

## CHAPTER 1

# THE POWER AND PROCESS OF MENTORING

WHAT EXACTLY IS a mentor? Because *mentor* is often used loosely to refer to various learning relationships, it is important as you set out on your path as a mentee to understand just what mentoring is and what it isn't. We can gain some insight by considering the origins of the word. *Mentor* is a Greek word stemming from the name of a character in Homer's *Odyssey*. Mentor was an elderly man, whom Odysseus asked to watch over his son Telemachus when Odysseus set off to fight in the Trojan War. We don't know much about the interactions between Mentor and Telemachus; few conversations are recounted in the story. But at one point the goddess Athena takes the form of Mentor and guides Telemachus in his quest to find his father, and the brief description of this suggests what sets mentoring apart from other learning relationships. Unlike a teacher or even a coach, who is focused on helping us learn and practice a particular set of skills, a mentor acts as a guide who helps us define and understand our own goals and pursue them successfully.

Of course, mentors in today's world may not have a goddess's supernatural powers to help us negotiate our struggles, but they have something else, something that I would argue is just as powerful. They—and you, as a mentee—have access to insights and research about what helps create strong mentoring relationships and what helps adults learn and grow. In the past fifteen years, as mentoring has grown more pervasive and popular and as the field of adult learning has expanded, we have learned a great deal about what both mentors and mentees need to do to build and maintain the kind of relationships that change lives.

## WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT GOOD MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

Good mentoring depends on effective learning. We now know that the best learning occurs when there is a mix of acquiring knowledge, applying it through practice, and critically reflecting on the process. This means that the model of mentoring popular in the 1980s, in which an older, more experienced adult passed on knowledge and information to a younger, less experienced adult, is being replaced by a new model, one that is similar to the one that I first described in *The Mentor's Guide* (Zachary, 2000). The new model emphasizes the value of the mentees engaging actively in their own learning and critically reflecting on their experiences.

Good mentoring therefore depends on a reciprocal learning relationship between you and your mentor. Together you form a partnership to work collaboratively on achieving mutually defined goals that focus on developing your skills, abilities, knowledge, and thinking.

To be successful, this relationship must have the following elements: reciprocity, learning, relationship, partnership, collaboration, mutually defined goals, and development. Let's look more closely at each of these elements:

**Reciprocity** This means equal engagement on the part of you and your mentor. Both of you have a responsibility to the relationship and a role to play, and both have much to gain from the relationship as well, not just the mentee. Although mentees often wonder what the mentor has to gain from the relationship, there is more than you might expect. Mentors say that they receive a great deal of satisfaction from sharing their knowledge and experience. Their own perspectives expand as a result of engaging in a mentoring relationship. Often the experience reaffirms their own approaches or suggests new ones. It helps them reconnect to the people in their organization and become reenergized. As a mentee, it is important that you keep this in mind. If you see yourself only as a grateful receiver of help and advice you may be reluctant to ask for what you need.

**Learning** The purpose, the process, and the product of a mentoring relationship is learning. Your relationship may be a good one, but without the presence of learning there is no mentoring. By *learning* we mean more than simply acquiring knowledge, which, though important, is but one aspect of learning. The learning that goes on in a mentoring relationship is an *active* learning: the mentee gains expanded perspectives; knowledge about the ins and outs of the organization, field, or profession; an understanding

of what works and doesn't work; and, most important, a deepened self-knowledge and self-understanding. The process of critical reflection enables the mentee to transform and apply learning in new ways. Because mentoring is so learner-focused, it is important to understand yourself as a learner and what you bring to the relationship. Because not everyone learns in the same way, it is useful for both you and your mentor to be aware of the how you learn best. In Chapter Two, on preparing yourself for mentoring, you will find some tools for helping you better understand your own learning style.

