

The strategist's bookshelf

Mentoring: lending and getting a helping hand

Harvey A. Hornstein

One Minute Mentoring How to Find and Work With a Mentor – and Why You'll Benefit from Being One

Ken Blanchard and Claire Diaz-Ortiz, (William Morrow, 2017, 160 pages).

In ancient Greece, Odysseus, the fabled king of Ithaca and hero of Homer's *Odyssey*, made a memorable choice when he picked his friend, Mentor, to be an educator for his son, Telemachus. Mentor became Telemachus' teacher, coach, counselor and protector. The tutoring seems to have helped Telemachus mature into his role as "Chief Executive" of the household while Odysseus was away for 20 years, first fighting in the Trojan War and then wending his long journey back home. Over time, Mentor's name became both a noun and the verb that characterizes relationships in which an experienced, knowledgeable person provides guidance to a less experienced person.

In 1985, Professor Katherine Kram published a landmark summary of issues and ideas relevant to mentoring in work organizations, *Mentoring at Work*,^[1] arguably establishing mentoring as a potentially useful tool for promoting organization success. In the years after Kram published her book, mentoring in organizations has been the focus of scholarly reviews such as *The Blackwell Handbook of*

Mentoring by Tammy D. Allen and William T. Eby^[2] and scientific inquiries such as "Marginal Mentoring" by Belle Rose Ragin.^[3]

Guidelines for mentoring at work

Practitioners who are assigned to be a mentor or who engage in such a relationship as a "pay it forward" duty are likely to skip the scholarly tomes and instead tap into Google to find a practical guidebook. A useful one is *One Minute Mentoring: How to Find and Work with a Mentor – and Why You'll Benefit from Being One* by the prolific author of management advice, Ken Blanchard, and former Twitter executive, Claire Diaz-Ortiz. It's an entertaining book, containing helpful advice for working people who want to either give or receive mentoring.

After telling readers that "Successful people do not reach their goals alone," this book's lessons for mentors and mentees emerge from lively descriptions of the work experiences of prototypical characters "Josh" and "Diane." Josh, a young mentee, is in the midst of a career stall. Diane, who is older, is a sales executive who attributes her flagging work motivation to increasingly overburdened workdays. Josh's and

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Diane's paths to understanding and remedying their problems take them to mentors and we, as readers, are privy to the conversations that they have with them. We also get an account of their thoughts before their mentoring began, when they were still debating how to find someone to talk with about their situation, and, if they were going to work with a mentor, how that work should proceed.

Even if the storytelling isn't award-winning literature, Josh's and Diane's narratives successfully acquaint the reader with the experience of being mentored and mentoring. They are readable, filled with familiar detail and, because of those very features, likely to produce lots of head nodding and warm smiles from a wide range of working people.

In between their stories of the experiences of Josh and Diane the authors offer a series of what they call "One minute insights." Sometimes these are straightforward simple questions relevant to the story, prompting readers to consider similar circumstances in their own work lives. At other times, the "insights" are briefly stated lessons, drawn from the story, capable of awakening readers' awareness of options that they may be overlooking in locating and working either with, or as, mentors.

Some of this book's most useful features are its graphics that display

ideas and lessons in visual layouts that make it easy to recognize and remember them. As an example, the book's "Take Action" inserts, containing explicit suggestions for working within mentor-mentee relationships, help make the advice memorable. And so do other bold print inserts that summarize what the authors believe are important guidelines for forming mentor-mentee relationships.

To summarize its teachings in a closing chapter the authors resort to a time honored cliché by turning the word "mentor" into an acronym – M = mission, E = engagement, N = networking, T = trust, O = opportunity, R = review and renewal – offering their insights of what each of the acronym's six parts mean for mentors and mentees. This final section also offers a few rudimentary ideas that might be useful for organizations that want to launch mentoring programs.

For the finale, the authors first offer their thoughts about the differences between coaching and mentoring, a thought provoking distinction. Then, unabashedly, they end the book with information about how readers might secure their services.

Practitioners who need sophisticated advice about mentoring in organizations are likely to be left with many unanswered questions after reading this book. For example, this book does nothing to advance the understanding of the

conditions under which similarity or difference between mentors and mentees – in, for example, socio-cultural background, interests, style of interaction, values, current work roles or work histories – produce mentoring success. Nor does it explore the circumstances under which organizations' mentoring programs benefit from being either formal or informal, or voluntary or mandatory. If your interest in mentoring is shaped by such concerns, then *One Minute Mentoring* isn't for you. But, if you're entertaining the possibility of being either a mentor or mentee, then the few hours spent reading this 160-page book, which currently has a five-star rating on Amazon.com, are likely to be worthwhile.

Notes

1. *Mentoring at Work: Developmental Relationships in Organizational Life*, (Scott, Foresman and Company, 1995).
2. Tammy D. Allen and William T. Eby, *The Blackwell Handbook of Mentoring*, (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).
3. Belle Rose Ragin, "Marginal Mentoring: The effects of type of mentor, quality of relationship, and program design on work career attitude," *Academy of Management Journal*, 2000, Vol. 43 No. 6, pp. 1177-1194.

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