Question 1: What is employee mentoring?

Answer 1: Mentoring is a type of leadership. Employee mentoring involves a relationship between an experienced employee and a newly assigned employee, the goal of which is to get the newly assigned employee to become more like the experienced employee. The new employee is afforded the best and proven qualities of the mentor, and then adds them to his or her own characteristics.

The mentoring relationship is not the same as a training relationship, wherein an individual is taught to perform repeatable tasks that are executed with a sense of regularity. Mentoring is not as broadly defined as in the case of an educator–student relationship. This relationship encompasses a wide range of subjects that are imparted to the student to enable him or her to be able to analyze in the abstract and in the determination of appropriate courses of action. In corporate employee mentoring, the mentor imparts his or her abilities to an already loyal advocate. Mentoring also equips this person with personal and corporate objectives, so that the protégé eventually can mentor others.

The experienced employee (mentor) and the new employee (protégé) need to invest in their working relationship for their mutual success and for that of the organization. The relationship involves time, although it should not take 40 hours each week. Informal meetings take place after the initial collaboration. Mentoring operationalizes techniques with the corporation.

Question 2: How can a "superleader" promote self-leadership?

Answer 2: Superleaders face all of the challenges in leading followers to discover the potentialities that lie within themselves. It is critical and essential that a person first learn how to lead him- or herself before a superleader can learn how to effectively lead others. Self-leadership is the influence individuals exert on themselves to achieve the self-motivation and self-direction needed to perform. Approaching the topic from another venue is that self-leadership is also the essence of effective "followership." For example, an employee from a large corporation stated that the company started using participative management, but no one knew what that meant for the subordinate (employee). No one spelled out the responsibilities of the follower or how this person should behave in participative management situations.
The next step is to demonstrate these skills to employees, once superleaders master their own self-leadership. The superleader then takes on the role of modeling what he or she has learned. Modeling can be used to develop employee self-leadership on a daily basis. These employees first establish new behaviors, especially self-leadership, without having to actually perform it.

Superleadership is attained by increasing the probability of previously learned self-leadership behaviors. These behaviors can be enhanced through positive rewards by others for desired behaviors. For example, at one large company, an elderly woman reacted with delight when she was presented with a special achievement award for developing a new inspection procedure. She had developed this procedure using her own initiative; in other words, acting as a self-leader.

Employee self-goal setting is a key element, because the main purpose of the superleader is to improve the performance of the employees through the development of their own self-leadership capabilities. It is important to note that goal-setting is a learned behavior that an employee can learn over a period of time. Also important in superleadership is constructive employee thought patterns. The role of the superleader is to transmit the process of facilitation positive self-expectation in employees.

One of the most effective strategies is in developing self-leadership by reward and reinforcement. A good example of a reward is an employee’s incentive pay. Teamwork and the proper culture are two more elements that play an important role in the superleadership.

**Question 3:** What is the difference between transformational and transactional leadership?

**Answer 3:** Transformational leadership offers employees constant feedback about the importance of their jobs and performance to the company. It also enhances the idea of employee awareness of their needs for personal development and growth. A key component of transformational leadership is that it motivates employees to work towards the good of the company, and not just for themselves.

According to Vecchio (1997), there are four primary dimensions of transformational leadership, as follows:
1. **Idealized influence**: This describes the behavior that is epitomized by employee–follower admiration, trust, and respect. It also involves risk-sharing on the parts of the leaders, consideration of the personal needs of the employees, and moral–ethical conduct.

2. **Individualized consideration**: This is reflected by leaders who attentively listen and pay attention to the employees' needs for growth and achievement.

3. **Intellectual stimulation**: This is seen in leaders who solicit new ideas and creative solutions for problems from their employees. The leader will also encourage novel approaches for performing work.

4. **Inspirational motivation**: This is a dimension that is reflected in the employee’s behaviors. These behaviors provide meanings and challenges to the employee’s work. The specific dimension includes behaviors that articulate clear expectations and demonstrate a total commitment to the company’s overall goals. The leader is seen to arouse a team-type spirit through enthusiasm and optimism.

It is important to understand that transformational leadership often occurs during a company crisis or major change. The leader convinces the employees that the old methods used are no longer effective when this occurs. The leader continues through his or her behavior to reinforce the vision of the company, usually resulting in a heightened trust and respect on the part of the employees.

