

Deacon Mentoring


Investing in Tomorrow's Leaders

“ . . . We are not asked to make this journey solo”

ANDERSON/REECE

The word “mentor” is defined as a “wise and trusted counselor or teacher”. Although mentoring does not appear specifically in the Bible, Scripture does give us numerous examples of mentoring. Moses was mentored by his father-in-law Jethro, first as son-in-law and then as a leader ([Exodus 18](#)). The mentoring relationship between Eli and Samuel prepared Samuel for the tasks and responsibilities that were his after Eli’s death ([1 Samuel 1-4](#)). Jesus mentored His disciples ([Luke 9](#)), and both Barnabas and Paul excelled in mentoring ([Acts 9-15](#)).

Jesus made His style of mentoring clear: He led so that others can follow. He said, “If anyone will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24- 26). Because He is our leader and we are to follow Him, Christian mentoring is a process dependent upon submission to Christ. Neither the mentor nor the candidate controls the relationship. As such, the process is best characterized by mutual sharing, trust, and enrichment as the life and work of both participants is changed. The mentor serves as a model and a trusted listener. The mentor relies on the Holy Spirit to provide insight, change lives, and teach through the modeling process.



Spiritual mentoring is a triadic relationship between mentor, the mentored, and the Holy Spirit, where the mentored can discover, through the already present action of God, intimacy with God, ultimate identity as a child of God and a unique voice for kingdom responsibility.”

ANDERSON/REECE MODEL OF SPIRITUAL MENTORING

The Mentor’s Heart

Mentors are not perfect. Some people may hesitate to mentor an emerging leader because they feel inadequate. Mentors are models for their mentees, and any human model is fallible. But the mentor’s transparency will help the mentee to deal with his or her own struggles. Mentors need to be authentic God-seekers and Christ-followers who are willing to help others in their own development.

Biblical mentors seem to share some key values. They do not attempt to build their own kingdoms, but focus on the kingdom of God. Their leadership is based not on the manipulation of power, but on an attitude of servanthood. Brokenness before the Lord characterized by humility makes their lives compelling to others. They are not lone rangers;

they are team players. They have decided to invest in others and make leadership development of others a priority in their ministry.

Putting Mentoring into Practice

Some organizations implement formal mentoring programs where more experienced members are teamed up with younger individuals in order to help them learn the ropes. Studies have shown, however, that informal mentoring based on mutual willingness of the participants is more effective in the long run. Mentoring relationships go through at least three stages.

The first stage is *initiation* or *attraction*. At this stage, mentors and mentees see characteristics that draw them together. Mentors may identify potential in an emerging leader and approach that individual to develop a mentoring relationship with him or her. On the other hand, emerging leaders may see individual qualities in a more experienced individual that they may want to emulate, or skills that they wish to develop.

A second stage in mentoring relationships is the *cultivation* stage. In the first stage, mentor and mentee often lay out the expectations they have of the relationship. Some commitments may be made as to frequency of communication and the level of transparency they wish to maintain. In the cultivation stage, the relationship begins to bear fruit as mentor and mentee share with one another and face challenges and opportunities together.

The third stage is *separation*. Separation eventually comes, whether due to changes in assignment, location or the felt needs of the participants. Paul and Barnabas separated even after Barnabas had been used of the Lord to open great doors of opportunity to Paul. This stage can be painful, but it is necessary as the mentee continues to grow developmentally. Often, mentoring relationships will evolve into peer relationships marked by continued mutual support. Wise mentors will be sensitive to this need and will release mentees to pursue God's vision for his or her life.

Mentoring Tips

Mentoring is not an exact science, but there are some basic principles that can guide mentors in developing mentoring relationships with mentees. The following are six.

Mentors are role models. Mentees are often drawn to mentors because they want to be like them in some area. While communicating information and knowledge is important, mentors should first keep watch over their own lives and ministry so as to maintain an effective example for the mentee to follow.

