

Mentoring Emerging Leaders In Labor Organizations

There are key differences between instructing, coaching, and mentoring.

- **Instructing** deals largely with the dissemination of knowledge.
- **Coaching** deals primarily with skill building, and giving feedback for specific improvement.
- **Mentoring** is an activity that can potentially promote spiritual and passion development. A mentor is one who helps shape the outlook or attitude of the individual.

The greatest leaders within collective movements were spiritual and passionate about the purpose, focus and necessity of their work.

Mentoring relationships arise in numerous ways, from school or community-based relationships, work and career, to e-mentoring relationships. These mentoring relationships vary and can be influenced by the type of mentoring relationship that is in effect. That is whether it has come about as a formal or informal relationship.

Consider the two types of mentoring relationships: formal and informal. Informal relationships develop on their own between partners. Formal mentoring, on the other hand, refers to a structured process supported by the organization and addressed to target potential leaders. In labor or community based organizations formal mentoring is part of developing future talent focused on key populations such as members in specific areas of organization, newly hired staff/employees, high potentials and future leaders. In formal mentoring, matching of mentor and mentee is done by each choosing their partner in order to create a balanced and authentic relationship.

The norm of mentoring in labor organizations has traditionally been done on an informal basis. If an individual member, steward or officer shows enthusiasm and becomes active in the grievance procedure, organizing or collective action leadership will begin to mentor an individual to become a leader in a specific area or with a specific project. The work of unions are more complex and the need to develop broader skills, knowledge, attitude and do broader kinds of work than the traditional representation and organizing is going to be a key to future growth.

Union leaders are often challenged with the diverse needs of the members and often focus on mentoring those who have an interest or natural competency for the traditional work of the union. Other challenges in labor organizations is the democratic leadership decision making process. The risk for existing leadership to truly mentor an upcoming mentee is they may stand for election against them. Or after putting time and energy into the mentee with an expectation for them to accept formal leadership, it turns out formal leadership may not be what the mentee needs or wants.

Union leadership must formally begin to mentor others with the mentee expectations as the basis for the relationship, not the expectations of the mentor. Formal mentoring is not a part of leadership development in most unions, and consequently the next generation of leaders and activists are finding their opportunities in other movements.

Where do future leaders come from?

Leadership development takes place principally through struggle and reflection in the course of doing the work of the union. Therefore, broadening participation in a union that is fighting, engaging its members in struggles, through the structures of the union, becomes the primary vehicle for identifying, influencing and developing future leaders.

The challenge for union leaders to mentor a future generation of leadership is to look at why individuals are valued only within traditional roles defined within the by-laws of a local. Mentoring offers an opportunity to identify individual who work across the structures of the union to create and participate in collaborative communities.

The democratic purpose of the union supports the mentoring of broader and more collaborative leadership. The challenge for existing leadership and mentors is to create conditions for people's natural capacity of self-organization and motivation to flourish.

To mentor and liberate the next generation of leadership starts with building relationships with a focus on what the members need from the union and connecting it to the purpose and focus of the union. The CWA Triangle provides this focus.



The focus of the CWA Triangle allows for broad opportunities for involving members in the struggles of the union without defining specific action but instead

allows emerging leaders to define a clear direction that inspires them to take action. This is the basis for mentoring future leaders. There are a number of actions that elected leaders can take to allow emerging leaders to come forward.

Suggested activities to enhancing broader participation with unions:

- Create an environment for equality—remove organization or political barriers that hinder peoples freedom to act.
- Use the CWA Triangle to create a vision big enough for members to care about—this ensures that the freedom to act is not simply used to advance individual interests but broader union interests.
- Create an environment satisfying peoples need to grow—this develops the capability of people who are now both able and willing to act.
- Create an environment satisfying peoples need to self direct—mentoring able and willing people to act.
- Mentoring is relationship work—this a focus on the means of success and not the measurement of activity.

Emerging leaders present themselves out side the traditional work of the union, they connect with the broad purpose of the union and understand what people really want.

How do I mentor this emerging leadership that may not look or sound like me?

The first and most natural approach to mentoring is to pass along personal, professional skills and wisdom in order to provide diverse members and leaders with a vision of possibility.

1. The art of mentoring: Passing along wisdom

a. Mentoring is formal and intentional

Mentoring is

Mentoring is someone who shares wisdom and experiences with you without expectations.