**Relationship** Relationships don't occur by magic. They take time and work to develop. Working at the relationship is part and parcel of effective mentoring. It is difficult to learn if you don't feel secure in the relationship. Hence it is critical that mentoring partners work at establishing and maintaining trust. Without trust a good mentoring relationship is impossible. Without trust mentoring partners tend to take things personally and make false assumptions or start blaming. They end up going through the motions of mentoring rather than the process of mentoring. This underscores the importance of having authentic and honest conversations, being committed to the relationship, and following through on commitments.

**Partnership** In the past, mentoring relationships were driven by the mentor. The mentor was an authority figure who took the mentee under his or her wing; the mentee was there to receive the wisdom of the mentor and be protected, promoted, and prodded. The current paradigm calls for more involvement of both partners in a mentoring relationship. Just as in any other partnership, mentoring partners establish agreements and become knowledgeable about and attuned to each others' needs. Each mentoring partner is unique and that uniqueness includes all of the experience, history, diversity, and individuality they bring to the mentoring relationship.

**Collaboration** As with any partnership, the work in a mentoring relationship involves collaboration. Mentor and mentee engage in sharing knowledge and learning and building consensus; in the process they mutually determine the nature and terms of the collaboration. You and your mentor each bring your own experience to the discussions that take place. It is this give and take that contributes to shared meaning, and something greater emerges because of this process. Collaboration requires openness on the part of both mentoring partners.

**Mutually defined goals** It is hard to achieve a goal that has not been defined. It may be defined in your mind but unless it is mutually defined with your mentoring partner you may be working at cross purposes or on different goals. Clarifying and articulating learning goals is critical to achieving a satisfactory mentoring outcome because mentoring partners must continuously revisit their learning goals throughout the mentoring relationship to keep it on track. Without well-defined goals, the relationship runs the risk of losing its focus.

**Development** The focus in a mentoring relationship is on the future, that is, developing your skills, knowledge, abilities, and thinking to get you from where you are now to where you want to be. Mentoring thus differs from coaching, which is more oriented toward boosting performance and specific skills in the present.

## THE POWER OF MENTORING

What can mentors help you achieve? Our research at Leadership Development Services reveals multiple reasons for individuals seeking mentors. Some are looking for a safe haven, a place to go where they can vent or get candid feedback. Others are seeking a sounding board to test ideas. Many say they don't get the support that they need in their jobs, at school, or in their organizations to manage their productivity.

Within organizations, mentees we've interviewed say that mentors were invaluable in helping them navigate the organization and learn about what works and what doesn't in the organizational culture. Many report increased confidence, risk-taking, and competence in key areas. Others report more visibility in the organization and expanded networks and opportunities. Gen-Xers and Gen-Yers clamor for mentoring, and it is a drawing card for organizations looking to recruit them. What mentees gain from a mentoring relationship has a lot to do with how open they are to learning. Let's turn to Kendra's story and what happened for her as a result of her informal mentoring relationship.

### *Kendra's Story*

*Kendra had been having a hard time at her new job as manager of customer service at a large retail chain. She sought this job to escape from a very toxic situation in her previous workplace, where there was little communication or information sharing and information was used more as a weapon than as a tool for cooperation. At the time, she had assumed*

*that everything that was going wrong in her previous job was her fault in some way. If, for example, someone refused to share information with her, she assumed it was because that person wanted her to fail. On top of this she believed that anyone in a senior position was probably smarter and more competent than she was. As a result, she became overly cautious, untrusting, and lost all self-confidence.*

*Even though the culture of the new organization was completely different from that of her old job, she was finding it difficult to shake the old feelings, suspicions, and self-doubt. Kendra had brought the defensive and ineffective behaviors she learned at the old job to the new one, and it wasn't working for her. Although the new job had a culture of collaboration and openness, Kendra assumed that people were withholding information and didn't want her to succeed. Instead of trying to function effectively in her new workplace, Kendra's strategy was to focus on impressing everyone and making herself look as good as she could. To this end, she took a very top-down approach, quickly implementing a series of changes and dictating new policies. She managed to alienate her colleagues and the people who reported to her in very short order.*

