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REFLECTIONS ON EXPERIENCE

Why Don't More Senior Leaders Mentor?

And How They Are Mortgaging Their Company's Future in the Process

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Large organizations are facing a pending talent drain when baby boomer generation senior leaders begin retiring over the next 3 to 5 years. As companies scramble to develop and retain their next generation of leaders, many overlook a cost-effective, tried-and-true method for engagement and leadership development—mentoring. According to the authors' 2-year in-depth research study with senior American business leaders across 20 different industries, mentoring engages high potentials, helps develop essential "soft" skills (e.g., "navigating the culture"), and sends the message that they are valued. It is unfortunate that many executives choose not to mentor, and they may, according to the authors, be mortgaging the future of their companies in the process. The authors have identified five of the most common excuses cited by senior executives who choose not to mentor (e.g., "It doesn't work") and offer specific strategies to overcome the resistance that senior leaders have about mentoring.

Keywords: *mentor; mentoring; talent management; executive coaching; talent pipeline; leadership pipeline; succession planning*

The American workforce is graying and the baby boomer generation is getting ready to retire. Over the next 7 to 10 years, as many as one in two workers in most industries, including current senior leaders of America's top organizations—public and private—will be eligible for retirement. This departure process is starting now, and in many cases, every time a senior executive closes the office door for the last time, years or even decades of intellectual capital walk out the door with him or her for good. Unless addressed head on, the snowballing of baby boomer retirement will result in lost productivity and intellectual capital, massive recruiting expenses, and disruptions of business due to ineffective talent management strategies and their implementation.

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Over the past few years, we have heard an increased expression of concern from senior executives about the future generation of leaders. Specifically, these executives are concerned that there are not enough high potentials in their leadership pipelines who will be prepared to face a future that will be, in most cases, far more complex and rapidly shifting than the world today. It has also become apparent that different companies have different levels of commitment to addressing the looming leadership gap. Some have been extremely proactive, developing human resource (HR) strategies that encompass most or all aspects of leadership development, such as coaching, training, succession planning, and job rotation. Others recognize the need to do something and are just beginning to address this issue. The remaining have chosen to take a more laissez- faire approach—they acknowledge the existence of a future leadership gap but have not yet elevated this issue to the forefront of strategic discussions or action. As one executive told us, "We're doing fine right now and when the time comes we'll figure it out—probably by throwing a ton of money at our retiring executives or by recruiting people from the outside." This executive's company has a dominant position in the marketplace and his comments reflect an often-unstated belief that there will always be an abundance of leaders who will want to work for his company. As we have seen in recent years with the rise and precipitous decline of once-successful companies such as Bethlehem Steel and AT&T, it can be very costly to assume that past success guarantees a successful future.

In our work, we have repeatedly seen and heard about another method for developing and retaining key future leaders. It is low cost, and according to those who have been recipients of it, it increases the effectiveness and motivation of up-and-coming leaders and lowers their companies' rates of turnover. It is simple, not excessively time- consuming, but does require skill to use. It is *mentoring*. We believe, as do many senior executives (who have been the recipients), that mentoring is an effective strategy for companies to develop, engage, and retain their next generation of leaders.

As leadership development and organizational development practitioners, we have heard repeated stories across a wide range of industries about the benefits of mentoring. We are talking here about one-on-one, nonprogrammatic mentoring relationships that develop, either organically or with intention, between a seasoned "older" executive and a less experienced "younger" executive. After hearing of so many positive, rewarding mentor–mentee relationships, we decided to investigate what, exactly, mentoring provides to a developing leader. What really gets discussed in those mentoring meetings? What are the benefits to both parties? What are the downsides, if any? Furthermore, if mentoring does increase motivation, accelerate learning, and provide other benefits, why don't more executives do it? Are there ways to stimulate additional mentoring? And can we stimulate more mentoring by creating mentoring programs, or is some other structure more desirable?

