MENTORING:
A CREATIVE RESPONSE TO THE URGENT NEED
FOR LEADERSHIP SUCCESSION

David E. Hartl

In the past few years several of our clients have told us of how they are having to focus on the problem of replacing a disproportionate number of their most senior leaders in the coming few years. As I thought about how such a situation might have developed, I considered that 25 to 30 years ago the workforce of America expanded in a rush – the economy of the late 70's and 80's thrived for the most part. It was the heyday of high tech industries on both coasts and the Southwest. The percent of Americans employed in government jobs – federal, state and local – doubled, from 9% to 18% of the workforce, during the period 1980 – 1992 with a resurgence in budgets for both military and safety personnel. New cities were incorporating and creating their professional staffs. Entrepreneurs operating all kinds of small businesses were becoming economic driving forces for the U.S. economy. Baby boomers and their early children born in an "echo boom," filled up American organizations and many of them moved up into positions of leadership in growing organizations.

Well, the careers of those leaders are coming to an end. They are now retiring or getting ready to retire. During the next few years the past incoming wave will turn into an outgoing tide, taking with it priceless experience, technical expertise, critical organizational memory, and leadership confidence. It seems clear to me that organizations must not risk being unprepared for this inevitability.

In addition to an outgoing surge of experienced leaders, there is an incoming surge of new ways of doing work largely caused by advancing technology. Even in situations where the nature of the work has remained stable (policing is still policing; sales is still sales; construction is still construction, etc.), the *way* the work is done, the methods and tools that are used, is changing rapidly, requiring the use of new technology and increasing the pace of progress. This advancement is great for improving productivity, but it requires people to acquire new knowledge, skills, and attitudes more rapidly than ever before.

The question is, "What can we do to arrange for a smooth and competent transition in leadership at all levels of the organization and assure that people quickly learn new ways of working?" It's one of the most important questions that organizations have to face these days. If their futures are to be assured, this question needs to be addressed forthrightly and immediately.

Paradoxically, one of the best answers to the question already exists in the very same organizations that are facing the problem, and it requires only a slight shift in priorities: present leaders need only to add a new function to their portfolio of responsibility; *they must become **mentors***. For the next few years, until they retire, current leaders must fulfill the role of mentor to others and be deliberate about passing on their knowledge, perspective, and confidence to the next generation of organizational leaders. In addition, organizations need to create and maintain an effective process for continuous mentoring of others in acquiring the new knowledge, skills, and attitudes that influence how work gets done. Mentoring, as a primary instrument for continuous learning, needs to be incorporated into the ongoing fabric of daily life throughout organizations. Mentoring is pretty much a one-on-one process that is intensely personal and highly effective when done well.

What is mentoring?

Mentoring is one of my favorite professional activities. It's truly a way to give new life to an organization, one of the most precious acts any leader can take. It creates, sustains, expands, and extends the vitality of a healthy organization into the future. Mentoring creates a living legacy. For most people, the experience of learning, and helping someone else learn, is an intrinsically rewarding activity. It feels good and is often intellectually satisfying.

I define mentoring as **one-to-one actions provided by someone experienced that help another learn to be successful in their career, relationships, and life. The mentoring relationship is based on a voluntary and trusting relationship between a mentor and a mentee. Mentoring usually occurs separate from ordinary line-authority relationships and entertains a wide variety of concerns and/or interests to both the mentee and the mentor.**

There are some important qualities that pertain to both mentors and mentees if the relationship is to be effective.