*Kendra was lucky, however, because Sandra, the HR manager took notice. She saw that Kendra was struggling and invited her to lunch one day to talk. Sandra made it clear to Kendra that she believed in her and offered to meet with her regularly to give her feedback and direction. Sandra saw, for example, how Kendra's lack of confidence was causing her to make decisions without consulting and working cooperatively with her colleagues and reports. At one meeting, Sandra said, "You need to take credit for your ideas. I would like to see the day when your confidence catches up with your ability. You have good ideas, but you aren't leading." That comment made a big impact on Kendra. She realized that it was OK to admit to yourself and even show others that you are good at something. She started very slowly and tentatively to switch her tactics. Instead of pushing her agenda on others, she began to enthusiastically and straightforwardly present her ideas. As she did, other people began to see value in her work and to see her differently.*

*Sandra helped Kendra realize exactly what she needed to do to be successful. She was able to make concrete suggestions for ways to approach meetings, influence some tough department heads, and resolve conflicts with her peers. When Kendra saw the results from her first performance review (which involved 360 degree feedback from those*

*she reported to, worked with, and managed) she was overwhelmed by the praise from her colleagues and direct reports. Kendra had left her previous position feeling like a failure. Sandra's help allowed her to change how she behaved, as well as her view of herself and the world around her. Kendra observed, "With Sandra's help I was able to turn myself around."*

*Although Kendra was not involved in a formal mentoring program, she was engaged in an informal mentoring process with Sandra which allowed her to develop confidence and success at a very critical time in her career. All this came about because Sandra had approached her and essentially offered to informally mentor her at a time when she needed it most.*

The profound influence of a mentor's candid in-person feedback can dramatically transform one's personal perspectives and worldview, build self-confidence, and add to one's professional competence.

Some mentees say that mentoring gives them exposure to people and ideas they would never have encountered on their own. Others find that their mentor's belief in them gives them strength and bolsters their courage in taking risks. Some report that mentoring helps demystify their profession, organization, or job. Still others find the benefit of mentoring a way to jump-start their learning process in new and unfamiliar areas.

## THE PROCESS OF MENTORING

Mentoring occurs every day in many places and spaces. Mentoring relationships can look very different depending on the people involved. Although spontaneous and informal mentoring can have great results, in this book we focus on a way to intentionally find and nurture mentoring relationships that will help you achieve specific and satisfying results.

As already mentioned, research has taught us a lot about how adults learn best and what makes good mentoring. The bar on mentoring practice has risen considerably over the years as a result. We now know, for example, the kind of preparation and work that both mentor and mentee need to engage in to develop a good relationship, set goals, work to achieve them, and create a satisfying result to their work together. This knowledge has been shaped into a four-stage model, which I first introduced in *The Mentor's Guide*, and provides a framework for managing the life cycle of a mentoring relationship.

Do you really need a model? Does it seem artificial? Sometimes working with a model can seem awkward or unnatural. If you are concerned about this you are not alone. A number of the people we interviewed explained

that although they were initially wary of using a model, they found that it provided them with the fundamentals and a solid structure that made a dramatic difference in the outcomes of the mentoring and helped them derive more satisfaction and learning from their relationships.

The model I presented in *The Mentor's Guide* sets out four phases of the mentoring relationship: (1) preparing (getting ready), (2) negotiating (establishing agreements), (3) enabling (doing the work), and (4) coming to closure (integrating the learning and moving forward). The phases build on one another to form a predictable developmental sequence that varies in length from one relationship to another. These stages often merge into one another, and as you work together with your mentor you may be unaware that you have progressed from one phase to another.

## The Four-Stage Mentoring Cycle

Here are the four stages in more detail.

### Preparing

This is the *getting ready* phase. It involves preparing yourself for mentoring and preparing the relationship. This phase therefore occurs individually and then jointly. Each partner examines his or her motivations and engages in self-reflection to determine what he or she is expecting from the relationship. Partners then enter into a dialogue and explore these issues together. For mentees, it is especially important at this phase that you honestly examine what you want to learn and how you learn best. The more self-knowledge you have the more prepared you will be to approach the job of defining appropriate and realistic goals. You will be able to come to the relationship with your mentor as a full partner with an agenda of your own. This phase is discussed in Chapters Two and Three.