Transactional leadership uses reward and coercive powers to encourage the improvement of employee performance. Simply stated, this type of leadership exchanges rewards for performance and punishment for failure. These types of leaders push employees to change, but they do not seem to change themselves. The transactional leader does not have a vision of where he or she needs to take the company. This type of leader is waiting for things to go wrong, failing to take action when needed, and lacking in expectation clarifications. This type of leader focuses on mistakes rather than successes. This leader also sees avoidance as a mode of operation, not interacting with employees unless absolutely necessary (Vecchio, 1997).

**Question 4**: What is the dark side of charismatic or other visionary leadership?

**Answer 4**: Visionary leadership has the potential to create problematic or even disastrous outcomes for many companies. For example, when a
visionary leader’s behavior becomes exaggerated, loses touch with reality, or becomes a vehicle for personal gain, then the overall organization may suffer.

Visionary leaders often contribute valuable skills, such as strategic vision and communication, but many times, an unsuccessful strategic vision can be traced to the inclusion of a leader’s personal aims that do not match the organization's goals.

Personal vision many times encourages leaders to expend huge amounts of energy, passion, and resources to put them into effect. The higher a leader’s commitment, the less willing they are to see the viability of competing ideas. Failure is seen to have more serious consequences. Basic perceptual errors held by many leaders can also lead to the failure of the initial vision. Common problems include: (1) a lack of understanding or exaggerated sense of the needs of market, (2) an inability to identify important changes in markets, and (3) a failure to precisely assess and obtain the necessary resources for the vision’s accomplishment (Vecchio, 1997).

**Question 5: What is effective "followership"?**

**Answer 5:** Effective "followership" is a positive assessment of a leader's performance as measured by the performance of his or her employees. The performance of these employees is more often a function of the talents and wishes of the followers than the leaders. Note that a given level of an employee's ability and motivation can have far more to do with the employee’s performance, rather than the leader’s efforts.

From this perspective, a failure in leadership is, in essence, a failure in followership. A certain degree of responsibility for performance is assigned specifically to the employees. It is impossible for the leader to make a difference if employees do not subscribe to the overall goals or exert a certain amount of productive energy. Followers have a responsibility to be aware and to expend energies for the company’s goals.

On the other hand, leaders have a direct responsibility for developing and maintaining the followership of their employees. Loyalty is a key element in enhancing this value. Commitment also plays a significant role.
Question 6: What role do gender differences play in leadership?

Answer 6: Discussions of gender-specific leadership traits are inevitably contentious because of the gender stereotypes that permeate our culture, and the risk of the discussion descending into a debate over whether men or women make more effective leaders. The fact that there are women who naturally possess traditionally "masculine" leadership traits and men who naturally possess traditionally "feminine" leadership traits illustrates the difficulty in making definitive statements about gender-specific leadership traits. Nevertheless, researchers have observed that—generally speaking—men and women do have different leadership traits and behaviors. A woman's leadership traits are typically characterized as relationship-oriented, while a man's traits are said to be more inclined toward a "command and control" or militaristic style of leadership. Women leaders differ from men in that they exhibit a cooperative, empowering style that includes nurturing team members. Women also are more likely than their male counterparts to praise group members, and they will temper their criticisms with small amounts of praise.

Also, female leaders find participative management more natural than men, because interacting with employees and building relationships fall into their "comfort zone." Women’s natural sensitivity to people affords them an edge over men when it comes to encouraging group members to participate in decision making.

On the other hand, male leaders are said to be characterized by such positive traits as a sense of humor, an ability to make decisions quickly, and a propensity to take risks.

Several modern researchers feel that the best approach to dealing with gender-related leadership issues is to take advantage of the positive traits from both men and women, and even contend that the combining of these traits has led to a new management style (DuBrin, 1997).

From another perspective, this purported new management style could be seen as extremely idealistic in a highly competitive business culture where women are "forced to act like men" to succeed as leaders (Simonds, 1998). According to Professor Judy Wajcman at the Research School of Social Sciences in Canberra, Australia (1998),
macho management is still the norm among executives, and to break through the glass ceiling women have to manage like men. This is despite the popular rhetoric in management schools that ‘feminine’ management qualities—such as flexibility, team work and people skills—are necessary for the new millennium and that women with this style will flourish.

According to Simonds (1998),

although many [...] senior managers [...] acknowledged the importance of these qualities, in the real world of corporate downsizing and managing with less, they said executives relied on old fashioned, ‘masculine’ management styles of command and control.