Our research tapped into the hearts and minds of 31 successful senior executives across American industry. At the time of the interviews, most of these executives were "C" level or just below, that is, they were on the top executive team for their companies or reported directly to that team. A few were retired from their companies but still actively engaged. All of them had had mentoring relationships; some had had several. And, they all credited their mentors and those relationships with contributing immensely to their personal and career development and, we can assume, their overall success.

Mentoring is as old as the hills, or at least as old as the ancient Greeks. In Homer's epic poem "The Odyssey," written nearly 2,800 years ago, a man named Mentor is charged with teaching, guiding, and counseling Telemachus, son of King Ulysses, over a 10-year period while the king was off fighting the war against Troy. Over the ages, the word *mentor* has changed to describe the process by which a master teaches an apprentice, as well as the process by which an older and accomplished individual provides advice and feedback to a younger, less experienced individual. For the purpose of our research, we defined *mentor* as any individual, inside or outside the workplace, who has had a significant impact on an individual's career decisions and progress and/or growth and development as a leader.

The executives we interviewed spanned a total of 20 different industries. During our discussions, we gleaned significant insights about the power of mentoring for developing, engaging, and retaining future leaders. These insights formed the basis of our earlier white paper titled "Building the Leadership Pipeline in Corporate America: Why Smart Companies Should Use Mentoring as Part of Their Talent Management Strategy" (Russ & Satter, 2005). Although we had many questions, as listed above, with each mentoring success story we heard (and we heard 96 of them), we began to wonder why more senior leaders don't mentor. We posed this question to our study interviewees and their responses formed the basis of this article.

There are countless reasons that more senior leaders don't mentor, including but not limited to, "It's not part of our corporate culture," or "Nobody mentored me, why should I mentor someone else?" When we asked our study participants this question, they identified five commonly held perceptions about mentoring that can prevent these critical relationships from forming.

Perception #1: Mentoring isn't a strategic objective in my company. (But, as we discovered, it should be.)

Senior leaders are under tremendous pressure to perform and deliver bottom-line results. Ideally, senior leaders are aligned with their company's business strategy and have all the resources required to achieve their business objectives. In reality, however, most leaders are constantly competing for resources or having to make adjustments due to fluid market conditions and competitive demands. Many executives have built their careers and have been handsomely rewarded along the way for figuring out the most efficient (i.e., direct) way to the goal line. In addition, they are cognizant that their success will be reflected in their compensation. In highly competitive environments, and to a lesser degree in other organizations, mentoring can be counterintuitive because the WIIFM (what's in it for me) factor doesn't exist or the direct connection between mentoring, strategic goals, and executive reward has been obscured. And, because it is often not woven into the fabric of corporate strategy, executives don't make mentoring a priority. For this very reason, we believe mentoring needs to be aligned with overall strategic goals and included in senior managers' performance objectives. When asked why more executives don't serve as mentors, one executive, the former CEO of a global food manufacturer, remarked, "Executives today are becoming athletes—they are compensated and rewarded for being a performer—delivering results. The more performance driven a corporation becomes, the more development gets forced out." This presents an unfortunate dilemma: Developing high performing young executives will increase the chances that they will deliver strong future results. If their top leaders are rewarded mainly for achieving their own short-term results, future performance may be at risk.

Perception #2: No time—I'm too busy to be a mentor. (But we discovered that many of the most successful leaders are mentors.)

Many senior leaders who have never been a mentor believe they are too busy to play this role in their organizations. They view mentoring as an extracurricular activity that requires a significant time commitment that will distract them from meeting their performance targets. In light of grueling travel schedules, back-to-back meetings, and the constant barrage of voice mail and e-mail, the thought of adding yet another responsibility is an untenable proposition.