### Negotiating

This is the *establishing agreements* phase, in which mentoring partners discuss details and agree upon goals, processes, and ground rules. The work that takes place during this phase lays the foundation for the relationship. An important aspect of this phase is establishing trust, and to that end it is important that mentoring partners discuss confidentiality. Another issue that should be addressed during this phase is setting realistic boundaries for your time together to ensure that your work is not derailed by discussions of personal issues. Finally, this is the time in which you set up the logistics of your work, agreeing on questions such as: How often will we meet? Where and for how long? What are target dates for achieving specific goals? You will learn more about this phase in Chapter Four.

## Enabling

*Enabling* may be a hard word for you to swallow in this context. Because the term is emotionally loaded, I want to make my intention clear. I use this word to describe this phase in its most positive sense. It is the *implementation* or *work* phase of the partnership. Most of the learning occurs during this period. It is therefore the longest phase. During enabling, partners work toward achieving the mentee's learning goals and communicate regularly about their progress and how well they are meeting goals and objectives. This phase requires much attention and care. There are likely to be setbacks as well as successes. Issues may arise that will need renegotiating. You may find that you need to change the frequency or duration of your meetings. Questions about trust can surface and resurface and should be addressed and resolved quickly or the relationship will suffer. It is challenging, but both mentee and mentor need to stay focused not only on the mentee's learning goals but also on the relationship. This phase is described in depth in Chapter Five.

## Coming to Closure

This is the *integration and moving forward* phase. It entails consolidating the learning, evaluating the partnership, and celebrating successes. Both partners reflect upon the relationship, their personal and professional growth, and how they can each leverage their learning. There is a temptation to dismiss this phase as unimportant—after all, the real work is over, the learning has occurred; it's time to move on, right? Wrong. One thing we have learned from our work with mentees is that if this phase isn't handled well (if, for example, a mentor leaves suddenly at the end for a new job), it can leave both mentor and mentee frustrated and dissatisfied. If mentees don't feel good about the relationship it can adversely influence how they feel about their learning. Chapter Six explains how to ensure that this phase goes well.

## Different Kinds of Mentoring

Mentoring relationships come in all shapes and sizes and include multiple modes (informal and formal) and models (one-to-one and group) in diverse and disparate organizational types and settings. The following are common types of mentoring:

### One-on-One Mentoring

One-on-one mentoring is the traditional and most common model of mentoring. It involves two people working together to help the mentee



achieve specific goals. The mentor can be a peer, a more senior person, or a person with specific expertise and experience. The relationship can be informal or formal. An informal relationship may occur without your even being aware of it at first. For example, you may find yourself seeking and receiving advice from a trusted colleague, a manager, or anyone really who has something to offer. A good example is Lory Fischler's relationship with her tennis coach, Ed, which we describe below. Lory didn't set out to be mentored but found herself receiving advice not just about tennis but also about lots of areas of her life. She never formalized the mentoring side of this relationship but continued to reap the benefits of listening to and knowing Ed. In formal mentoring relationships, on the other hand, mentees and mentors are typically involved with a program within an organization. Still, anyone can decide to formalize a mentoring relationship whether in a program or not. Formalizing a relationship would simply mean following many of the steps in this book—identifying goals, negotiating the terms of your relationship with your mentor, and following through to closure.