Wajcman (1998) further explains how adopting different gender-specific traits has different consequences for women than for men:

Far from enhancing opportunities for women, current enthusiasm for a ‘feminine’ leadership style reinforces the stereotype that is at the root of the problem. When women adopt male leadership traits like dominance and aggressiveness they are cast as ‘iron maidens.’ At the same time there is evidence that men can appropriate the rediscovered ‘feminine’ style and add it to their traditionally male repertoire.

Whereas men will be advantaged by adding these new qualities to those they are already deemed to have, women will continue to be seen as offering feminine qualities only. While management gurus may ask ‘why can't a man be more like a woman?’ this does not necessarily herald the achievement of sex equality for women. The ‘man’ is still a defining feature of senior management.

It might be worthwhile to assess the appropriateness of certain leadership traits without regard to an individual's gender. The type of leadership required often depends on the environment in which the company exists, the industry to which it is affiliated, and the company's current internal culture and structure. If a company is in a stable industry with little competition, the need for innovation and openness may not be as great. Efficiency would then become the most immediate concern. A highly participatory, open-thinking, and
innovative leadership style might not be highly effective for this type of organization, regardless of the leader's gender.

**Question 7:** What is narcissism, and how does it impact leadership?

**Answer 7:** *Narcissism* is a psychoanalytic term used to describe a person's admiration for his or herself. The concept is analogous to self-esteem and is considered a normal part of everyone's psyche, but it develops differently in every person. It is sometimes instructive to study leaders in terms of the quality and intensity of their narcissistic development. Sigmund Freud reported in his study of relationships between leaders and subordinates that “the leader himself [sic] needs to love no one else; he may be of a masterful nature, absolutely narcissistic, self-confident and independent.” (Vecchio, 1997; Freud, 1922, pp. 123–124).

Later, Freud introduced the concept of a narcissistic libidinal personality, which describes a leader as a person whose main interest is self-preservation and who is independent and impossible to intimidate. The leader's aggressiveness manifests itself in a constant need and readiness for activity. These types of individuals impress others as having strong personalities. Narcissists feel they can only rely on themselves rather than on others for the gratification of their needs. The underlying assumption that many narcissists live with is that they cannot rely or depend on anyone's love or loyalty. (Vecchio, 1997; Freud, 1922)

Subsequent psychoanalytic studies into narcissistic behavior have deepened our understanding of the concept. A person traditionally labeled a "narcissist" might more accurately be said to suffer from a "narcissistic personality disorder" (NPD). Some researchers believe that NPD is triggered by a traumatic event in a person's childhood, while others point to genetics or a combination of genes and environmental factors. A person with NPD is typically characterized by, paradoxically, unconscious deficits in self-esteem, along with self-preoccupation and lack of empathy. A person with NPD may exhibit aggression, excessive control, and self-aggrandizement—behaviors that serve to compensate for his or her deficit in self-esteem.

It is important to remember that these characteristics occur in everyone with different degrees of intensity. A certain amount of narcissism is necessary to function effectively; however, those individuals whose narcissistic development has been abnormally affected (by trauma or otherwise) might experience difficulties in dealing with the external environment. Such a
person often responds inappropriately, even displaying rage that is out of proportion to the situation when challenged or confronted on a matter.

The presence of narcissistic leaders is an issue that numerous companies have had to address. What can be done when the company is centralized and the narcissistic leader is dominant but exhibits poor performance? Subsequent dismissal by a strong board of directors may be the only way to proceed if change is needed. Even this solution is ruled out, especially when the leader has strong financial control.

It is extremely difficult to change a narcissistic leader’s personality. The first suggestion is to transfer the individual out of harm’s way or reduce his or her influence. One way this can be accomplished is for power to be broadly distributed in the company so that many people are involved in strategic decisions. Cross-functional committees, task forces, and executive teams can supply a useful forum in which a multitude of managers can express their viewpoints providing opportunities for the narcissistic leaders to learn from and have their influence mitigated by the others.

Regular leader appraisals in which employees have a chance to express their opinions to a neutral third party about the leader may also prove to be useful. Where a consensus of dissatisfaction is looming, particularly when poor performance is an issue, it might be time to transfer or release the leader of his or her responsibilities.

Inexperienced managers should never be assigned to a narcissistic leader. These employees will have little resolve when dealing and coping with the leader. In contrast, it may be beneficial for a company to assign confident and experienced managers to this type of leader. These employees may help introduce more reality in the decision-making process.

It is keenly important to watch for signs of narcissistic disorders in the recruiting, interviewing, and promotional stages. There are a variety of psychological tests conducted by trained clinicians that can point out possible narcissistic problems with a candidate. (Vecchio, 1997)

References


