



Mentoring of executive staff – a personal perspective.

- But why do I need a mentor?

“When I came into the role of General Manager XXXX I was offered the chance to have a business mentor.

At the time I was very cynical of what could be described as a business mentor or coach. I did not think that I needed it, having been appointed to a senior role, having had some experience of large organisations and in particular, having worked in that specific sector.. The offer of a mentor was perhaps a slight to the ego for a person in these sorts of role.

In addition the cost of a person was an issue particularly at a time when we were trying to control all costs and that I considered that I had enough managerial skill and experience. However, I took up the offer as a test to see how this went. They offered a person, this person was Ann Ryder.

- A good mentor has an incredible depth of knowledge and wisdom

At the start of the mentoring I was really surprised with the in-depth knowledge of a whole range of disciplines such as my speciality of accounting and finance, but also others such as HR, Facilities Management, Health and Safety, IT and so on.

There was a real understanding of organisations in general, the specifics of where this organisation was at and what my role was trying to achieve. This wisdom has been an extremely valuable thing against which to test my plans against.

- Keeping you honest

In each session I would outline the plans that I had for the organisation and my teams. Ann as a mentor would have an encyclopaedic memory for each conversation and makes sure that all plans were reviewed and that anything I was letting slide, had forgotten about, or needed to attend to urgently were brought up.

In addition I had a really difficult issue that I needed to address with my board early after my arrival to the organisation. My mentor helped to strategise how these issues needed to be explained, given my detailed understanding of these, and explain these simply and concisely so that they could understand the issues. It worked and having survived this experience thanks largely to the strategies that my mentor provided, the longer term benefits of a mentor started to become evident.

- Reminding that you need to be a leader rather than manager

I started to realise that in a senior management role many of the attributes needed are those of leadership rather than management. I also began to realise that the step up between a line management role and a general management role often is a move between management and leadership. To have a person who can constantly distinguish

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between the two in a corporate setting is refreshing, highly valuable and challenging for the executive involved.

The value of this began to dawn on me. Having seen a number of failures in this sphere across a number of organisations I have deduced that they are characterised by an inability to lead rather than manage. Indeed in many cases, the executive involved lacks that very ability to distinguish between the two. In many cases really capable managers are placed in positions where with some support they would stand a good chance of success but without that support they are often doomed to failure early in their General Management careers. Many organisations have this experience. I would pose the question to an organisation, if you appoint a General Manager/Executive and they think that they do not need a mentor you might be setting up for a failure and you may wish to reconsider the appointment?

- Summary

So when it was first suggested to me that I could use a mentor I was very sceptical and conscious of the cost and perhaps felt a stigma- a perception that somehow I was not up to the role. However, the mentor involved very quickly gained my trust, respect and became a valued confidante who you can test ideas and strategies on without the fear of failure within the Executive team.

I now recognise the real the value to the organisation in making sure that when in a senior role you are kept honest and you concentrate on the leadership of the team rather than management.

Finally, I am now of the opinion that if you were offering a senior role to an individual then having a mentor would in my view be essential. Alternatively any person appointed to a senior role who felt they did not need a mentor would raise questions in my mind as to that person's suitability. For a large organisation I would certainly see a lot of value in having a mentor programme for all senior roles including the CEO."

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