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9 Steps to Great Mentoring and Coaching

It's lonely at the top; I wish I had a sounding board; and it's a steep learning curve. Common headspace dialogue by a person involved in an important endeavor. It could be the CEO of a multi-national, an employee recently promoted into a new role or anyone who feels uncomfortable and is struggling to adapt to a new set of circumstances. Mentoring or coaching or a combination of both is a valuable skill to assist in these areas. An important pre-condition is that the mentor/coach enjoys imparting their experience, knowledge and wisdom. And, of course, the intending mentee is all for it, prepared to share their thoughts and be open to new ideas. The following are what I believe to be the key tenets of great mentoring/coaching:

1. **Be Authentic:** Establish trust. Authenticity is vital. Outline your history, your experience and importantly your human touch. Without trust, it will be difficult to move forward and provide value.
2. **Listen and Understand:** Meet with the mentee's manager and/or with the mentee. Listen carefully – the issues may not be well articulated. It could be to address low confidence in taking on a new role; how best to handle a series of issues; or to learn new leadership skills. The issues and objectives could be wide and varied. Listen and understand the overarching objectives.
3. **Understand the Mentee and Environment:** Attain a good understanding of the mentee, their history, job and environment. This is important information for your mentoring/coaching. As the sessions proceed, further details will inevitably emerge. Take notes and continue to refine this understanding.
4. **Crystallise the Issues:** Prior to this step, you may only have a broad understanding of the issues and objectives of the mentoring/coaching. This step sharpens the focus. Agree on the desired outcome. List them out in a program – a document which captures the objectives, strategies, actions and timelines.
5. **Brainstorming Sessions:** Make these regular – weekly is a great interval. Prepare. Ask open questions and get the mentee's thinking juices flowing. Gently steer to solutions that are worth pursuing. A good mentor/coach will listen, empathise, plant idea seeds, all the while using their experience and wisdom to steer the mentee along the desired path. These sessions will also unearth other issues and strengthen the bond between the mentee and mentor/coach. Importantly, document your agreed strategies, actions and timelines and at each session monitor the progress and drive improvements.
6. **Practice and Implementation:** Between the sessions, the mentee will practice and implement the agreed strategies and actions. During this period, it is important that the mentor/coach is available in person, on the phone or via email for guidance if required.
7. **Feedback:** Constantly give and seek feedback – to/from the mentee and other stakeholders as may be appropriate. Adjust your approach to improve.
8. **Completion:** When and how the sessions end is very dependent on the circumstances, the mentee and the objectives. I strongly believe each objective you address will have an ending or at the very least the attainment of an agreed level or milestone. The sessions may continue to attain further improvements.
9. **Follow-up Review:** Once the desired objectives are met, the relationship may end. However, I believe it is important to organise a follow-up review – in 1, 2 or 3 monthly intervals – to ensure the mentee is still on track and has not fallen away and returned to old habits.

A successful mentoring/coaching program not only benefits the mentee but the organisation and the mentor/coach. It is one of the best methods of passing on knowledge gained via the school of hard knocks – business acumen not easily found within the education system.

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