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Mentorship Philosophy Essay

Mentorship in Three Qualities

A helping hand. A guide in life. A listening ear. A bank of knowledge. All of these descriptions can be applied to a mentor. Mentorship appears in many forms, situations, and environments. In every mentoring relationship, there is a mentor, the person providing guidance, and a mentee, the person receiving guidance. The characteristics of each individual relationship or sequence of interactions is as unique as the individuals involved. How each relationship differs is dependent upon each mentor’s strengths and experiences. A personal mentoring philosophy is unique to each individual, but there are common themes that should relate to a mentor’s philosophy in any situation. Experience, knowledge, and empathy are the three most important qualities that a mentor can have and they have become an imperative part of how I approach mentorship in my own experiences. After establishing a strong foundation of these three qualities, a mentoring relationship is then tailored by the mentor to their specific strengths and weaknesses. As I have explored my philosophy and what these three qualities mean in my role as a mentor, all three themes constantly reappear in my shaping of my approach to mentorship while utilizing my strengths.

First, is what constitutes as mentorship. As I alluded to earlier, mentorship can take many forms in many environments. The act of mentoring can take place in a peer-to-peer, professional-to-nonprofessional, or professional-to-professional environments as well as many others. Knowledge, experiences, and advice are all being passed from one individual to another. In all of these instances, there is a mentor guiding another individual through a task, decision, or career regardless of that individual’s status as a peer or professional. According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, a mentor is “someone who teaches or gives help and advice to a less experienced and often younger individual.” How a mentor gives help and advice to a mentee is the main distinction between a mentor and another educator. The unique form of passing along information is done by sharing personal experiences to aid a mentee.

Experience is the most important quality that a mentor can possess. Experience does not take the place of proven knowledge that one can read from a textbook, but it does present a mentee with a more personalized account, as opposed to the advice they may find in a book. In Plato’s *Theaetetus*, he argues that experience does not constitute knowledge. In this argument, he discusses and discards three definitions of knowledge: knowledge is perception, knowledge is true judgement, and knowledge is true judgement with an account. In translation of Plato’s words, experience is a blend of his definitions that knowledge is perception and knowledge is true judgement with an account. Without this distinction between knowledge and experience, there would be no difference in the information received after reading an academic article about how to be successful in a specific situation and speaking to a mentor that has personal experiences to reference. The same information would be presented by the two sources, but if a mentor were to present that information to their mentee while speaking from their own experience, it is likely that the information or advice would be better received. With the sharing of experience as a basis for a deeper connection between a mentor and their mentee, a relationship begins to form. Trust is gained. A mentee will grow more comfortable asking questions when they come up. They will begin to ask, not only about experiences, but the knowledge gained through those experiences.

Knowledge is the building block of mentorship that follows experience. It is true that knowledge can be gained through experience, but experience alone is not knowledge. A mentor must possess both knowledge and experience in order to be a valuable asset. For example, a piece of knowledge that a mentor may pass on to their mentee would be that an academic advisor is very useful in college. A personal experience relating to that piece of knowledge could be how I asked my advisor to write a recommendation letter for me and received a scholarship because of it. Without the support of a personal experience, a mentee may be less likely to relate the stressed importance of creating a relationship with their academic advisor to their own life. The shared personal experience may provide more incentive. Additionally, a mentor is able to pass along a piece of knowledge in a way that may be more palatable to their mentee. It is true that experience and knowledge go hand in hand, but it is their working relationship that make these two things equally valuable in a mentoring relationship and the role occupied by mentor and mentee. In order to be a mentor, one must have valuable knowledge that can help their mentee in the obstacles that they are predicted to come across. When a mentor and mentee come across an obstacle or question that the mentor does not have experience with, the mentor must find a way to convey this piece of advice in a personal way. This involves knowing the inner-workings of their mentee. For example, if a mentee is struggling in a specific class or wants more information about where to get assistance with a class that the mentor has no experience with, the mentor may search for the information necessary that will make their mentee successful. Armed with this knowledge, the mentor could help the mentee brainstorm about possible options so they do not feel as if they are forced to go by anyone. This could be an option if the mentee likes to be independent and solve problems on their own. It is the mentor’s role to know which strategy the mentee would prefer to problem solve. Through the mentoring relationship, the mentor is responsible for creating a personal connection that allows them to do this. They must emotionally understand their mentee.

Empathy is the final of the three instrumental qualities needed in mentoring. This quality is more unique to mentors than it is to other types of educators. Empathy is defined by Daniel Goleman, a researcher on emotional intelligence, as “the skill in treating people according to their emotional reactions”(88). Just as the sharing of knowledge and experience helps to form a personal connection between the individuals in a mentoring partnership, empathy comes in when the mentor is able to take what they have learned from their mentee’s reactions and use it to tailor how they present the needed information. This can be categorized as empathy because, at times, it is the mentor’s role to observe body language and nonverbal cues as to what the mentee needs in a specific moment. These nonverbal signs are very much a part of discerning emotional reactions and treating people accordingly just as Goleman describes. Showing that one identifies with a certain view or emotion further strengthens the personal relationship between the two people that began to form as personal experiences were shared at the beginning of the relationship. I have been able to experience the development of these connections in mentoring and in my specific situation I have incorporated capitalizing on my strengths when relating to my mentee’s emotions and situations.

As a mentor, it is important to capitalize on strengths and minimize weaknesses. In my personal experience, a few of my strengths are that I have a large stock of experiences that may help a younger individual entering college and I have specific knowledge that can help someone pursuing a similar path to mine. One may notice that my experiences and knowledge are very much related to my self-awareness of my qualities. A specific weakness of mine is consciousness of context according to an inventory in *Emotionally Intelligent Leadership for Students*. In order to minimize or avoid my weakness of observing a situation and tailoring my interaction, I usually choose a setting for a meeting with my mentee ahead of time so that I can mentally prepare for the situation. Throughout my time as a mentor, this skill has continued to develop, but it still needs improvement. After taking into account personal strengths and weaknesses as a mentor and building upon them, the next step is to identify who will benefit from your specific strengths as a mentee.

There are multiple mentees that can benefit from my strengths in experience and knowledge of the path that I have taken. A mentee that would benefit most from my mentoring is someone that is pursuing a similar path to mine, whether it would be related to my involvements, academic pursuits, or personal interests. In these areas of common ground, I would have knowledge and personal experiences to pass along information that a mentee may benefit from which would enable them to be successful in their pursuits. With my weakness in observing specific and changing contexts, a mentee would need to be more open about how a specific context would affect them. This has not come up as an obstacle to my mentee so far, but I continue to be conscious of how I react to her emotions and interests when we meet and how she reacts in a specific situation or discussion. I am continuing to improve my empathy in my role as a mentor. Despite my specific strengths and weaknesses, I continuously focus on developing the three main qualities of a mentor: experience, knowledge, and empathy.

Through my time growing as a mentor so far, I have gained many experiences and skills in this short amount of time. My base of knowledge about myself and how I interact with others, as well as tips and advice to pass along, has also expanded. As an empathetic person, I continue to improve through constant exposure and practice in that area when interacting with my mentee. These three qualities are the basis of any mentoring relationship. Without possessing and displaying even one of these qualities as a mentor, a mentee may not feel connected in a way that will make them more interested in the piece of advice a mentor may pass along. Mentorship is an important facet of educating others and both the mentor and mentee can benefit from the relationship. Whether it is through self-reflection or practice and mentor can always improve upon the three main qualities of a mentor: experience, knowledge, and empathy.

Works Cited

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