Mentors should pray for and pray with the mentee. The Holy Spirit is the primary agent of spiritual development. Apart from his working in the mentee's life, the mentor labors in vain.

Mentors should seek to provide opportunities for the mentee to gain ministry experience. By sponsoring the mentee, the mentor can often open doors to new leadership development.

Mentors should learn to listen to the mentee. Sometimes well-meaning mentors have pat answers for life problems. Trust will grow in the relationship as the mentee senses that the mentor is truly seeking to hear and understand the mentee's needs.

Mentors should give guidance to the mentee. However, unless there are clear scriptural commands at issue, allow the mentee to make his or her own decisions before the Lord. For instance, in considering a change of ministry, help the mentee examine matters of spiritual gifting, call and future goals. But the final decision must rest upon the mentee as he or she takes responsibility for discerning and following God's will.

Mentors should be sensitive to cultural differences that influence the expectations that mentees have of mentoring relationships. Some cultures expect that mentors be more or less directive. Others may require the mentor to be much more paternal and to become much more involved in the mentee's family and personal life. Some mentors may want to keep a strict schedule, while the host culture may consider relationships far more important than schedules. Cultural sensitivity, wise transparency and a winsome spirit will go a long way in nurturing the mentoring relationship.

Recommended Reading:

- Krallmann, Günter. 2002. *Mentoring for Mission: A Handbook on Leadership Principles Exemplified by Jesus Christ.*
- Sanders, Martin. 2004. *The Power of Mentoring: Shaping People Who Will Shape the World.*

Questions & Answers about Mentoring

(from an interview with Nancy Ortberg in Christianity Today)

What do younger leaders most need to hear from older leaders?

"I see you and I believe in you." That is the first thing they need to hear. Then I think they need ongoing leadership from the older generation. They need them to say, "I'm going to watch you and give you experiences and opportunities to do things, but I'm not just going to let you go. I'm

going to coach you along the way, I am going to be a resource for you, I'm going to watch you do it, and I'm going to give you feedback. And then I'm going to give you another opportunity, and stretch you a little further that next time.

The three words I think of a lot when I think of developing people are relationships, opportunities, and challenges. To build trust with somebody, I need to have some kind of a relationship. They don't have to be my best friend, but I have got to know that they know me and that they care about me. There has to be a relationship. Then they have to give me an opportunity to do something that is aligned with who they know me to be, and what my gifts are. If you got to know me you wouldn't put me in charge of a children's program. That's not what I'm good at, and I don't like it. So you give them an opportunity that is based on what you know about them and then along the way you give them challenges, and you stretch them to see how ready they are to take the next step.

How can leaders better think about their role as identifier and recruiter of new leaders?

Read Ephesians. That's really their primary job, to equip the body for the work of ministry. That means leaders have to be really well-versed in spiritual gifts. They have to know what the spiritual gifts are, and they have to know what clues people radiate off of themselves because of their spiritual gifts. Someone with the gift of hospitality almost always has a warm, welcoming, inclusive, and open posture. Their first response in most situations will be, "Let's be sure everyone feels included." That sentence right there is a spiritual gift 'clue.' Someone with the gift of intercession will say, "Let's pray about this." An administrator will say, "Let's organize this." People are radiating clues about their spiritual gifts all the time. We need to pay attention.

The primary job of a leader is to look across the horizon of the church and see who the people are, what gifts God has deposited in them, and how they can place them in areas that line up with those gifts to leverage the power that God has placed in them. This is the power that pushes the church into the future. So you ask a lot of questions, you listen well, you make observations, and then you make the ask: "Have you ever considered possibly thinking about volunteering with junior high kids as a leader? Here's why I think you'd be good at that."

What types of questions can leaders ask to help identify leadership potential in people in the pews?

