I was recently invited to write this article for the Life-Long Learning series on the power of mentorship. It made me reflect on my own career and the role mentorship has played. Mentorship—being a mentor as well as being a mentee—has always been highly regarding value add in my career and the careers I have had the opportunity to guide. When I was successful in connecting to mentors, I saw how it opened up the ability to pursue opportunities, tap into resources and create a feedback loop that is essential in anyone’s career journey and progression.

**What is Mentoring?**

Mentoring is a strategic tool. Its main premise is to essentially help people (mentees) to specifically develop their career paths more effectively. Please note however that mentoring is not the same as training, teaching or coaching, and a mentor doesn’t need to be a qualified trainer or an expert in the role the mentee carries out. Coaching is generally short term to be used to improve performance personally or professionally. Mentoring is long term, generally six months to one year. Sometimes (more often than not) one gains a lifelong relationship with a mentor or mentee. Mentorship offers off-line help by one person to another in making significant transactions in knowledge, working or thinking.

**Benefits of Mentoring**

Having a mentor and being a mentor is exceedingly beneficial - you both grow and learn. Mentorship is probably the most underrated aspect of searching for a job or building the foundations of your career. The guidance you can potentially receive from a mentor is invaluable, and their ability to help you navigate the unknown paths of your position and reach your goals more quickly is what makes them so important.

Today’s business landscape is complex and changing. Navigating and maneuvering within it is critical. And a combination of soft and hard skills is often at the heart of this. Having a mentor, usually a person who has more experience, provides an opportunity to glean an understanding of the best ways to accomplish this.

In my own career, I came to a point where my progression stalled despite being a highly sought after consultant. And this is where learning and connecting really helped me break through the barriers. To be clear, I did not have a single mentor or a formalized regular cadence, but what I did have was a small network to ask for guidance for different perspectives. And from there, I began to apply those tips, build allies in the right places and make my strengths visible to those who mattered.

What does this mean for companies and organizations when their employees have the benefits of mentorship? In my case, having this guidance and advice allowed me to take on career opportunities that I otherwise may not have. My confidence soared, and my goals found clarity. And that meant my organization at that time was able to harness my talent most effectively and translate that into deepening employee engagement—I stayed longer and contributed more.

Mentorship also lends a voice to many who, on their own, are not able to traverse the journey. Having a wide variety of voices around the table is extremely beneficial to running any business, organization or project, because it brings different solutions and perspectives that translate toward direct success and, in turn, result in a positive cascading effect.

**What Makes A Good Mentor?**

Generally, a good mentor is someone who is motivated and energized, cares about developing others, and is willing to commit their time. At the same time, if you are a mentee, make sure to dedicate the time and energy necessary to be mentored properly. It’s most effective when there is a good match between the mentor and mentee—whether that be in backgrounds, skill sets, experiences, roles or facing similar challenges.

A mentor is someone with knowledge and experience in your desired field. They’re willing to share this knowledge with you to help you achieve your goals. A mentor should be someone who has achieved a level of success that you envision for yourself. It’s someone who can challenge you and push you in ways other people can’t.

A good mentor also builds trust, is discreet and respects confidentiality. You, as a mentee, should feel safe and be able to share in a frank and transparent conversation. I am someone who appreciates straight talk, and therefore, my best mentors were the ones who didn’t hesitate from highlighting my weaknesses and providing critiques—in a constructive manner.

Recently, I had a mentee whose career trajectory was similar to mine, but most importantly, she was facing common issues that I faced at similar points in my career. As a result, there was plenty to share, discuss and discern.

I find goal setting to be rather important when finding a good mentor. As a mentee, you can identify a mentor who will be good only if you are clear in what you are looking to accomplish. The accountability always lies with mentees—you have to own that—however, a good mentor helps you get to a better framework especially if you are plagued by doubt and uncertainty.

Companies and organizations stand much better chances of advancing and achieving positive business outcomes when they help build leaders at every level. Mentorship is a great pathway for enhancing employee skills, advocating toward organization-wide diversity and driving the desired impact of corporate culture with far-reaching impact on employee development.

At an individual level, mentorship is insightful and beneficial. For me, this has been a transformational learning and growth experience, both as a mentor and as a mentee—it has been rewarding! Invest time in it and keep at it.

7 Habits of Highly Successful Mentors and Mentees

1. Active listening
2. Dedication to their success
3. Dedicated to others’ success
4. Curious
5. Engaged with their surroundings
6. Willing to step out of their comfort zones
7. The 3 R’s: Responsible, Respectful & Ready

In summary, the benefits of mentorship are sincere, open and supportive in almost any professional growth and expansion situation.