

Eight ways to share

by Gianni Anchois

**“There’s a good feeling to be had
by sharing” - Linus Van Pelt**

I know, he’s not real person, but I think Linus, my favourite Peanuts character, has got a point here.

SHARING IS CARING

Sharing what you know with others, unselfishly and expecting nothing in return, is the best feeling you can possibly experience.

Technology is a big help for doing that. With next to no technical skills, you can setup a blog, start tweeting and write articles on Medium in a matter of minutes. For free. Or you can go a more personal way, and become a mentor.

AN ANCIENT CONCEPT

The original concept of a mentor was of course introduced to us by Homer. In the Odyssey, on the eve of his epic voyage, Odysseus leaves his son Telemachus in the care of his trusted friend, Mentor. This is

actually Athena, the goddess of wisdom, inspiration, skills and strategy, in disguise.

You definitely don't need to be Athena to be a good mentor, but if you have a lot of experience and the right attitude, you're already on the right path to become a trusted advisor and counsellor for your mentee.

That's why I love it when a colleague or friend ask me to become his/her mentor. I don't know if I do it right, but I really put all my energies and enthusiasm in trying to be the best mentor I can possibly be.

But what does it take to be a good mentor?

THE TENETS OF MENTORSHIP

Well, there's ample literature available on the net, ranging from basic rules to expert advise and even play-books. As usual though, I prefer to take the personal route and share (!) what I believe are the eight key elements for a mentorship relation to work, based on my direct experience. The following are the pointers that have served me well through the years.

1. Work with someone who shares your values, who possesses high standards of trustworthiness and integrity. Sometimes it takes years to find such an individual, other times it can take a few occasional chats at the water cooler. You'll be surprised how many times you will be tricked into believing the match is perfect only to be disappointed at the first discussion.
2. Seek a person that will absorb, amplify and give back the energy that you do your best to provide during your conversations. If you do, every single meeting and conversation will not only open up a world of new possibilities, but strengthen the mutual respect.
3. Commit yourself to patiently listen, be supportive and encourage your mentee. This can be difficult at times, especially if you have a high demanding occupation (who doesn't?) and struggle to manage the time pressure. I'm not a particularly patient person, but I trained myself to make sure I really set aside the right amount of time and just listen.

We all need to vent our frustrations at times, the important thing is to do it and then move on to more valuable interactions.

4. Help the mentee develop his or her skills; identify and foster the potential to perfect or acquire new ones according to the set goals. Many management or HR consultants will tell you to work on your weaknesses, but I think that's the wrong thing to do. Make sure you don't have major weaknesses, but then work on the things you are doing well and become great at them. Even better if you become the greatest.
5. Do not hold back constructive criticism if needed, and openly provide your point of view on things and situations. This is tricky, because it could kill the conversation and become a monologue. As a mentor, you need to be honest and show just the right amount of humility. Unless you were selected because of a super unique skill only you possess, and your mentee literally hangs from your lips for every word you say, just make sure you give your point of view and then move on.
6. Open up and provide access to your network of contacts so that it can be leveraged if needed, and involve your mentee in your future projects, if meaningful and of reciprocal advantage. You might have worked together on projects in the past, in that case you should have a good understanding of the potential areas of involvement. My suggestion is to stretch the boundaries of such collaborations, venture into topics that might at first seem completely unrelated but promise to provide, if nothing else, the perfect terrain for interesting exchanges. Seek to move into uncomfortable territory and see what happens.
7. Dispense guidance, offer insights, and help plan for future career moves. It's probably going to be counterintuitive, but the best way to do this is not to put yourself in the other's shoes. Make the effort to see things from as many different perspectives as it makes sense, but remember your role is to be an impartial counsellor. Never make the mistake to believe that what's good for you is also good for your mentee.

8. Position yourself on equal grounds. This is not a contest, the mentor is not better than the mentee or the other way around. If you engage as peers, ignoring the difference in age, experience, type of responsibility, you will learn from the experience at least as much as the other party. And when you learn new things, magic happens. New ideas form, plans are hatched and a renewed flow of energy fills your brain.

A mentoring assignment is without doubt one of the purest forms of sharing, and once again it's totally free. As an added bonus, it's also the best way I know to learn about yourself.

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Gianni Anchois is a writer, blogger and technology enthusiast, with a background in electronics engineering, computer science and marketing. He has worked at Olivetti, Italia Online, Yahoo! and Hewlett-Packard, holding international responsibilities across IT services, business management, e-commerce, sales and marketing.

<http://twitter.com/giannianchois>

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/giannianchois>

<https://medium.com/@giannianchois>