I would start with questions of passion. Questions like, What kind of conversation would keep you up late at night? What are you passionate about that might surprise other people? When you look at the church, or outside the walls of the church, and you consider the fact that the church could make a difference in some of these areas, which ones excite you the most? I would also ask questions about their past. What have you done in the past that brought you a lot of energy and success? What are some areas or competencies that you

have that when you used them you had successes, and things happened and changed because of it?

I would also ask them questions of maturity. Tell me a little bit about your journey with God. I also ask people, "When has been a hard time between you and God, when you have doubted him or haven't felt his presence? How did you get through that?" And then I always ask, "What has been a hard time in your life?" For a leader to be good, they have to be very aware of their woundedness, their brokenness, their pain and suffering. Without that self-awareness I'm not ready to put them in too high of a leadership position.

How can you develop reluctant leaders—those people with latent gifts that don't seem to want to step up?

Encouragement. You're going to develop these people slower. One of the reasons it's hard to develop this kind of person is because some people who are reluctant have really low self-esteem. That's really hard to overcome. I have recommended therapy for lots of people, myself included. Low self-esteem is one of the most difficult things to overcome in working with future leaders. So if their reluctance is around that, they're probably going to need a season of spiritual direction and counseling and reading great books, like those by Henry Cloud or Dan Allender, that are going to help them get to the depths of their woundedness.

Other people are just reluctant because nobody believed in them enough to give them a chance and then coach them along the way, to be their safety net. I would give these people observations and feedback about why they might be good in a certain position. And then I would give them a small job first, something with a little less of a stretch, because that gap would be too big and their reluctance might just swallow them down into that chasm. And then promise them that someone is going to be there watching them, supporting them, and giving them feedback to help them succeed.

Mentoring Plan for Deacons

One you have connected a new deacon with someone who has experience in the role, here is a plan to help get you started:

- 1. Spend time in the first meeting exploring the role of the Deacon and exploring personal call and giftedness.**
 - a. Look at the "Charge to the Deacons" together and ask the following: *What stands out for you in the charge? What resonates deeply and inspires? What gifts do you bring to the table? What do you see as (potential) personal challenges?*
 - b. Go over the nuts and bolts of diaconal ministry specific to your church context. *Who collects the money? How is the offering schedule set each year? Who is on your benevolence list? What ministry work is the diaconate engaged in? What is required for each role of the diaconate (Chair, Treasurer, Secretary etc.)?*

Does the diaconate have a workplan that reflects wholistic community, justice and benevolence ministry?

- c. Consider using Diaconal Ministries Canada *Spiritual Gifts Inventory* tool to explore the personal giftedness of the new deacon. Share personal stories of faith and service. This is helpful in building the mentoring relationship and allowing a mature, wise person of faith to speak into a younger person's life and prompting a hunger for greater work with God.
- d. Ask questions about him or her, as suggested by Nancy above. Start with questions of passion. Questions like, *What kind of conversation would keep you up late at night? What are you passionate about that might surprise other people? When you look at the church, or outside the walls of the church, and you consider the fact that the church could make a difference in some of these areas, which ones excite you the most?*

Also ask questions about their past. *What have you done in the past that brought you a lot of energy and success? What are some areas or competencies that you have that when you used them you had successes, and things happened and changed because of it?*

Ask them questions of maturity. *Tell me a little bit about your journey with God.* Ask people, *"When has been a hard time between you and God, when you have doubted him or haven't felt his presence? How did you get through that?"* And then ask, *"What has been a hard time in your life?"* For a leader to be good, they have to be very aware of their woundedness, their brokenness, their pain and suffering.

2. Develop leadership skills and start by reading the book of Ephesians together.

The primary job of deacons is to equip the body for the work of ministry. That means leaders have to be really well-versed in spiritual gifts. This vision of leadership involves looking across the horizon of the church and seeing who the people are, what gifts God has deposited in them, and how they can place them in areas that line up with those gifts to leverage the power that God has placed in them. ***This is the power that pushes the church into the future.***