### **Group Mentoring**

Group mentoring is a type of social networking that honors and shares the knowledge and expertise of the individuals within a group. It typically involves a small number of people who have similar job functions, experiences, interests, or needs and so form a self-directed group to learn from each other. The group is self-managed and takes responsibility for crafting its own learning agenda and managing the learning process to meet members' learning needs. These groups can be part of a formal mentoring program or you can set up your own; this is what I did when I first moved to Phoenix. I had been meeting people who were truly inspiring and interesting and I wanted to stay connected to them. Despite my desire, I was finding it difficult to find the time to connect with them all. I invited them to a first meeting and asked them whether they found the same value in each other as I did, and, if so, whether they would want to form a peer mentoring group in which we could engage in good conversation, share best practices, and support one another. Most of them said yes, and our group was formed. When we met again we invented a peer mentoring structure that worked for us. The format varied over the years. We took turns presenting to each other on our area of expertise. From time to time we invited experts to meet with us. Some years we had a theme and a retreat. We orchestrated our own learning and supported each other in our development.

### **Reverse Mentoring**

Reverse mentoring has become more popular in recent years, growing out of a mutual need for learning. People in senior positions learn from individuals with expertise within their rank and file and at the same time those in junior positions learn from the senior leaders of their organization. It often works like this: a senior person is mentored by someone who has specific technical knowledge they need to learn. That individual, in exchange, is mentored by the senior executive, who offers the big organizational picture and perspective.

### **Mentoring Board of Directors**

In the mentoring board of directors model, a group of hand-picked mentors functions as a personal board of directors to help facilitate an individual's achievement of a clear and specific learning goal. The board has the advantage of providing multiple perspectives and diverse feedback to a mentee by clarifying, pushing, and expanding the mentee's thinking, promoting personal reflection, and functioning as a sounding board. Typically in the personal board of directors' model it is the mentee who seeks out and recruits multiple mentors to help her achieve specific goals. The mentors meet together with the mentee at regular intervals; the mentee manages the learning process, calls meetings and hosts them together with her mentors, and shares accountability for the learning process and achievement of desired results.

### **Informal versus Formal Mentoring**

The model outlined in this book provides a framework for mentoring excellence that is relevant to mentors and mentees whether they are participating in a mentoring program or acting on their own agree to formalize their relationship as mentor and mentee. Thus, those who find themselves in informal mentoring relationships can draw on this model as well. What does informal mentoring look like? Kendra's story is a good example of informal mentoring. Sandra, her mentor, approached her and agreed to give her feedback, and what followed was a process that evolved as Kendra's needs arose. There were no formal agreements or commitments, just two people committed to learning and a mentee who was motivated and open to change. Informal mentoring occurs every day in various settings. It can last a week, a number of months, or it can last a lifetime. The more you know about yourself, what you want to learn, and how to form a good relationship with your mentor, the more you will benefit, no matter how spontaneous or informal your work is.

## MENTORING CAN HAPPEN ANY TIME AND ANY PLACE

My colleague Lory Fischler tells the following story about her mentor and tennis coach Ed. It is a great example of how mentoring can happen at any time and any place. Here is the story of Ed in Lory's own words:

### *Lory's Story*

*I had been playing tennis most of my life and at the age of forty was on a tennis team. We played in USTA sponsored tournaments and met weekly to practice. One day during practice we saw another team on the courts who looked like they were having a blast. We thought, "Hey, we'd like to do it that way." So, we hired their coach and thus began my relationship with Ed, tennis coach and mentor.*

*Ed didn't look much like your typical tennis coach, five feet eight, a bit overweight, and scruffy—and not inclined to show us a lot of deference. But what was clear to me from the beginning was that his whole orientation was to my being the best at my game. My game. And that is where the mentoring began.*

*Ed started every lesson with, "How've you been playing? What do you need to work on?" Even when I would tell him about some wonderful victory, where I finally beat someone who had been kicking my butt, he would say, "On your best day, you are never as good as you think you are. And on your worst day, you are never as bad as you think you are." He forced me to stay focused on my goal. Ed taught me a lot about tennis, but more important, he taught me about life. It wasn't good enough to bask in past victories; it was important to keep moving forward and stay focused on my goals.*

