

Article from **Policy Perspectives**

(http://www.imakenews.com/cppa/e_article000826448.cfm?x=b6Gdd3k,b30DNQvw,w)

May 29, 2007

Be a Mentor

by Ken Embley, CPPA

Just about a year ago, I wrote a piece for this column titled *The Likeability Factor* (July 2006). The title is the same as that of a book written by Tim Sanders. In the book, Tim identifies four likeability factors: friendliness, relevance, empathy and realness.

Recently, some folks asked me to provide an example of what a supervisor can do to be relevant in the workplace. In sum, their collective question is somewhat like...“Besides ordering people around, what do I do to be relevant in the lives of the people I supervise?” and my response was “Be a mentor.”

Their response to me was something like... “Great! I can find time to shoot the breeze with people who report to me” and to this I said “Then do not mentor, you are just wasting time.” Allow me to go back to the origins of the word mentor and speak to the evolution of mentoring as a substantial tool for a supervisor who wants to be relevant.

According to *The Odyssey*, Odysseus entrusted Mentor with the education and development of his young son, Telemachus. Mentor was the guardian who protected; he was wisdom personified and the dispenser of knowledge. He was the consummate teacher, who faithfully educated Telemachus in the ways of the world and gave him the requisite knowledge to live in that world. When Telemachus grew up and Odysseus returned, Mentor’s responsibilities were complete.

Mentoring has come a long way from its original purpose of enlightenment. Although the original concept of a mentor as a loyal and trusted counsel exists, it is woefully incomplete.

Today’s mentor is a facilitative partner in an evolving learning relationship focused on meeting the learning goals of the protégé. A learning-centered approach to mentoring requires that a mentor facilitate a learning relationship rather than being a “dispenser of knowledge” or to “shoot the breeze with people who report to me”.

When the foundation of the mentoring experience is learning, the likelihood that the mentoring relationship will become a relevant and satisfactory one dramatically improves. In her book, *The Mentor’s Guide, Facilitating Effective Learning Relationships*, Lois Zachary explains the four phases of mentoring—the four phases of developing a learning relationship.

<http://www.josseybass.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-0787980455.html>

Preparing phase—each mentoring relationship is unique. Each time a new mentoring relationship begins, both mentor and protégé should prepare individually and in partnership to ensure clarity about both roles and expectations.

Negotiating phase—is the business phase of the relationship, the time when mentoring partners come to agreement on learning goals and define the content and process of the relationship. This is when the details of when and how to meet, responsibilities, criteria for success, accountability, and bringing the relationship to closure are mutually articulated.



The **Enabling phase**—is when most of the contact between mentoring partners takes place. The enabling phase is maintaining a sufficient level of trust to develop the quality of the mentoring relationship and promote learning. The mentor's role during this phase is to nurture the protégé's growth by establishing and maintaining an open and affirmative learning climate and providing thoughtful, timely, candid, and constructive feedback.

Closure phase—is an evolutionary process that has a beginning (establishing closure protocols when setting up a mentoring agreement), a middle (anticipating and addressing obstacles along the way), and an end (ensuring that there has been positive learning, no matter what the circumstances).

To be likeable, it is important to be relevant in the lives of people who report to you. Of course, there are many techniques to employ but one of the more promising is to be a mentor. However, it is no longer good enough to be a "dispenser of knowledge" or to "shoot the breeze" with people then declare your mentoring effort a success. In the simplest of terms, being a mentor means having the skill and ability to facilitate the development of a learning relationship.

Published by [Center for Public Policy & Administration](#)

Copyright © 2007 The University of Utah. All rights reserved.

The Center for Public Policy & Administration offers research, education and services to public and nonprofit organizations that will strengthen administration, leadership and public policy making.

Powered by [IMN](#)