

**Fast-Tracking Your Career  
Through Effective**

**MENTOR – PROTÉGÉ  
CONNECTION**

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‘You have the power to elect a US Senator, Obama told Emil Jones, Democratic leader of the Illinois state many years ago. Jones looked at the ambitious young man smiling before him and asked teasingly; do you know anybody I could make a US Senator? According to Jones, Obama replied, ‘Me’.

Everyone who has paid attention to Obama’s political evolution knows that Emil Jones Jr, was to put it simply, his ‘Godfather’. Jones it was who helped Obama master the intricate of the legislature when democrats took control of the State Senate. Jones he risked offending his colleagues who had toiled futilely on key issues under republican rule, he tapped Obama to take the lead on high profile legislative initiatives that has boasted about in his presidential campaign. And when Obama wanted a promotion to the US Senate, Jones provided critical support that gave the little known senator, legitimacy, keeping him from being instantly crushed by frontrunners.

Stories abound about employees who were recruited alongside their peers, but they suddenly began to rise fast in the corporate ladder, handling plush assignments with high degree of visibility. Some may rise to the level of acting as an internal consultant and having inputs and influence in policy matters within the organization.

Such individual may not possess one of the best academic or professional qualifications, and may not have attended one of the best schools. This high corporate mobility exists in many organizations, but many gravely misunderstand and continue to misunderstand the formula or connection such person may have developed that is responsible for excelling. Often this is a product of the ideal **mentor connection**.

### **WHO IS A MENTOR, AND WHAT IS MENTOR CONNECTION?**

A mentor is one who oversees the career and development of another person, usually a junior through teaching, counseling, providing psychological support, protecting and at times promoting or sponsoring the protégé.

The concept or mentoring has been fraught with misunderstanding. People intermix the concepts of the coach, sponsor, teacher, “rabbi”, and ‘godfather’ with the concept of the mentor to such an extent that it is impossible to fathom what functions and entities they are referring to.

To truly qualify as a mentor, the mentor should be able to play most of the roles listed below during the course of the relationship:

- ❖ **The mentor as a teacher.** The mentor imparts various organizational and occupational skills to the protégé; instructs the protégé in the power and political framework of the organization, perhaps divulging inside information; and gives the protégé tips on corporate comportment and social grace.
- ❖ **The mentor as a counselor.** Generally tries to build the protégé’s sense of self through “pep talks” confidence building and the like.
- ❖ **The mentor as an intervener.** The mentor actually intercedes on behalf of the protégé, at some times protecting the protégé when organizational pressures becomes too overbearing, at other times advertising the protégé as “good manager”.

- ❖ **The mentor as a sponsor.** The mentor either promotes the protégé into a higher position (if the mentor has the power to do so) or influences “the power that be” to promote the protégé.

From the above we can see that the benefits received from the mentor connection includes knowledge, personal growth, protection, and career advancement. Eugene Jennings in his book, *Routes to the Executive Suite*, indicated that most company presidents have had sponsors who guided and promoted them, stating that “no one goes to the top rapidly without a sponsor”.

### **THE NEED FOR MENTORING**

According to a poll reported in the *Wall Street Journal*, a high proportion of the baby boom group expects to get their most immediate and meaningful life satisfaction from their jobs. Part of job satisfaction lies in promotion, which has traditionally been contingent on education and ability.

Furthermore, a *New York Times* article reported that in 1982 over 58,000 men and women received their MBA degrees, compared to 21,000 only 10 years earlier and average of 5,000 in the 1960s. The article indicated that within 20 years, more than 1million MBAs might be trying to reach the upper rungs of the business world.

Moreover, in addition to MBAs, countless other with claims to ability and experience will be trying to climb the corporate ladder. But there will just not be that much room at the top, so that methods other than obtaining educational credentials will have to be utilized to achieve success.

The *New York Times* article also claimed that “middle managers are getting squeezed out”. Because many companies must run leaner operations, they are forced to lay off many middle managers. At times they even reach into the higher ranks to find dispensable employees.

So a variety of factors obstruct employees chances for career growth: an oversupply of equally qualified members of the same age cohort, the elimination of managers who already populate the upper middle executive rungs, mergers that eliminate positions at the top, and economic conditions that have generated a no-growth corporate environment.

## **STRATEGIES EMPLOYED IN ATTRACTING MENTOR**

To be able to attract and retain the right mentor, there are a number of competencies the protégé must possess and display. Some of these listed and analyzed below.

- i. Possessing and demonstrating competence
- ii. Achieving visibility
- iii. Getting key assignments
- iv. Showing a desire to learn
- v. Take advantage of key interfaces
- vi. Showing a willingness to help the potential mentor accomplish his goals
- vii. Taking the initiative
- viii. Making self accessible.

1. **Possessing and Demonstrating Competence.** To attract a mentor, the protégé must display a basic competence and perform their jobs and understand the workings of the organization. He or she must also demonstrate ability to clearly and effectively express himself.

