

What Makes a Mentor? By Gilly Johnson, Director and Founder, AMC, 2008.



How do you know what you need to do or be as a mentor?

How do you know what you want in a mentor?

These two questions are asked regularly by both mentors and mentees. An extensive amount of information has been written around what makes for a good mentor or what the skills are required to be a mentor, along with what to look for in a mentor. In January 2008, the Harvard Business Review (HBR) published an article: *Why Mentoring Matters in a Hypercompetitive World* which contained a short section on **what makes a good mentor?**

HBR indicated that through their interviews with successful professionals, the following indicators point to being 'a good mentor':

- *is someone absolutely credible whose integrity transcends the message, be it positive or negative*
- *tells you things you may not want to hear but leaves you feeling you have been heard*
- *interacts with you in a way that makes you want to become better*
- *makes you feel secure enough to take risks*
- *gives you the confidence to rise above your inner doubts and fears*
- *supports your attempts to set stretch goals for yourself*
- *presents opportunities and highlights challenges you might not have seen on your own.*

From the **mentor's** perspective this is a good starting point to reflect on what you might need to 'do or be' as a mentor. And from the **mentee's** perspective this is a good starting point to reflect on what you might 'want' in a mentor - and be able to communicate this to your current or future mentors.

Fundamentally mentoring is a leadership activity on both the part of the mentor and the mentee. So - perhaps we need to look to leadership principles further to support the question of **what makes a mentor**. The Kouzes and Posner **Leadership Challenge Model** describes five practices that are common when leaders are able to make extraordinary things happen. These are known as **The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®**. They are:

- Model the Way
- Inspire a Shared Vision
- Challenge the Process
- Enable Others to Act
- Encourage the Heart.

There's no one clear list of behaviours or characteristics that define the most suitable mentor for every mentee. However, when you compare the 'indicators' from the HBR article to the Kouzes and Posner Leadership Challenge Model, clearly there's a strong correlation between mentoring principles and leadership principles, and this is a great starting point for:

- Organisations to be able to define a set of guidelines for mentors and mentees
- Mentors to be able to reflect on 'what to do and be' as a mentor
- Mentees to be able to reflect on what they are looking for in a mentor and to be able communicate this clearly.

The Australian Mentor Centre combines mentoring and leadership - why not talk to us about how you can to. Contact us on info@australianmentorcentre.com.au or 1800 100 848.