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### Partnership for Success

For the past thirty years, I've been meeting every month or so for a long lunch with my friend Josh. Josh was part of my first sales team when I was promoted to sales management. I was his manager and coach for three years until he took a position in another industry. When he gave me his notice, Josh asked me if it would be "okay to keep in touch with me." He thanked me for my guidance and support and told me he would like me to continue to be his mentor. In the intervening decades, Josh has bought me many lunches and I've seen him grow as a business professional and as a man. Our relationship has been rewarding for both of us. Throughout my life, many people have helped me along the way and I view the time and the effort I put into helping Josh as a way to "pay it forward" to the next generation. This month's Link & Learn will look at the mentoring process and how it can benefit both parties involved.

#### Coaching versus Mentoring

When we first met, I was Josh's boss. I was responsible for leading my team and driving our sales revenue. I spent a lot of time coaching my people and honing their sales skills. I conducted regular team training sessions, did endless role-plays with my people and offered them feedback on the calls. I started out as Josh's coach, only later did our relationship evolve and I became his mentor.

While many coaches are also mentors, there are fundamental differences between the two activities. Coaching is task oriented. A coach teaches specific techniques—how to open a sales call, handle a stall objection etc. Coaches are often assigned to their position and their authority derives from their place in the company's hierarchy. The coach is tasked with achieving the short-term goals of the people who report to him or her.

While coaches think tactically—they want to achieve this quarter's sales goals, mentors think strategically, they focus on developing the individual, on helping them build a character and the attitudes which will sustain them throughout their life. Coaches show their charges what to do, mentors show them how to think. The coach is an authority figure, they have power over the person they are working with, the mentor is a partner, whose influence comes from their genuine concern for the person they are trying to help and the strength of their character. This is why mentoring relationships often last a lifetime. Coaches provide a valuable service; they make us better businesspeople. Mentors provide an invaluable service—they make us better people.

#### Finding a mentor

I come from a solid blue-collar background. My father took great pride in being a "Master Machinist." He learned his trade in his company's apprenticeship program, by working alongside and observing an older, experienced craftsman. As a young salesman, this seemed like a good way to learn the craft of selling.

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My company didn't have a formal apprenticeship or mentoring program, so I created my own. I listened closely in sales meetings and compared sales results to determine who the best sales people were in my office. When I wanted to improve my skills in a particular area, I would approach the top rep in that skill and ask them to share their expertise with me. For example, when I worked for the Yellow Pages we had just started selling coupons in the back of the directory, the company was paying a bonus for each sale and I wanted to get my share of this extra money. One rep in our office had sold twice as many coupons as the next person on the list so I approached him to be my teacher. I approached him by saying, "Bill, I'm impressed by your coupon numbers, if I buy you lunch, would you give me some tips on selling them?" Bill agreed to help me out, we role-played his pitch at lunch and he even let me ride along with him for an afternoon as he closed several more coupon sales. When I rose to be the number two coupon seller in the office. I gave Bill full credit for my success. He became my mentor and I learned a lot about selling and navigating the politics of our company from him. He remained my friend for many years.

I have to admit that not everyone was as willing to help out a young peer as Bill. Some reps gave me the W.C. Fields' treatment, "Go away kid... you bother me!" Like so many things in sales, all we can do is ask and wait to see what will happen. Not everyone who possesses great skills has the ability, or inclination, to teach others. I was fortunate that Bill had all the benchmarks of a great mentor, these include:

- **Authenticity**—Bill practiced what he preached. He worked hard, managed his time carefully, constantly worked to improve his skills and never compromised his ethics. He was a thoughtful man, who had clear goals and knew how to articulate them. In short he was an excellent role model.
- **Emotional maturity**—Bill was very self-assured. He did not feel threatened by the success of others. He believed that a "rising tide lifts all boats." He had a genuine interest in helping other people to succeed.
- **Honesty**—I could always count on Bill to give me his honest and accurate feedback. He praised me for my successes but more importantly, he didn't hold back when I screwed up. He clearly explained what I did wrong and offered suggestions on how I could do better in the future.