QUALITIES OF EFFECTIVE MENTEES	QUALITIES OF EFFECTIVE MENTORS
Willing to trust the mentor and value the mentor's time, experience, and ideas; committed to respecting confidentiality.	Able to enter into and maintain a relationship characterized by acceptance, trust, and strict personal confidentiality.
Motivated to learn from the experience of the mentor and seriously consider the mentor's counsel and advice.	Willing to voluntarily provide time and energy to a mentee and to share experiences that are relevant to the needs of mentees.
Willing to adopt and maintain a positive mental attitude about new ideas and growth; able to take appropriate action toward positive change.	Able to present ideas and experience in a positive manner, accentuating possibilities while acknowledging potential obstacles.
Willing to receive and use supportive as well as corrective feedback.	Understand the value of encouragement and positive reinforcement for learning.
Able to remain authentic with the mentor, especially including receiving feedback non-defensively.	Able to communicate with authenticity including giving non-judgmental feedback.
Able to regard the mentor as a co-learner and advisor; willing to learn mutually with the mentor.	Open to being a co-learner with a mentee and learning from someone with less experience.
Able to persist in personal learning and growth efforts in spite of setbacks; committed to outcomes as well as efforts.	Able to remain patient and even offer encouragement as well as suggestions when a mentee fails in attempts at new behavior.
Able to acknowledge the value of a mentor's support even when being guided in a direction that engenders personal resistance.	Willing to persist in the mentor role even in the face of receiving little or no recognition or thanks for doing so.
Able to take individual responsibility for producing outcomes and efforts that will serve your own best interests.	Able to regard the needs and best interests of the mentee as the primary factors in the relationship.

Assumptions about adult learners in a mentoring relationship

Mentoring is about learning and growth and typically involves adults as mentees. There are some important assumptions that will apply in the mentoring situation, therefore, that are made explicit here.

ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT ADULT MENTEES	IMPLICATIONS FOR MENTORING
1. Most mentees like to feel they are in control of themselves, self-directing, even when they are in a learning situation.	Mentors realize and act toward mentees in ways that acknowledge mentees' primary responsibility for leading the mentoring relationship. Mentees realize they are in charge of the learning and act with initiative taking responsibility for setting the learning agenda.
2. Most mentees enjoy adding new things to their experience as long as it doesn't threaten previous experiences too greatly.	Mentors acknowledge their mentee's experience and use it as a valuable context for introducing new ideas. When needed changes threaten a mentee's previous experience, mentors adjust the learning pace and tactics to minimize resistance to learning. A mentee's trust of their mentor is a crucial element in learning and change in spite of perceived threat.

3.	Most mentees will change their behavior when they are actually given an opportunity to experience something different, rather than just understanding what it is they are doing wrong or not doing.	Mentors do more than explain; they serve as guides to a mentee's actually experiencing new areas of performance and values. Mentors "walk them through" desired new experiences so that mentees get the "feel" of the lesson being learned or the new situation being entered into. Mentees are responsible for taking the risks necessary to have the new experiences so their learning goals are met.
4.	Most mentees will open themselves for learning and change in the degree that they can see how and why the change will benefit them.	Mentors articulate as direct a connection as possible between trying new experiences and being able to perform in desired ways to achieve desired goals. Mentees realize that their openness to learning and change is the key to successful mentoring and take initiatives accordingly.
5.	Most mentees learn better and support changes more readily if they are actively involved in the processes of learning and change.	Mentors regard both themselves and their mentees as active, not passive, learners. They create opportunities and methods for mentees to guide the learning process, interact with learning resources, experiment and debrief new experiences, evaluate progress, and celebrate success.
6.	Most mentees will remember better what they learn if they have a chance to actually apply the lessons immediately or use the lessons to solve problems that are important to them.	Mentors find ways to engage mentees in performance situations in which the mentees have opportunities to try out new knowledge, skills, and values. Mentors observe and offer feedback. Mentees risk trying new activities and stay focused on learning from the experiences, even if they go wrong.
7.	Most mentees enjoy learning, for its own sake, as an intrinsically valuable process. They like it even more if they can use it to improve their lives and/or the lives of others.	Mentors assume the motivation to learn comes from the mentee and relates to the mentee's ability to immediately apply their learning in their work and life situations. Mentors help mentees to notice their learning and the changes that come as consequences of their learning. Mentees take full responsibility for initiating learning.
8.	Sometimes mentees don't know they have learned something until after they have been exposed to it, reflected on it, tried it out, interpreted it in their own way, and implemented it for a while.	Mentors remember that learning is a dynamic process that often takes learners far beyond the limits of the lessons offered by others. Mentees accept the responsibility to keep at it, generate more and more connections between lessons and life, and see where growth takes them. Mentees remain focused on their key learning goals even when their boundaries are being stretched in mentoring.