We find that many experienced leaders see regular mentoring as an integral part of their jobs, not an added responsibility or requirement from their HR department. "At first, I thought becoming a mentor would be a burden or obligation," says the senior vice president for a major international airline. Today, this executive serves as a mentor for five high potential women at the airline. "Now I can't imagine myself *not* being a mentor—it has become part of who I am." One COO remarked that she sees mentoring as critical to her strategy for staying on top of issues and concerns that are of importance to younger workers. "It's how I keep my finger on the pulse of the organization." A former governor and ambassador we spoke with has served as a mentor at different times in his career. For him, the mentor role has been especially satisfying because of the "joy in watching young people grow and move on." Yes, it does take time to be an effective mentor, but each of the participants in our study who has served as a mentor, and every one of them has, indicated that the rewards and satisfaction of contributing to another individual's growth and success far outweighed their investment of time and effort. Effective mentors don't create distinctions between the mentoring process and their daily work. In fact, the opposite is true. "I see being a mentor as part of the normal process of exchanging information and ideas with my high potentials on a regular basis," reports the senior vice president and general manager of a flagship brand in a major beauty products company. He is smart enough to know what he doesn't know and recognizes, by virtue of his senior level in the organization, that he and others like him are naturally out of touch with the front line. This executive uses mentoring as a forum to stay in touch with his people in the field who are constantly taking the pulse of key customers and to get feedback that helps him to make effective strategic decisions. Another individual, a vice president of global strategy and marketing for a Fortune 50 technology company, has a punishing travel schedule but nonetheless makes the time to mentor others. She was eloquent about how she doesn't have to create special time or circumstances to provide mentoring. "You can be a mentor anytime, anywhere, for even a few minutes. Every conversation is an opportunity to mentor someone. Sometimes, all it takes is a quick conversation over a cup of coffee to make a huge difference." This executive is currently mentoring several individuals from her company's offices around the world.

Effective mentoring is a win–win proposition for the company and the participants in the mentoring relationship. According to one executive vice president we interviewed, "Being an effective mentor pays handsome psychic dividends. I almost always get back more than I give." As you might expect, she is not alone. Every one of our study participants acknowledged the benefits they reaped by being a mentee and serving as a mentor.

> *Perception #3:* Mentoring is too emotional or "touchy-feely." (Yet, our leaders mentioned that some of their most impactful mentoring came at times of conflict, stress, and worry—times when they most needed support and advice.)

The vast majority of senior leaders that we have met and worked with over the past two decades take pride in their competence. Many feel right at home when discussing technical, financial, operational, or strategic issues, but they feel like a fish out of water when it comes to dealing with "soft" issues where emotions may rise. We have observed otherwise confident senior executives who will engage in a myriad of different avoidance behaviors to delay or avoid addressing a potentially emotional situation. Indeed, for many executives, that "soft stuff" is really the hard stuff. Leaders sometimes "avoid what they can least control—and the soft issues are, in fact, often the hardest to address" (Russ & Darling, 1999, p. 30). Many senior leaders who claim to be too busy to become mentors actually resist making the commitment to mentor because they are concerned that their mentee will present a wide array of personal problems or conflicts and that they will be forced into a therapist-like role, needing skills that they neither possess nor desire. Noel Tichy (2003) points out that "face-to-face encounters require interacting with other emotional beings" and that "the potential for emotional display makes many leaders uncomfortable. So they avoid it, sometimes by becoming domineering but most often by being too laissez-faire" (p. 31). In his work on emotional intelligence, Daniel Goleman (1998) talks about the importance of "recognizing our own feelings and those of others for motivating ourselves, for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships" (Appendix 1, p. 31). An effective mentor has the self-awareness, life experience, coaching skills, and emotional presence to handle the emotional issues that arise in the mentoring relationship—the mentee's and his or her own. Ironically, many of the behaviors associated with effective mentors (e.g., possessing awareness of self and others, empathy) are similar to some of the behaviors that many highly effective leaders already demonstrate in less intimate circumstances.