Mentoring isn't

Mentoring isn't someone who tells you right from wrong and what you need to do.

Mentoring is based on our natural interaction with others, but is truly a skill that is often in opposition to the skill of leading a democratic organization. Good mentors separate the organization skills from those defined in the SAGE model.

SAGE

- **Surrendering** – Most leaders are socially conditioned to drive the process of learning; great mentors surrender to it. Driving the process has many unfortunate effects. It tends to cause resistance; it minimizes the potential for natural and personal growth, and it tilts the focus from competence to control.
- **Accepting** – Ridding ones self of bias, preconceived judgments, and human labeling. Accepting is embracing, rather than evaluating or judging.
- **Gifting** – Putting something out there for someone to take without wanting something in return. Putting something out unconditionally allows the relationship to stay healthy. It is at the other end of selfishness.
- **Extending** – Allowing the relationship to grow in whatever way it chooses to grow without limits.

b. Traps to avoid

- **I can help** – I can show you the way so you don't have to learn it on your own. This often leads to not finding out things from someone else's point of view. I know something or someone and you don't, is a trap.
- **I know best** – I believe I have knowledge around the area and can give you the answer. "I am the best person for the job." "No one knows it better than me." If you can't allow your mentee to find their personal approach this could be a trap.
- **I can help you get ahead** – If as a mentor you have ways to help the mentee get around obstacles that they could have done on their own – that is a trap.
- **You need me** – If the relationship is based on dependency it is likely that it will not help the mentee.

c. Perspectives of mentor relationship

- Be open and honest and have frequent encounters. The door works both ways. If your mentee needs knowledge in an area and think you as a mentor can help find a solution, the mentee should be able to contact you. Be a wise adviser at all times.

2. The context of mentoring; "lead" is a four letter word

a. Mentors responsibilities

- To empower the mentee with the knowledge that allows them to make confident choices. Their choices may not be always be positive but that is not the responsibility of the mentor. To help the mentee grow as a person is through learning from one another, including unintended results and their consequences.

b. Role of Mentor for the future

- The mentor should be supportive, trustful, honest, accepting, and an affective listener. The mentor is a model of the mentee values. The mentor should be able to look at the positive in all situations.

3. Leveling the learning field

a. Philosophy of mentor-mentee

- The philosophy of mentoring is to go into the relationship as a partner and to ensure that there will be mutual learning. Ensure the mentee that they can do anything if they put their mind to it and use their individual strengths. “You are responsible for your own learning. I am responsible for supporting, facilitating, and learning with you.”

b. Changing roles through attitude and communication

- The attitude has to be give and take – both parties have something to give and gain. Communications allows you to receive the knowledge that you need. Communications also helps you make sure you follow your words with actions. Formal mentoring will often change your view of situations and provides learning for both partners.

4. The power of rapport

a. Communication/Dialogue

- Addressing assumptions and misconceptions you may have of your mentee creates new levels of understanding of how they see the work of the union. Being able to communicate your awareness to your mentee about the consequences of the choices and actions they may take, without judgment or expectations is key to dialogue.

- When we first connect with the mentee we set a foundation for trust and respect to be built throughout the relationship. When you create a formal connection the mentee will be more comfortable communicating with you because they will trust your ability to respect their choices.

b. Understanding

- Understand yourself
 - Creating an awareness of your beliefs and communicating them for your mentee allows for a deeper connection and understanding of how you do your work— this allows the mentee to see and experience your authenticity outside the role of union leadership.

- Understand others
 - As a mentor it is important to appreciate the realities of your mentee. Through active listening the mentor will learn and understand another experience and approach to the work of the union.

The key to developing a trusting mentor/mentee relationship is creating an understanding between you. Communications is defined as the “the co-creation of understanding.” Dialogue is the best tool for communicating understanding because it levels the playing field.

Dialogue

Dialogue is a form of communication that fosters **trust, respect, authenticity,** and **shared meaning**



Guides to Dialogue

- **Exploring Assumptions**
 - ❑ Be aware of your assumptions and hold them up for consideration.
 - ❑ Cannot be done if we are defending them.

- **Learn from and teach each other**
 - ❑ Mutual quest for deeper insight and understanding of the situation and each other.
 - ❑ The conscious act of thinking of another as a working partner contributes toward acting that way.
 - ❑ Conflict is seen as “people with differing points of view” as opposed to adversaries.

➤ **Curiosity**

- ❑ Wanting to understand the other's point of view.
- ❑ Seek first to understand, then to be understood.

