

With so many generations working together now, it's important to take the time to share experiences—both successes and failures—and to share our talents collectively. We can learn from the younger generation as much as they can learn from us.

But what attributes does a great mentor possess?

According to an article published in the Harvard Business Review entitled “*The Best Mentors Think Like Michelangelo*” by W. Brad Johnson and David G. Smith, it all comes down to the art of affirmation:

“First comes perceptual affirmation. Excellent mentors are intentional about taking the time to truly “see” their mentees, understanding — and accepting — both their authentic real selves and their ideal selves and imagined career destinations. This takes time and patience. A mentor must earn trust, be accessible, and listen generously”.

“Listen generously”.

That reminds me of one of the Cinderella skills from the book “*Your Relationship GPA: Lessons from Harvard Students on How Make Time for What Matters Most*” by Greg Foster and Stephen Turban—as the art of listening is so important. Hear what people are saying, not what you want to hear.

“The second element involves behavioral affirmation, helping mentees to engage in behaviors aligned with their ideal selves. Having gained a window into whom a mentee dreams of becoming, a mentor opens doors and conjures the opportunities the mentee will require to get there”.

If only it were that simple in the workplace...

If you could turn back time (like Cher), what is one thing you would tell your former boss that could have helped you successfully achieve your professional goals? As a boss, what pearls of wisdom did you share to help guide people to become their best selves?

Speaking of mentoring, Deborah Solomon, Founder of Wall Street Dead aHead Networking Events® (WSDaH), has the uncanny ability to unlock the hidden talents of her Family Members. They aren't her 'direct reports', yet she effortlessly points people in the direction of achieving their goals, while adding positive reinforcements along the way. She mentors Family Members who are starting out in their careers, entering new ones or changing midlife.

I spoke with WSDaH Family Members—both mentors and mentees—and here’s what they had to say on the topic of mentoring:

"Mentors have been critical in both my personal and professional development. While it's easy for people to share stories of success, the mentors that have meant the most to me have been those humble enough to impart their biggest failures and missed opportunities. The world we live in has many means of bringing you down, and my best mentors have helped me navigate these sometimes troubled waters".

Josh Rosen - A&D Sales Representative – Knoll

"Mentors are great listeners. They take the time to listen to the challenges and questions of their mentee, and can pinpoint areas where the mentee may not be seeing on their own. Good mentors tend to have a track record for finding, developing and sharing talent with others. It's important to seek a mentor who is willing to disagree with you, and when he/she is candid and honest with you and gives you advice and guidance that you are actually open to taking the advice. When someone signs up to be your mentor, respect the spirit of what that means".

Jim Cochran - Global Head of Recruiting – JP Morgan Chase

"I believe a mentor should be someone who is willing to share all the knowledge and experience they have gained over their lifetime. A mentor should be a great listener, someone who is approachable and never too busy to provide guidance. Being invested in the success of the mentee is critical and approaching this important role with honesty, compassion and patience is paramount".

Alan Wolfson - Office Managing Partner – CohnReznick LLP

"Having a good mentor early in my career was critical—not just for helping me to find the answers—but to help me to formulate the questions. Mentors are invaluable when it comes to the soft skills as well as knowing how to navigate the political minefields that can sometimes be a key part of the corporate sector. I still stay in touch with my main mentor today—it's been 10 years".

Mike Mellor - Director of Marketing and Business Development – Pryor Cashman

"As a mentor, you're regarded as an expert in your area or field of responsibility. It's one thing to know what you're doing; but another to be able to explain what you know,

and to be willing to take the time to do it. A mentor should be a good listener, able to accept constructive criticism and be willing to make the most of your time and energy”.

Scott Gibson – President – SG Sourcing

In a perfect world, we would all have great mentors to mirror as we make our way through the challenges of our careers. Were you fortunate enough to have a great mentor or two during your career? Do you think you're a great mentor? We'd love to hear your stories!

“*You who choose to lead must follow*”—sounds like a pretty good start to me...

References:

Johnson, W. Brad, Smith, David G. "The Best Mentors Think Like Michelangelo." *Harvard Business Review*. 23 January 2018.

Stephen Turban and Greg M. Foster, *Your Relationship GPA: Lessons from Harvard students on how to make time for what matters most* (New York: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016)