It's human nature to operate in our individual comfort zones and senior leaders are no different. Many senior leaders are comfortable operating with a directive personal style. Given the volume of work and pressures of the job, telling subordinates what to do is quick and decisive and keeps the leader in control. It is not surprising that our research indicates that effective mentoring often requires the mentor to slow down or pause, change gears, and "be" rather than "do"—not an easy task for a typical hard-charging corporate veteran. An ancient Chinese proverb advises, "To go fast, it is sometimes necessary to first go slowly." Yes, it might be appropriate for a mentor to be prescriptive if his or her mentee is about to make a critical mistake, but for the most part, effective mentors listen first, ask questions second, and advise third. "There is a difference between telling people what to do and helping people help themselves," says a retired CEO of a global Fortune 50 financial services company. Early in his career, this executive learned from his first mentor that "sell don't tell" was an effective strategy to guide another person to consider and then to "own" a particular solution. Along the way, the effective mentor might also share a story about a personal setback and how he or she dealt with it as a way of guiding the mentee to reflect before deciding on the best course of action. The mentor who can effectively model vulnerability without weakness (e.g., discussing a mistake or failure) demonstrates strong leadership to the mentee. A former governor and candidate for U.S. president, who now teaches at a leading university, approaches teaching and mentoring the same way. "I teach my mistakes to others. I counsel, encourage, and help people move on. I see my job as helping others to open the door and see the possibilities that lie before them."

Handling the emotions displayed by (or withheld by) mentees can both support the mentees' learning process and provide effective role modeling as well. Some mentees are, as one of our interviewees put it, "young bucks," eager for challenge, resistant to feedback, and ready to battle at the slightest provocation. A seasoned leader–mentor who can meet such a mentee at his or her own level, so to speak, without being drawn into needless arguments, can help develop an intelligent, strong leader who knows how to use his or her emotions productively. One CEO had this to say about how his mentor dealt with his emotions: "I had a mentor who respected my aggressiveness. He parried with me—in private—and gained such respect from me that I paid very close attention to his advice and counsel." Similarly, some mentees are lacking confidence, unsure of their own expertise and decisions at times, or unable to effectively manage conflict, competitiveness, or difficult relationships. Having a mature mentor's guidance in navigating through these obstacles is a welcome relief for many developing leaders, allowing them to surpass emotional barriers that might otherwise get in the way of their ongoing learning and development. If there is to be any growth on the part of the mentee, the mentor must have the capacity and be prepared to handle both the mentee's emotions and his or her own emotions that get stimulated during the course of the relationship. The mentor must be able to recognize and receive emotions as well as have the energy and clarity to manage them.

Perception #4: I don't know how to be a mentor. (You may not, but you can learn.)

Some mentors are born, but many are taught. In our work, and as a result of our research, we learned that many senior executives are pleasantly surprised to discover that they have already served as a mentor without realizing it because no one had labeled it as such. One executive, who has had a successful career in television, told us,

> Over the years, I've had a number of people thank me for teaching them the ropes or for encouraging them to apply for a new job, even if it meant leaving the company. I never thought of that as mentoring—I considered it part of my job.

Although our research identified many qualities and skills associated with effective mentors, some of the most critical are as follows: (a) displaying genuine empathy toward the mentee and being invested in his or her development; (b) having the ability to listen and possessing strong self-awareness to ensure that the process stays focused on the mentee; (c) having a service orientation; (d) demonstrating "range"—the ability to ask the right questions at the right time and to shift style as appropriate; and (e) having the ability to deliver feedback constructively and with care.

Displaying genuine empathy toward the mentee and being invested in his or her development. Empathy is a cornerstone of emotional intelligence—it is part of the glue that allows mentoring relationships to form and develop. The presence of empathy reminds the mentee that the mentor is there to help him or her grow and succeed and is willing to make time in a busy schedule to talk or meet. One senior executive we spoke with had this to say about the mentor he had earlier in his career:

> My self- worth was enhanced simply because I knew this someone was doing something extra for me, whether showing me how, or just caring . . . (about what I thought). It was so validating to know this important person was spending part of their day thinking about me and my welfare.