*Another big Ed lesson: One day after I dunked a ball into the net, he asked me, "What were you thinking?" I replied, "Nothing . . . I was just trying to hit it back." He responded, "On every shot, at every moment, you need to go in with a plan. Even if it doesn't work, always have a plan." I have taken that lesson to heart and whenever I feel stuck or stressed, I summon up Ed's words like a mantra, "Always have a plan." While this doesn't always result in a long-term solution or a winning shot, it puts me in control. Without a plan I'm just throwing things against a wall and seeing what sticks. If something did work I wouldn't even be able to identify what it was. With a plan, even if it doesn't work, I can look back on it, reflect on why it didn't work, and actually learn something.*

*More Ed wisdom: "Play your bread and butter shots." Mine is a down the line shot. He always advised me, "Know what you have that you can rely on. That is what is going to win you games, when you play your best and most consistent shots." In tennis, as in life, it is important to play to your strengths. This doesn't mean you don't work on stretching your game, practicing other shots to use in a pinch, but if you try to make your fundamental game about doing what is hard for you, you will lose games. I learned to know my strengths and rely on them.*

*Ed was my teacher for twenty years. That adds up to a lot of life lessons.*

*"Put a positive message in your head," he told me one day when I was working on serving after coming back from shoulder surgery. "Don't tell yourself not to double fault. Instead," he reminded me, "tell yourself to throw the ball higher, or out more or reach for it. Give yourself a positive not negative message."*

*When I was struggling with my ground strokes one year, he asked me what I was thinking about in trying to correct my stroke. I listed about five things. "Work on only two things at a time," he challenged me. "That's about all the brain can handle at once. Especially your brain," he said, smiling.*

*I am without Ed now on the tennis court. He died rather suddenly last year after a short illness. But he died living all those life messages he had been passing down to me over the years. And because of him I am living those messages too. He told me, "I have had a great life. I have made great friends, played a game I love, with people I care about. What could be better?"*

*Knowing Ed, as a mentor and as a friend, what could be better?*

*P.S. I wasn't the only person who was mentored by Ed. At his memorial service with only twenty-four hours notice over sixty people showed up. When the time came to share Ed stories, after an initial silence there suddenly came a flood of stories of things Ed had told people, what they had learned, how they would be forever influenced by his words, wisdom, and teaching.*

Ed's job title was tennis coach, but his work went way beyond coaching. What made him a mentor was what he asked of people and how they responded. He cultivated mentoring relationships when he asked his students to create goals, know and challenge themselves, reflect on their

practice, and grow and learn. He nurtured his relationship with his students consciously. It was this relationship that served as a vehicle through which learning happened. Although natural mentors like Ed may not be typical—he knew instinctively what good mentoring involved—the learning that resulted from his mentoring, his effect on those he mentored, can happen anywhere. People can learn to be good mentors and mentees. All that is necessary is for people to come to the process with an open mind, learn about the fundamentals of good mentoring, and put these fundamentals into practice. That is what this book is all about.

## IS MENTORING RIGHT FOR YOU?

The people mentored by Ed were mentored successfully because they were ready to receive what he had to offer. In much the same way, Kendra was also ready when her mentor stepped forward at a very teachable moment. She was open to learning and professional development. Because she had a mentor who created a safe climate, she was able to be open with herself and her mentor. She learned how to listen to and respect critical feedback and convert those lessons learned into action. Mentoring was right for her. Before moving on to the next chapters about the mentoring process, it may be useful take a moment and consider how ready you are.

Here are some questions for you to think about:

- Do I have a sincere interest in learning?
- Am I willing to commit time to developing and maintaining a mentoring relationship?
- Am I willing to work on my own growth and development?
- Am I willing to be open and honest with myself and another person?
- Am I willing to listen to critical feedback?
- Can I participate without adversely affecting my other responsibilities?
- Am I committed to being an active mentoring partner?

Although these are important questions to consider, don't worry if you can't unequivocally answer each with a resounding, Yes! Learning to be a mentee can take time. Still, it is useful to go into the process with an awareness of aspects that you might find particularly challenging. The next chapter on preparing yourself for mentoring will give you an opportunity to explore just how ready you are and address these areas of challenge before you move forward.

