

# Mentorship... What people might become



Watching Gareth Malone, the nerdy-looking young man of *The Choir* (BBC) fame, for a third season on TVO, continues to move me to tears. His distinct awareness, intelligence and leadership as he recruits singing talent in underprivileged British towns, as well as his courage and humanity, reveal what I consider to be true mentorship ability.

Navigating the minefield of population segments that have more or less been written off by the upper classes of English society, he identifies, inspires and enables raw singing ability, against all odds forming top-notch performing choirs. He seems driven by an unshakable quest to discover what people might become given the chance. He validates the individuality that lurks in those he meets and marries it to a common and relevant cause.

In his own words, when asked why he does what he does Malone says: "... above

all, it was their increase in confidence as the months sped by that was the real highlight for me. All those involved learnt how to aim high, somehow to lead ... they learnt how to be a team, how to support each other and how to be patient when others are struggling. That, to me, was worth all the effort."

Similarly, perhaps the greatest legacy of the late Richard Bradshaw was not in getting the Toronto Four Seasons Opera House built, but rather his creative recruitment of the unlikely young Canadians that now provide the stalwart talent and passion that defines the Canadian Opera Company. Many of the young artists he identified have gone on to gain international renown. Many openly admit that if he had not spotted and nurtured what was considered uncertain talent, they would perhaps not enjoy their current success.

These reflections are important to me because they highlight what mentorship is really about and what it takes to be a good mentor. The essence of an evolving mentor/mentee relationship is interaction that provides a stepping stone or sounding-board that will assist mentees realize their full potential—becoming who they are, and what they want to be, rather than who they are supposed to be. Effective and trusted mentors will display:

- Disinterested recognition, understanding and preservation of unique mentee thinking, competencies and impact.
- Preparedness to accept value and priority differences (the ability to transcend personal or projected goals).
- Acceptance of changing realities as the relationship progresses.
- Ability to work with uncertainty and intangible results—it is important not to care more about outcomes than the mentee!
- An understanding that mentorship often bears fruit only in years to come—when the mentee is ready and able to absorb fully the mentor's contribution.
- Ongoing commitment as a resource/sounding board.
- Belief that the process is a two-way

street—a relationship of equals builds trust and opens the door to mutual learning.

Mentorship is age and gender neutral. Anybody can mentor or be mentored at any stage in their career evolution. Mentorship is not a fast-track networking vehicle, nor is it an opportunity to rapidly download the hard-earned knowledge of others.

As coordinator of the Canadian Women in Communications (CWC-AFC)/Canwest mentorship program, part of my responsibility involves securing mentor/mentee matches. I am blown away by the readiness of business folk across the board to give so generously of their time and expertise. Their sole motivation is to assist those who they have discovered have a greater leadership contribution to make.

It is also interesting to note instances of people mentoring others while currently being mentored themselves. Women asking for help, and being helped in a trusted environment, has gone a long way to create a community that speaks to the real advancement of women in the corporate world.

Mentoring youth is my particular passion. The York University Learning Disability Mentorship Program presents young men and women, frustrated by labels and a template-driven undergraduate environment, determined to be who they are rather than to labour under a life-long etiquette of the learning disabled. Uniquely motivated mentors, from all walks of life, buy into this vision and dedicate themselves to successfully enabling the promise that lies within each student mentee.

In the bigger picture, mentorship builds for the future, strengthening the fabric of diverse industries. I salute those who embrace this important role!

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