Demonstrating concern for others does not require a lot of effort. It can be as simple as creating a "touch point"—placing a call or sending a note or article to a mentee about a topic in which he or she has interest.

Listening, and possessing strong self-awareness to ensure that the process stays focused on the mentee. Effective mentors are self-aware—they are cognizant of their individual strengths and weaknesses and are able to recognize and take responsibility for the effect that they have on others, especially in face-to-face encounters. Effective mentors are active listeners. They are able to subordinate their own agendas and really *hear* what their mentee is saying—both in terms of content and underlying concerns that are often embedded "between the lines" of what is and isn't said. As one senior executive told us, "Really listen—there's a genuineness in that that you can't fake. You have to listen to give tailor-made advice." Active listening is a basic skill that can be developed at any point in one's career. All it takes is focus, practice, patience, and a skilled facilitator.

Having a service orientation. Effective mentors typically have developed a personal sense of obligation to their company, to their community, and to the development of others. They have made a conscious choice to focus part of their efforts on the good of the whole rather than just their own good, and they see the direct connection between developing others and receiving "psychic income" from their mentee's successes. Service orientation can also be seen as a critical strategic thinking skill, because the focus is on building the whole community or enterprise through the development of an individual.

Demonstrating "range"—the ability to ask the right questions at the right time and to shift style as appropriate. Effective mentors have learned to use different styles at different times, based on their assessment of how they can best add value to their mentee at any given moment. Like all humans, mentees (and mentors) are subject to positive and negative emotions. Sometimes, it is most appropriate for a mentor to be supportive and nurturing, whereas at other times, it may be most appropriate to be firm and challenging. Knowing how and when to shift gears to engage the mentee—no matter what state he or she is in—provides the mentor with greater opportunity to have an impact. In this manner, the mentor can better lead the mentee toward a desired outcome.

Delivering feedback constructively and with care. Knowing how (and when) to provide others with developmental feedback is another cornerstone behavior of effective mentors. Sometimes, feedback sheds light on a blind spot and helps the mentee discover something about individual style that he or she is not aware of. Other times, feedback can reinforce what the mentee knows but has not quite figured out how to address. Being able to deliver constructive feedback is an acquired skill that is best learned with a clear understanding of the basics and frequent application.

Perception #5: Mentoring isn't very effective. (On the contrary, mentoring can have a substantial impact.)

In its 1997 landmark study "The War for Talent," McKinsey & Co. made the case that being known as an "employer of choice" in the marketplace was a critical business strategy for success (Michaels, Jones, & Axelrod, 2001). As mentioned earlier in this article, we have seen a strong correlation between companies that actively encourage mentoring and the retention of their key talent. According to a study by the Corporate Leadership Council (2004), having an effective mentor is the single most effective lever for employee engagement and results in an average 25.5% increase in productivity. In a 1999 survey that polled 378 companies on why they offered mentoring to employees, the largest percentage of respondents (73%) stated that they did so to retain employees (Manchester, Inc., 1999). In addition, employees who do not receive mentoring are twice as likely to look for another job within 12 months as those who do receive mentoring (Interim Services, Inc., & Louis Harris and Associates, Inc., 1999).

Without exception, every one of our study participants indicated that their mentors had had a significant impact on their professional development and productivity. A senior vice president who leads the HR function at a large financial services company spoke of her mentor, who helped her build self-confidence. "She took me under her wing . . . and gave me a sense I could be more than I was." Similarly, other participants acknowledged their mentors who provided them with timely and constructive feedback after important meetings and presentations—feedback that was useful for either developing new or modifying existing behavior, producing improved results the next time.

