

Expert Tips & Tactics

Mentoring

I gave a presentation to a Toastmaster's Club recently about one of my greatest satisfactions in life: Helping people to succeed. I commented that mentoring is the art of being stunningly successful and completely anonymous. When we mentor people in life, we often do so for a specific part of their lives. Mentors help their protégés to develop and acquire the skills that will ensure success. It is the protégé, however, who draws the adulation of praise for success...and this is exactly as it should be. Mentors are quiet, unobtrusive advocates and facilitators of their protégés.

I see mentors as map-readers, mine sweepers and lighthouses. Since I draw a lot of my experience from the martial arts, I see martial arts instructors as the ultimate mentors. We are map-readers because we are further ahead on our own journey. We have been there, done that. We know the lay of the land, the obstacles, pitfalls and challenges that lie ahead for our students. We are mine sweepers precisely because we do know the challenges ahead, and we can offer suggestions that might help our students avoid obstructions and achieve success sooner.

Typically, protégés choose mentors whom they admire and respect and who can act as a guide, which makes the mentor a lighthouse, a beacon to safe harbor on an uncertain ocean. Frequently, protégés want to emulate some aspect of the mentor's character or success. The mentor in turn needs wisdom, understanding, tolerance, patience and above all compassion.

For mentoring to be effective, protégés need to have a plan of what they wish to achieve. The mentor cannot provide the map; that is the responsibility of the protégé.

It is inevitable, however, that protégés will make mistakes. Falling over is a necessary step in the process of learning...I truly believe we fail our way to success. I can think of hundreds of instances where I fell flat on my face or made the wrong choice in my own journey. But each choice was a valuable lesson. I am still on my journey, learning and making new mistakes. Failure allows us to discover the ways that won't work and draw us closer to the ways that will work. It also means that our students have to make their own mistakes to learn the necessary lessons that will ensure eventual success.

When protégés make mistakes, mentors are patient and tolerant. Often the mentor can see pitfalls ahead and might even give warnings of their impending arrival, but ultimately it is up to the protégé to successfully negotiate the obstacle.

If mentors do their job well, protégés achieve success through synergy. Synergy occurs when a group of individuals combine their skills, knowledge, experience and talents to achieve more, sooner, than would have been possible had they acted alone. By drawing on the experiences of mentors, protégés can achieve higher levels of success, sooner. In an ideal world, martial arts instructors should want their students to be better and achieve more than they did.

Once the success has been achieved, it should be the protégé who draws the praise and the mentor should be in the background. It is not about my ego as a mentor, it is about the success of my protégé.

Now, look around in your life as a business owner. Where would a success coach speed your arrival to success? Are you too proud to ask? Are you too afraid to ask?

If you look ahead on the road, you will see people in front of you and if you look behind you, there are your students. Your mentors are ahead of you, if you just ask, and your protégés are waiting for your guidance. Ultimately only you can chart your course to success. A mentor can help you achieve success sooner, but it is your journey, no-one else can walk it for you.

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