



Islamic Leadership Institute of America

MENTORING

AN INTRODUCTION

Mentoring is a powerful method and one of the most successful and effective leadership development delivery methods known to mankind. Islamic heritage is rich of stories of mentorship and coaching from the early days of creation, and the Quran and hadith of the Prophet (pbuh) brings to life every possible type and track of mentor coaching.

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A process of sharing, sharing the lessons of success as well as those of failure. It is sharing the wisdom and providing others with the ability to accelerate and get a jump start in life to succeed in this life and the hereafter.

One of the main and most common ways human learn is through observation and experimenting, allowing them to gain experience and apply knowledge they acquired through this process in new avenues, applications and context.

Our Islamic heritage is full of stories and examples of great mentoring relationships. Angel Jibriel (pbuh) and his teaching the Prophet (pbuh) is one prime example. Ibrahim and his son Ismail (pbut) is another mentoring relationship between a man and his biological son. Musa and the Khedir (pbut) is an example of mentoring between two men. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and Muath Ibn Jabal is another example of mentoring between a man and a youth. The examples are plentiful and very diverse, and Allah (SWT) has blessed us with real-life examples that we can learn invaluable lessons to develop ourselves, families and communities.

INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL MENTORING

The mentoring process requires a good healthy match between a mentor and a protégé, also known as a mentee. The apex of this match is based on trust and sincerity. The sincere intention of the mentor to share and give with nothing in return develops trust between the two parties and leads to a fountain of learning, teaching, and counseling.

Mentoring is considered a large component of coaching. I view coaching as a broader umbrella which includes mentoring. A mentor is more like a consultant, guiding the mentee through example, making available tips to develop one and giving advice, but not taking part in the actual work. A mentoring coach adds a little more spice to the relationship. The coach takes it a few steps further by raising the bar on

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Trust & Compassion

Process-Oriented

Challenge Focused

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Skills-Based

the mentee, challenging the protégé with additional experiences, counseling the protégé as needed through active and empathic listening, and allowing the protégé to identify root causes for success or failure. The coach also assists the protégé in resolving problems by self. Coaches play a major role as teachers and tutors as well, offering individualized attention and utilizing various approaches to make concepts and ideas clear and meaningful.

A good mentoring coach is one who also confronts a protégé with both positive and negative experiences. Good coaches ask for clarifications, set expectations, identify shortcomings and help protégé develop plans for improvement and growth.

A sound and solid coaching conversation exhibits seven key skills mostly summarized as:

1. **Mutuality:** During a conversation both parties must be able to talk and listen and engage in a healthy deep dialogue. A mentoring coach is not a lecturer and should not offer one way instructions and expectations.
2. **Change-Oriented:** The discussion must be focused on a change element and envision some future outcome. The protégé might be very successful and the mentor is assisting in gaining even higher levels of success.
3. **Trust and compassion:** The relationship has to be based on mutual respect and compassion. This will yield respect and an environment of caring conducive to learning, experience and development.
4. **Process-Oriented:** The coaching relationship must follow a process to be successful. This is where most mentors find a mentoring relationship challenging. A process can be as simple as setting goals, with clear milestones and working on a plan, keeping the soft human element side active.
5. **Challenge-Focused:** A good mentor focuses on the abilities of the protégé, considers the environmental factors impacting the protégé. The protégé's strengths and weaknesses and the root cause of a challenge, issue or problem.
6. **Immediacy:** Both the mentor and the protégé must be part of the relationship, it has to be a two way road, there has to be a strong binding and tight coupling between the two personalities and both should be active and available, looking forward to the mentoring relationship.
7. **Skills-Based:** Strong mentors and mentoring relationships exhibit the traits and styles that the Prophet (pbuh) has implemented and applied, such as attending to the situation, protégé and issue at hand, acknowledging information, and giving feedback and asking questions in a compassionate and trustworthy approach. Reflecting on discussion points and living in one's shoes is only a normal skill for a mentor, always summarizing at closure.

TYPES OF MENTORING

Most mentoring relationships are one-to-one, where one coach mentors one protégé. However in some cases group mentoring might also be useful when mentor resources are scarce. Identifying mentors is a challenge to begin with, and finding solid mentors is a very difficult task. Mentoring requires commitment, dedication, and passion to help others with the ability to never get bored and truly be part of someone else's life.

At times of high demand I have mentored up to six people during the same time period, individually, some required more time than others. In some cases one of my protégé's alone might require a full day of very close attention to address a challenge or meet a deadline, and this could repeat a few times over several days and in some cases weeks. Other times it might be a matter of fifteen minutes during a particular week. The bottom line is that the mentor needs to be available not necessarily physically (although it does bring much value), but mentally and emotionally.

MENTORING TRACKS

Mentoring today is becoming a common practice across our societies, at work, in families, in local communities and at educational institutions. I generally break down mentoring tracks into four main areas which are:

1. **Academic mentoring:** A relationship mostly focused on the academic success and development of the protégé. Teens and college students, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels are usually the most common groups to engage in academic mentoring.
2. **Career mentoring:** A relationship that focuses on career options and paths for the protégé. Common in large organizations, professionals and executives usually benefit from these relationships as well as young recent college graduates.
3. **Social mentoring:** A relationship that addresses peer issues, social interactions, identity, family and societal relationships. It is common among the younger population and takes the form of a big brother or big sister program, and can include flavors of other tracks of mentoring.
4. **Life skills mentoring:** A relationship focused on the whole of the person including and not limited to the spiritual, academic, career and social perspectives. It is a comprehensive mentoring program extending across tracks at any given time, quite often mixing tracks and integrating areas of interest across the spectrum including teens, college students, executives, exceptionally high achieving individuals such as sports athletes, entrepreneurs, gifted and talented achievers, as well as individuals with special challenges such as incarcerated reentry inmates, homeless households, and challenged individuals.

WRAP UP

Developing strong leaders and solid characters takes more than words, it requires application. Coaching is one of the best delivery approaches in educating others about leadership traits, styles and their applications. Mentoring coaches are a rare commodity and everyone should have a handful of people whom are considered trusted advisors that can act as mentors. A mentor does not need to be the best achiever, but must possess the requirements discussed earlier and be able to master their application. Mentoring has proven to be an extremely successful tool in protecting at-risk-youth, in developing successful business leaders, in growing phenomenal entrepreneurs and simply transforming someone's life into the next world champion.

TO READ MORE

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ayman Nassar is founder and president of Islamic Leadership Institute of America (ILIA). His experience spans areas of technology management and leadership, youth & family leadership development, community and institutional enterprise architecture and sustainability development. He holds graduate degrees in technology management and engineering, and patents in areas of systems sustainability and service management. He authored several books in the areas of leadership and management and speaks frequently at youth groups, community centers and conferences in the areas of leadership, technology and education.

For more information visit www.islamicleadership.org or call 240.765.7151 and ask about EmpowerOne, ILIA's coaching & mentoring program.

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