2. **Achieving Visibility.** The protégé must exhibit the ability to work completely and professionally in such a way that his proficiencies become known to the powerful people in the organization. You must learn to volunteer to take up assignments that can make you visible. As one protégé describe it, “If you do a great job, and it is not known is responsible for the output, it is not going to help you get a mentor.

**3. Getting Key Assignments.** Most protégés got noticed by getting involved in new and challenging assignments ‘the hot projects’. Too many managers do high quality work on low priority projects’. A situation that does not go to highlight their careers. One senior manager puts it this way:

Get a hot project, and do a good job on that project, you are going to get rewarded. The guys at the top will notice you.

**4. Showing a Desire to learn.** Most mentors are at least partially to young employees who display an eagerness to imbibe their knowledge. When the mentor senses that the employee will make a willing pupil, he can see the beginning of a cooperative interchange.

But the protégé must be willing to be the mentor’s student. According to one manager, By initiating the mentor relationship from the perspective of a teacher-student interaction, the young manager is honestly signaling to the prospective mentor that he feels that he has something to learn from the latter’s years of valuable experience.

Manager potential connections between senior and junior managers are aborted by the unwillingness of the latter to accept a temporary student role.

*‘Newly minted MBAs love to tell people how it should be done, which is probably the worst thing in attracting mentor’*

**5. Taking Advantage of Key Interfaces.** Social gatherings provide excellent opportunity to make an impact and get noticed. This provides opportunity for cross-rank socializing that are otherwise unavailable to the younger employee.

At social gatherings, one manager tries to meet the president and the chairman of the board and to make some memorable comments that will cause these persons to “remember the name”.

“If they’re standing there with a drink in their hands, it’s OK to go up to them, identify yourself, and try and say something insightful. These parties are occasions in which they’re all peers”

#### **6. Showing a Willingness to Help the Potential Mentor Accomplish His Goals.**

If the potential mentor sense that the junior manager is sincerely interested in helping him improve his own career, there is a greater chance for the mentor relationship to blossom.

By helping the senior person perform his job, the junior person contributes to the furtherance of that person’s career. And according to Mutual Benefits Model furtherance of his career is one of the senior person’s prime motivations or entering into the mentor relationship.

#### **7. Taking the Initiative.** Employees who do not want to live the growth of their career to fate must take the initiative in acquiring a mentor. Failure to acquire a mentor guarantees a less dynamic and successful career path. Acquiring a mentor is a more conscious way to speedy corporate mobility.

One thing that many managers seeking a mentor should keep in mind is that they may have already established contact with the members of upper management when they were first interviewed for the job. Most recruits think this encounter perfunctory in nature, but the senior manager who participates in the interview process obviously has some input in the hiring decision and is familiar with new recruit’s qualification.

The new recruit would not be ill-advised to casually seek out that person, perhaps even to write him a note to inform him that he has joined the organization and that he enjoyed the time spent during the interview. In this way, the recruit is reestablishing contact with the senior person while that person still has top-of-mind awareness of him. The note could be followed up by a phone call.

It might also be incumbent on the senior executive who approved the hiring to then ensure the “rightness” of the decision, perhaps by taking a personal interest in the new employee’s development or even by becoming his mentor.

- 8. Making Self Accessible.** Business is normally conducted from eight to five, Monday through Friday, but those in senior management know that the successful organization demands a dedication beyond the ‘normal’ time requirements. One of the qualities that mentors consider most desirable in a potential protégé is a sense of organizational commitment that compares with their own.

Lawrence Garibaldi is quite explicit in his description on how he emphasized this quality to attract a mentor.

“I made myself available. I made it clear that I was at his beck and call. The time schedules around here often get very cramped, and it’s necessary to work for short periods of time very long hours and weekends, and I let him know at the outset, ‘Here’s my home phone number. If we have to work, if you have any problems, I’m available. Do not hesitate to call.’”

But commitment is not measured merely in terms of the spent on organizational tasks. The senior executives will also assess the protégé

willingness to transcend job description, departmental scope, and prior training in a specific business discipline.

“So I was willing to take any other job that were peripheral that he could have given to the department or the sales department. I think once he understood that, he liked it.”

### **WHAT MENTORS LOOK FOR IN A PROTÉGÉ**

- i. Intelligence
- ii. Ambition
- iii. Desire and ability to accept power and risk
- iv. Ability to perform the mentor’s job
- v. Loyalty
- vi. Similar perceptions of work and origination
- vii. Commitment for organization
- viii. Organization savvy
- ix. Positive perception of the protégé by the organization
- x. Ability to establish alliances

### **CONCLUSION**

It’s obvious that something more than commitment to duty or academics intelligence is required to scale the ladder of success.

We certainly live in a world or “whom do you know”. The ideal and perfectly structured mentor – protégé connection is step in the right direction. It is mutually beneficial. The next step is to develop a mentor outside your industry for perfect networking.

So please step out from the crowd and get recognition. There is not unconscious about being successful. Your destiny is in your hand hands. GO START SOME CONNECTION.