

As we consider ways to care for our neighbors, one of the ways we need to care for and walk with one another as Christians and as we make disciples is by mentoring – helping a brother or sister in Christ become who God wants them to be by sharing who we are and what we've learned along the way. Dr. Gary McIntosh in his monthly letter, Growth Points, shares insights on mentoring...read, learn, share...another way to care for your neighbor.

Mentoring Relationships

Dr. Gary McIntosh

Recent research among church planters, as well as turnaround pastors, has revealed that having a coach is a predictor of success. This should not surprise us. Most professional trades have apprenticeships. Medical professions require internships. Even the Bible reveals that ministry success or fruitfulness often comes out of mentoring relationships, e.g., Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, Paul and Timothy, or Naomi and Ruth.

What is Mentoring?

One of the most comprehensive definitions of mentoring says, "Mentoring is an ongoing relational process in which someone who knows something, the mentor, offers that something (wisdom, advice, information, support, etc.) which is received by someone else, the mentoree, at a sensitive time so that it impacts personal and/or professional growth" (*Connecting*, 1992).

While that definition is extensive, I personally like the one offered by The Uncommon Individual Foundation: A mentor is "a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction."

Fred Smith said, "Mentoring is a one-on-one relationship between a mentor and mentoree for the specific and definable development of a skill or an art" ("Mentoring that Matters," 1999).

These three definitions make it plain that mentoring is more than simply talking together, or having a Bible study, or playing games over coffee. While these types of activities are excellent, they are not mentoring. True mentoring involves a strategic goal of helping a person improve a skill.

When mentoring relationships are analyzed, you normally find a younger or less experienced person initiated contact with an older or more experienced person with a specific request for help in developing some skill. For example, I've often been approached by younger writers to help them learn the process of writing a book. Their request resulted in a mentor/ mentoree relationship.

Being an Effective Mentor

While there are many ways to engage in a mentoring relationship, here are some basic guidelines you should keep in mind.

First, set the tone and expectations.

It's up to the mentor to set the tone. Do you want the relationship tone relaxed and informal or business-like and formal? Will you let the mentoree become like one of your family members, or will you keep a boundary between home and work? Will you simply invite the mentoree along to observe you in ministry situations, or will you spend time sharing your personal story?

Define the expectations early on in the relationship. Who will pay for the coffee? How often will you meet? How long will you meet? What level of accountability is expected? What is the purpose

of the relationship? Is there a fee for your time, or are you giving your time to them for free?

Determining realistic expectations at the beginning of a mentoring relationship will keep unrealistic expectations from undermining you later on.

Second, ask good questions.

A mentor is not just an “answer person” but a “question person.” Perhaps the most important ability of a good mentor is asking good questions. Consider some of the following questions as examples:

“What are you thinking about?”

“What is going on inside of you?”

“What is working in your life and ministry?”

“What is not working in your life and ministry?”

“How is your sense of God’s call being clarified?”

“What are some new things you could try?”

“As you assess your growth, where do you see areas you need to work on?”

“How may I help you?”

“How has that experience shaped you?”

“How has (or might) God use your past pain to prepare you for the future?”

Note that these are all open-ended questions, i.e., they cannot be answered yes or no, but require more thoughtful answers.

Third, nudge in the right direction.

Many people approach a new task with fear. Thus, a good mentor serves as a confidence builder, often by pushing mentorees in new directions. Ask, “What are you going to do about it?” “When are you going to get started?” “What are your next steps?” Push mentorees through their discomfort to take responsibility for their actions.

Mentors set the tone, ask good questions, and push in the right directions.

To learn more from Dr. McIntosh, visit churchgrowth.org online.