Conditions for effective mentoring

Mentoring requires self-discipline from both the mentor and the mentee to assure the relationship remains healthy and hopeful. Keeping agreements and persistent follow-through to achieve learning results are essential to assure that the time and energy invested in mentoring has an appropriate and satisfying return.

Organizations sponsoring mentoring programs will find their efforts more successful in the degree that they fulfill these five key qualities of effective learning organizations:

TRUSTING CLIMATE
- Leaders are accepting of people and their natural differences.
- Leaders actively work to eliminate fear and create feeling of security and safety.
- Leaders develop mutual commitment to goals as the motivational basis for all relationships with customers, employees, vendors, suppliers, media, and the general public; to the maximum degree possible, leaders avoid using intimidation as an influencing factor in relationships with others.
- Leaders act with integrity from genuine clarity about personal and organizational values.
- Active, empathetic listening is practiced throughout the entire organization.

LONG-RANGE TIME PERSPECTIVE

- Leaders are clear about the context of the enterprise – what the essential business is; who its stakeholders are; what constitutes long-term success.
- A deliberate and steady pace of operations with continuous improvement are the primary means for growth and change.
- Leaders avoid seeking short-term rewards at the expense of long-term success.
- Leaders are tolerant of temporary set-backs that enable permanent or more stable gains.

TOTAL SYSTEM VIEW

- All parts of the enterprise are regarded as important and as affecting all other parts; there is no turf protection.
- Extra effort is made to establish and maintain communication contacts and cooperative relationships among all system parts.
- A deep commitment to quality in all things is demonstrated and reinforced throughout the system.
- The coordination of the total system on behalf of achieving goals is paramount to leadership.
- When turbulence occurs in the system, leaders help to assure that all parts of the system can connect and communicate together to deal with its causes, find solutions, and recover balance/stability.

ACTION ORIENTATION

- All organizational members are oriented toward taking action, implementing, achieving objectives.
- Leaders expect and are ready for natural resistance to change actions; leaders act positively to maintain progress by removing obstacles that create resistance.
- The most immediate response following a change action is appraisal and another action.
- Inaction and delayed action is actively avoided throughout the system.

INITIATIVE AND RESPONSIBILITY EMPHASIZED

- Individual initiative and prudent risk-taking is appropriately rewarded, never punished.
- Personal and group/team responsibility is supported for achieving organizational objectives.
- Blaming of others is avoided and condemned when it occurs; individuals and teams are held accountable for their actions.

It may be noted that some of the characteristics of learning organizations are paradoxical in that they appear internally contradictory. Close examination of the issues involved in the paradox will reveal that rather than canceling each other out, the apparent contradictions are actually two equally valid yet seemingly opposite perspectives. Paradox is a common occurrence in the organizational and learning situation. In my experience, this is especially true in mentoring. Mentors typically have no formal authority over mentees, yet they are regarded by mentees as authorities. Mentees typically regard themselves as "one down" to mentors, yet their growth and learning is exclusively a function of their own initiative and self-discipline. Mentoring appears casual, informal, even incidental, yet its success can change a mentee's life. Paradoxically, mentoring requires the sharing of past experience, yet its focus is on assuring a successful future. As long as you keep yourself open to paradox, mentoring, learning from and with a mentor, and sponsoring a mentoring program in your organization can be a wonderfully fulfilling enterprise.

Dr. David Hartl is president of *General Learning Climates, Inc.*, a consulting, training, educational, and research organization dedicated to creating organizational climates conducive to learning and change. Since 1965 he has conducted successful consultancies with Fortune 100 corporations, high tech enterprises, small and medium size businesses, professional partnerships, educational institutions, healthcare organizations, and government agencies at the local, state, and national levels throughout the United States and overseas. He has taught for more than thirty years at the graduate level in the fields of leadership, organizational effectiveness, adult education, training, and human performance at Boston University, The Johns Hopkins University and, for more than twenty years, at the University of Southern California. His contact information is: P.O. Box 2788, Orange, CA 92859-0788.   Telephone: 714-633-0680   Fax: 714-633-1299   email: davidhartl@aol.com.