



Every Leader Can Be Mentored

Five Essential Questions to Ask Your Mentor

"Great coaches are themselves coached by great coaches." –Jim Mathis

Last fall my business was doing very well. Everything was falling into place. I knew, though that I needed to stretch myself. I felt that if I was to go to the next level, it would take the advice of a mentor on a higher level than myself. I sought out friend's suggestions and advice. My friend Tim Gard suggested that you should never hire a coach or mentor until you have the confidence to say, "No." Tim's remark got me to thinking, though about what you should do when you want to be mentored by a great leader.

Recently while attending a conference on leadership the speaker revealed that he had researched various leaders to find what they had in common. To his amazement, he found they had nothing in common. Everyone led in his/her own style. This raised a question as to how a leader could be mentored if every person led from their own style. Reverend Larry Osborn said, "For years I've studied leaders and their ministries hoping to get answers. I've focused on the highly successful, looking for their secrets, which I could apply to my own life and ministry. But what I've found has surprised me. Instead of secrets, principles and patterns that guarantee success, I've found amazing diversity. While there are certainly some common threads to be found, the most striking thing about highly effective leaders is how little they have in common. What one swears by, another warns against."

So who should you choose? How do you find someone who you feel comfortable with? What questions should you ask them?

Here are five essential questions you should ask your mentor to grow from their experience:

1. Ask them how they did it.

This gives you the process. Learn from their experience. There is nothing like learning from other people's experiences. Find where they have been. Look

at their road map. Discover their process. I mentor speakers who are just starting out and they all want to know how I became successful in such a short time. I tell them about the various experiences I have had and the methods I used to get clients, market my business and grow my career. Several months ago I received a compliment from one of my speaker clients who said, "You don't just teach methods, you practice them and that makes a difference."

Make sure they have done it, too. It is easy to find an "expert" on any subject, but are they experienced? Are they accurate? Phillip Tetlock has been observing expert's views on world events and politics for decades. He says, "Almost as many experts as not thought that the Soviet Communist Party would remain firmly on the saddle of power in 1993, that Canada was doomed by 1997, that neo-facism would prevail in Pretoria by 1994, that Emu would collapse by 1997... that the Persian Gulf Crisis of 1991 would be resolved peacefully." You can't always trust the "experts." Question your mentor and find out how and IF they did it.

2. Ask them what made it successful.

This gives you the secret. Watch Tiger Woods play golf. He plays the same course using the same club choices most other golfers use. But he makes decisions better than most of his competition. What you will learn is not how to succeed, but how to make the right decisions when the time comes.

Everyone has a story about the moment or the decision that changed their life. You may be surprised to learn that it occurred in a moment of crisis where they seized on an opportunity to move ahead or remain stagnant. Ask them the key that they feel put them over the top. Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "The young man knows the rules, the old man knows the exceptions." Don't be surprised if it involves taking a risk. The world consists of three types of people: those who take risks and succeed; those who take risks and fail; and those who never take risks. Which category do you fall in?

3. Ask them what they did wrong.

This gives you the pitfalls. I have found that most sales trainers teach methods that make them look infallible. They like to let you believe that they never make a mistake and if you follow their system you won't ever fail. This is nonsense. Even the top account executives have dry spells and down periods. If you think they don't, you are fooling yourself, or being fooled by them. I have made numerous mistakes in my business. I tell new speakers that they will make mistakes, hopefully not the ones I made.

William Knudson said, "Experience is knowing a lot of things you shouldn't do." Ask your mentor where he/she went wrong. I just finished reading former Coca Cola's CEO, Donald Keough's book *The Ten Commandments for*

Business Failure. He tells the many successes and mistakes he made as the senior executive of the world's number one soft drink, including the disaster of New Coke. He said he was misled by outside consulting firms that tempted him to look more at the taste of the drink and less of the preferences of his customers. What he learned from this was that his brand loyalty was more significant than he thought. You can't succeed over the opinions of your customers.

4. Ask them what they learned.

This gives you the lesson. It is amazing how many companies are run by supposed geniuses that don't get it until it is too late. General Motors spent a fortune fighting the allegations Ralph Nader put forth in his book, *Unsafe at Any Speed*. Nader's allegations and attack focused on the rear engine Chevrolet Corvair. Rather than accepting responsibility and making an effort to convince the public that they were going to insure safety in the car, they squandered their profits on defaming and harassing Nader. They lost millions in dollars, but moreover they lost public trust and customer loyalty. When they finally learned from their mistake, it was too late to save the Corvair.

What has your mentor learned from his/her errors? What universal principles can be applied to your life? John Maxwell says, "Experience is a hard teacher. The test is given first, the lesson afterwards." What lesson has your mentor learned that you can apply to your life and career?

5. If the mentor has a bad experience, get a second opinion.

This gives the perspective. When I began my speaking career, I was being mentored by two speakers. One was a positive role model, the other was insecure (I didn't know this at first, but I soon found out when the second one told me that if I couldn't sign five clients in five months, I should give up professional speaking as a career). The first mentor told me that I should stick with what I was doing and not to worry about the negative remarks of the one with the bad attitude. I got six clients within the next three months and my career took off. Maybe my negative advisor inspired me to greatness after all, but I was glad I sought out a second opinion.

At the beginning of this article, I stated that you will find many different styles of leadership. I encourage you to keep searching. Don't just settle on one advisor, mentor and coach. Get several opinions. Get several views. There is an abundance of people willing to help you if you simply ask. Spend time researching other people's experiences and tap into the vast amount of knowledge available to you.

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Jim Mathis, CSP is an international Certified Speaking Professional, executive coach and trainer. To subscribe to his free personal and professional development newsletter, please send an email to: subscribe@jimmathis.com with the word SUBSCRIBE in the subject. An electronic copy will be sent out to you every month. For more information on how Jim and his programs can benefit your organization or group, please call 888-688-0220, or visit his web site: www.jimmathis.com.