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A guide to good mentoring

Given the importance of mentoring, there's surprisingly limited guidance about how to become a good mentor. An article published in the Harvard Business Review provides a number of informal guidelines that can be used for those looking for a basis on which to form good mentorship practice. These can be applied across all disciplines.

Choose mentees carefully

Mentors trade away hours they could use to pursue their own career goals and spend them on someone else's. Having the wrong mentee can be painful. A mentee should be curious, organised, efficient, responsible and engaged.

Establish a mentorship team

The exclusive, one-on-one relationship of mentor and mentee, long the norm, was ideal for a time when both parties stayed put in one institution or devoted to a single mission. That time has passed, the authors write. Mentees should work with mentors to create a mentorship team, with members selected for their various areas of knowledge, such as subject matter expertise or career advice.

Run a tight ship

Mentoring needn't take an excessive amount of time. Establishing firm and clear ground rules with mentees can improve efficiency.

Head off rifts...or resolve them

It's not uncommon for mentors and mentees to have a falling out. What seemed like a perfect pairing on the surface may wind up being a total mismatch. Sometimes this becomes obvious suddenly. Deal with it.

Don't commit mentorship malpractice

Because mentors are in the dominant position in the relationship, it's easy for them to wield their power inappropriately – even if they're not fully aware of it. This has negative career consequences for both parties.

Prepare for the transition

While the actual moment of transition from mentee to mentor varies, the mentor should feel that the mentee has achieved real expertise and is equipped to make the leap. For this to happen, a mentor's accumulated wisdom and expertise should have passed on to the next generation.