Seeking out mentors is perhaps the single most important thing a young person can do to advance their career. They are often reluctant to approach successful people to help them because; "they are always so busy." It is wise to remember the old saying, "if you want something done, ask a busy person." Your potential mentor will tell you if they are too busy or if they are not interested in guiding you. You will never know these things for sure if you do not ask. Mentoring is about building a relationship. Like the other important relationships in our life

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they can't be forced, they have to grow naturally. I asked Bill for a bit of advice on selling coupons and this grew into a long and fruitful relationship with him. Finding a mentor is much like finding a life partner, you go on a lot of dates until you find the right person. Unlike romantic relationships, you can have many mentors in your life at the same time. Always be on the lookout for those who have something to teach you; your customers, your friends and anyone you encounter in life may have something to offer you as a mentor.

### **Being a good mentor**

As described above, many mentors have helped me along my way. I feel it is only right to pass along what they taught me to the next generation. I made a point of never being too busy to help another sales person improve their skills. I believe that my willingness to help my team is why I was chosen to be a sales manager and why I became a successful leader. I found this so satisfying that I later decided to become a sales trainer, a position that allowed me to mentor many young sales reps. I take this responsibility very seriously and have given a great deal of thought to the art of mentoring. Here are some of the things that mentors should do to help their charges to become better people:

- **Remember the goal is to help the other person grow**—The key factor in your success as a mentor is possessing a genuine interest in your mentee as a human being. I have seen people who sought out leadership or mentoring positions as a way to stroke their ego. These people invariably fail, often doing great harm to those in their charge. A good mentor must be a “servant leader” and the purpose of the relationship must be to help the other person grow and develop.
- **The mentor must be a good role model**—“do as I say, not as I do,” doesn't work in mentoring. To paraphrase Gandhi, “we must be the change we wish to see in our student.” We must model the behaviors we wish to teach. This is especially true in the area of emotional intelligence. The way we react to setbacks and challenges will make a lasting impression on our students.
- **Don't give lectures, have conversations**—At its core, mentoring is about communication. Effective communication is always a two way street. When we lecture, the other person may shut down mentally. A conversation keeps them engaged and keeps them thinking. A good mentor not only describes what they would do in a particular situation, but also tells why they would do it that way. This will help your students understand your thought process and help them learn to adapt to similar situations in the future. It is important to listen to the other person. Listening will help you to understand their thought processes and understand things from their viewpoint. Without this understanding, we will never be able to help them make meaningful and lasting changes in their behavior.



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- **Be a dispassionate observer**—I am always amazed at people who sit on their couch watching a bird's eye view of a football game on television and then criticize the quarterback for not making a particular play. The game looks a lot different when there are six 300-pound guys rushing toward you. The same is true on a sales call; it's hard to do the right thing when the pressure is on. One of the best ways a mentor can help their students is to review the "game films" with them. After an important sales call, meeting or other interaction, a person's emotions can blind them to what really occurred and prevent them from learning from the experience. The mentor can act as a "disinterested" observer to scrub the emotions from the discussion and get down to the facts. By dissecting the call, analyzing what was said, and perhaps role-playing it, we can help our mentee learn to do better next time.

### **Mentoring is a win/win**

In my forty plus years in business, I've been on both sides of the mentoring process. I have been helped by many great people and am eternally indebted to them for the time and the wisdom they've shared with me. I like to think that I've helped some younger people to prosper and grow as individuals. My mentors helped me achieve my goals and to provide for my family. Being a mentor has been one of the most satisfying experiences of my life. Based on my experience, the best bit of advice I can give to young people is to seek out mentors to help guide them along their path. The best advice I can give experienced sales people is to share their knowledge and embrace being a mentor. Life is hard, by working with one another; we can smooth out a lot of bumps in the road. The mentoring relationship is the very definition of a Win/Win experience—when it is done right, mentoring is one of the great experiences in life for all parties involved.

*This article was written by Jim Busch.*

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