Mentoring also provides a forum for learning how to navigate the corporate culture. In our interviews, time and again we heard personal accounts of mentors who taught their mentees the "ropes" and how to not only survive but flourish in their companies. A former CEO told us the following story to illustrate the role his mentor played when he was an up-and-coming star:

> My mentor was very direct. One day he told me: "Let me show you how not to get hurt in this culture; you're not as smart as you think. Young bucks like you either become very successful or they get hurt. Which outcome do you prefer?"

Another former CEO had a similar experience learning about his company's culture: "My mentor protected me from political traps while I was rising through the ranks. Along the way, he also taught me the importance of humility and how things really got done within the political context of the company."

Senior leaders who choose to mentor the next generation are investing in their future leaders by creating opportunities to develop what Kram (1985) calls career and psychosocial functions. Examples of career functions include job rotations, stretch assignments, and ongoing individual coaching on how to achieve specific business objectives. Psychosocial functions include counseling on networking, life balance, and navigating organizational politics, just to name a few. Effective mentors use interactions with their mentees to help the mentees develop confidence and resilience—two critical attributes that prepare the mentee for his or her next role.

There's a lot of truth to the saying, "It's lonely at the top." With each promotion and new responsibility, senior executives tend to become more isolated from the people who do the actual work, from former colleagues with whom they once socialized, from their customers, and from their current peers who occupy the other executive suites down the corridor. Mentoring is a way to break through the isolation and stay connected with the pulse of the organization. Not only do mentees bring fresh perspectives to established leaders, they challenge and stimulate their mentors' thinking. One leader we interviewed spoke of learning as much from her mentees as they learn from her. "My mentees are younger than I and bring a different generational perspective to the table. Without them, I would miss having a different window of what this place looks like through younger eyes."

Mentoring is also a way for a senior leader to build or contribute to his or her legacy. According to Erik Erickson, the psychoanalyst and personality development theorist, it is natural for men and women in their 40s and beyond to "demonstrate concern for the next generation and all future generations," a phenomenon that Erickson called "generativity" (Boeree, 1997). So, rather than forcing senior leaders into retirement, smart companies encourage these individuals to redefine their roles and spend more time actively engaging their successors.

In the greater scheme of things, mentoring is mostly about preparing the next generation of leaders to successfully lead our institutions in the future. Currently, many U.S. organizations have a "sink or swim" and "go it alone" culture—either one makes it on one's own or is out on the street looking for another job. This value, which is deeply ingrained in large parts of the American culture and is widely associated with the settling of the American West in the 19th century, may have served cowboys and prospectors well but is detrimental to the development of the next generation of our leaders. According to the Center for Creative Leadership, more than 40% of all senior executives who enter new roles fail within an 18-month period (Ciampa, 2005). And Deloitte Consulting reports that the "typical U.S. company spends nearly 50 times more to recruit a $100,000 professional than it will invest in his annual training after he comes aboard" (Athey, 2004, p. 5). Because most of these executives hit the ground running with little or no support, it's no wonder so many don't make the transition. Without a source for formal or informal feedback about their performance in the new role and sometimes very little information about how to do things in a new company culture, many executives discover they're failing only after it is too late to address these issues. Such failures are not only potentially devastating for the new executive but can be costly for the company in terms of executive search fees, severance, lost productivity, negative morale, and erosion of customer satisfaction.

Several of our survey participants indicated that having a mentor increased their job satisfaction by providing intangible benefits that are unique to mentees: "[Having a mentor] gave me the feeling that I fit in. It was so motivating that someone who was part of what the company stands for was sending me a message that I could really make it," says the executive vice president of a global communications company, who has been with his company for more than 20 years. According to a senior business development specialist for a major corporation's federal government unit, "My mentor provided me with specific feedback on what I did well and not well and helped me see myself differently in a broader context. He saw something in me and valued me and my thinking. I felt so validated." In fact, having a mentor who validated them early on in their careers was an experience that nearly all of our participants valued. A senior vice president of a major insurance company told us, "My mentor gave me books, expanded my horizons, challenged me in new ways, and made me think differently about my approach and style, none of which I would have ever learned in a classroom." Another executive, the EVP of human resources for a global financial services company, attributes part of her career success to a mentor who encouraged her to be more vulnerable—to be more effective with her use of "self" in front of her staff and others. She and her mentor also had numerous discussions about business relationships and how to productively manage them in a political office environment. In fact, every one of our survey participants acknowledged that effectively managing relationships has been an integral component of their advancement and that being mentored helped them develop the skills and tools required to succeed in this area.