5. Advice versus feedback

a. Danger of advice

- Not being clear. Avoid giving your opinion like it is the only way things can be done. You can put someone on the defensive. Another danger of giving advice is you can be seen as a know it all. It builds resentment.

b. Feedback as a communication tool

- Providing your view of a situation in a way that will not be seen as judgment and not lead to resistance
 - Make sure you agree on the situation
 - Ask permission to give your perspective
 - Clearly state your view of the situation
 - State your view in the first person singular.

6. Art of asking Questions

a. Advocacy vs. Inquiry

- As a mentor it becomes valuable to become more aware of your own thinking and reasoning and being willing and able to make your thinking and reasoning accessible to your mentee. Also being able to inquire into the thinking and reasoning of your mentee without judgment.
 - **Advocacy** – recognizes we can not impose our conclusions on the mentee but instead help them understand how you reached a conclusion in a similar situation. The “how” you reached the decision is more important than the decision or conclusion in a mentoring relationship.

Describing your situation, the insights you had, the assumptions you made about the situation or person and the conclusion you reached is the most powerful use of advocacy . This is making your reasoning available to your mentee so as they can make their own decisions what they can take or leave.

- **Inquiry** – using questions is the key tool in helping each other see the links to our reasoning and open ourselves to alternative interpretations and conclusions. This approach creates co-learning in the mentoring relationships.

b. Assumptions that destroy relationships

- We make assumptions all the time. Some are necessary for survival. However, other assumptions that we make about people or situations can jeopardize our relationships.
- We make assumptions based on our beliefs, attitudes, and past experiences; to which we then assign personal meaning.
- Many times our assumptions are misconceptions; however, often times we translate these assumptions and conclusions into “truths”.
- As a mentor the “trap” is to believe that our experiences, assumptions and conclusions are the only “truth”.

7. Putting “us” in trust

a. Power reducing techniques:

- Mentor is seen as an equal to the mentee.
- Mentees’s opinion is just as important as mentor’s.
- Relationship is not based on power but sharing of knowledge.

b. Narrow emotional distance between mentor and mentee

- To be effective leaders it is important for the mentor and mentee to be adept in appreciating, understanding and analyzing the union focus (CWA Triangle) in the context of human beings, the members that stand at the center of the organization.

8. The lost art of listening

- **Don’t Interrupt** – allow the speaker the opportunity to complete their message.
- **Empathize with the Speaker** – in order to decode the verbal and nonverbal cues from their unique point of view.
- **Maintains Interest** – try taking the view that there is always something of value in a conversation.
- **Postpone your Evaluation** – when we label a message as right or wrong we increase the likelihood of missing important points later in the conversation. Therefore, postpone your evaluation until your inquiry is complete.
- **Show your Interest** – give indications to your mentee that you are listening to what they are saying – (example: eye contact).
- **Provide Reflection** – when the mentee has finished take a moment to reflect on what was said and then ask questions for clarity on what you heard to ensure that you understand them correctly.

9. When fear and learning collide

a. Overcoming anxiety of differences

- By being able to understand the situation, keeping an open mind, as you may not see things in the same light as your mentee.

b. Defining “my” authenticity

- Everyone has to be free to be him or herself. If you hold back and are not the person you really are, then the relationship cannot be 100%. You have to be able to give your all.
- When working with peers you have to be humble and confident.
 - Ask lots of questions
 - Avoid conditional affirmations
 - Never resist resistance
 - Strive for reciprocal learning

10. The gift of balance

- **Find the teachable moment** – being able to know when to give your knowledge.
- **Support without rescuing** – know when it’s best for your mentee to find out things for themselves and when you should attempt to help.
- **Avoid perfection** – you are not the expert. Just someone that has some knowledge and experience to share.
- **Be passionate** about sharing knowledge and learning from others knowledge.

Different techniques may be used by mentors according to the situation and the mindset of the mentee. Mentors look for "teachable moments" in order to "expand or realize the potentialities of the people in the organizations they lead" and to reenforce that personal credibility is as essential to quality mentoring as skill.

Based on the work by:
Chip R. Bell
"Building Partnerships for Learning"

Alex Twix
"Democratizing work and unions"

Michael Maccoby
"The Leaders We Need: And What Makes Us Follow"

Kevin Boyle
"The Type "A" Leader"
"Cultural Exploration within Unions"

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