



The Power of Mentoring in Leadership Development by Lois Zachary

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“Good mentors help to anchor the promise of the future.” These words, written by Sharon Daloz Parks in the second edition of her book, [Big Questions Worthy Dreams](#), speaks to the power of mentoring for leadership development. Good mentors inspire, motivate, inform, and even empower a mentee to step boldly into the future.

I’ve been on the road the last month presenting talks and workshops on the topic of leadership and what I’ve discovered along the way is that more and more organizations are integrating mentoring as part of their [leadership development](#) initiatives for some pretty compelling reasons.

1. Mentoring drives recruitment of future talent. While Boomers exit the workforce, another door has opened and almost [80 million Millennials](#) are in or entering the workforce. Many of them will become future leaders and are already convinced that having a mentor is their ticket to success. They are looking for employers will provide them that opportunity. As an example, Hinda, a recent MBA graduate from a prestigious eastern school, had four job offers waiting for her when she graduated. The company she ultimately chose offered to pair her with a mentor from the moment she walked in the door and throughout her career.

2. Mentoring contributes to increased retention rate of leadership talent. Almost all successful leaders can attribute their success in whole or in part to the mentors who have supported their growth and development. When leaders feel that someone has a vested interest in their success, they are more likely to tough out the hard times and work through difficult issues.

Bob stood up at our workshop and proudly declared, “I would not be a company leader today if it hadn’t been for my mentor who cared enough to help me get out of my own way and provide me with honest, straightforward, [no-bull feedback](#).”

3. Mentoring nurtures to [commitment to the organization](#). Emerging leaders are more likely to be loyal to an organization in which they feel valued. Committed leaders want to deliver a return on the investment.

Mari's company weathered some pretty rough times in the last six months and there were several times she was ready to throw in the towel. Her mentor kept her focused on the big picture and the strategic direction of the organization so she would understand why [changing her behavior](#) was so necessary.

4. Mentoring builds and strengthens the talent pipeline. Cutbacks affect a surprising number of individual contributors and good performers. Expectations for them are higher than ever before. Organizations need to invest more – not less – in their development in order to ensure a smooth transition and continuity of prepared leaders.

Greg, an HR Manager, gave his talent pipeline a C- minus two years ago. And then they instituted several mentoring programs. He was surprised at how eager the emerging leaders were for these programs and how positively they effected their quarterly results. People were digging in, moving up and becoming increasingly productive.

5. [Mentoring facilitates strategic alignment](#). Knowledge is distributed unevenly throughout most organizations. Some information is known by some people. Other information is known “in pockets.” Knowledge silos contribute to lack of alignment and make it difficult for leaders to be effective.

Within one year after a company I worked with created a cross-functional mentoring program for new leaders, the [entire culture shifted](#). Previously, mentees had no idea what they didn't know about other divisions. Their work world revolved around their silo. The knowledge sharing that occurred through mentoring created new networks throughout the company and allowed them to align their efforts more strategically.

6. Mentoring promotes diversity and inclusion. Mentoring gives everyone an opportunity to learn from the diversity within an organization. Knowledge is shared and diverse perspectives get heard. As trust increases, perspectives expand and difference becomes a source for learning and shared understand, and boundaries disappear.

Sonja had never really known a Hispanic person before and went into her mentoring relationship with biases and invalid assumptions. In the process of mentoring Carlos, she came to realize how her stereotypes had been holding her back and negatively influencing her behaviors as a leader.

When an organization seriously engages in mentoring its leaders, everybody wins.

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