In our executive leadership development practice, we often tell clients that the soft stuff is really the hard stuff. Clearly, without mentors to provide encouragement, insight, and guidance through the shoals of organizational life, many of today's successful leaders either would have taken longer to achieve success or would have run aground along the way. Ironically, senior leaders who choose not to mentor may be unwittingly mortgaging the future of the companies that they have worked so hard to build. Leaders who do choose to mentor the next generation of leaders are making human capital investments that will pay handsome dividends in the future.

CONCLUSION

Mentoring is a proven strategy for engaging, developing, and retaining next-generation leaders. It's also an excellent methodology for transferring practical knowledge and, more important, wisdom from more experienced (and typically older) executives to younger ones. In today's 24/7/365 world, there are numerous perceptions that executives have about mentoring that help explain why many senior executives choose not to serve as mentors. In our research, we explored these perceptions and discovered that they resulted from both valid data (e.g., mentoring not being incorporated into corporate strategic objectives) and untested assumptions (e.g., mentoring is too soft or is generally ineffective as a development tool).

Given the brutal pace and other demands of conducting business these days, the mere thought of slowing down to be "present" for a mentee is enough to make some executives uncomfortable. On a deeper level, we discovered in our conversations some concerns about personal vulnerability ("What if I'm really not a good mentor?" or "What if I make a mistake?") and concerns about the loss of power and/or prestige ("What if my mentee fails—how will that reflect on me?"). Regardless of whether any of these concerns are legitimate or imagined, they need to be addressed upfront as part of a greater discussion about the merits of developing a culture that encourages senior leaders to serve as mentors. Bottom line—senior leaders who serve as mentors are contributing to and investing in the future success of their organizations. Senior leaders who choose not to mentor risk mortgaging their company's future through the loss of intellectual and relationship capital.

Consider the following four strategies to promote a mentoring culture in any organization:

1. Make mentoring a strategic objective for all senior leaders, including the CEO, by including it in annual goals and linking it to performance reviews and compensation. Acknowledge and reward executives for development and retention of mentees and for the successes of their mentees. Where applicable, encourage members of the board to take an active interest in the careers of high potentials as well.
2. Include discussions about mentoring during quarterly or semiannual talent mapping sessions. For example, once a high potential has been identified, encourage someone from the senior team to look out for that individual. Involvement could range from serving as that high potential's mentor to introducing the high potential to another senior leader inside or outside of the organization.
3. Include formal and informal discussions about mentoring during senior staff meetings. Have one or two senior team members report out about the progress of their mentoring relationships to the rest of the team to send the message that mentoring is a priority. Be sure the focus of the discussions is what the senior leader has learned from being a mentor (rather than the content of mentor/mentee discussions) to protect the confidentiality of the mentoring relationship.
4. Offer mentoring training to senior executives who have never had a mentor or to those who require some skill development. Special attention should be given to the skills of developing presence and range, increasing self-awareness, active listening, and giving and receiving feedback. Avoid initial resistance to the training by linking it directly to overall strategic goals and possibly branding it with a name that does not include the word *mentoring*. The Corporate Leadership Council (2004) recently reported that having an effective mentor is the single most effective lever for employee engagement and results in an average 25.5% increase in productivity. Still not convinced of the power of mentoring? Track the retention rates and trajectories of your high potentials who do and do not receive mentoring over the next 18 to 24 months—chances are you will see a distinct difference between the two groups.

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