITUDE - Individuals who are still willing and able to learn and who see the potential benefits of a mentoring relationship.
- DEMONSTRATED EFFECTIVE MANAGERIAL (MENTORING) SKILLS - Individuals who have demonstrated effective coaching, counseling, facilitating and networking skills.

### **Characteristics of a Mentee**

- Committed to expanding their capabilities
- Open and receptive to new ways of learning and trying new ideas
- Able to accept feedback and act upon it
- Willingness to apply learning back on the job
- Focused on achieving desired business results
- Able to communicate and work cooperatively with others
- Knows when to ask for help
- Have a sense of personal responsibility and commitment
- Willing to meet on a regular basis.

### **Role of the Mentee's Manager / Supervisor**

The manager's role in employee development is ongoing and not modified by an employee's participation in a mentoring program. Mentoring is a development tool at the disposal of the organization. Managers have the essential role of supporting the learning process by encouraging on the job exploration while also monitoring continued responsibility for performance. Managers fulfill a stewardship role in terms of day-to-day direct authority and capacity building, while mentors provide a broader and longer view that creates a path to the future for the mentee. This

is a triad relationship. Manager - Mentee - Mentor.

#### Line Manager Responsibilities

- Providing personal feedback to participants concerning values and expectations.
- Cultivating individual abilities both for the current job and for future opportunities.
- Supporting and designing learning assignments in partnership with the mentor and mentee.
- Endorsing experimentation in a way that applauds new approaches and permits the possibility of mistakes.
- Asking questions to encourage discussion of what is being learned and how.

#### Thoughts on the Mentoring Process

- Think of mentoring as a three party effort, rather than a one on one "arranged marriage".
- Think of a mentor as a learning leader who facilitates a learning process, rather than as a guru who passes down "the word" to a favored individual.
- Think of growth as the acquisition of attitudes and capabilities as well as the acquisition of skills and behaviors.
- View development as being enhanced by open dialogue and free form thinking, rather than limited by discussion guided by a set agenda.
- Think of development assignments, rather than future promotions, as a way of synthesizing thoughts about next steps in the organization.
- Cultivate career self-reliance in employees who use the mentoring process as one of a set of tools in achieves high performance.
- Mentors should not take away problems but must guide people toward solving their own problems.