

Mentors: Helping others, we help ourselves

Written by Julie Desmond
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Influence. Who has it? And what have they done with it lately? We are surrounded by ads persuading us to fill our closets and medicine shelves with a steady diet of new products. Our managers, teachers and neighbors are quick to tell us exactly what to do next. Political aspirants want our attention. But have you considered the ways that your own actions might impact others?

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In the largest sense, remember that your vote counts, both in Minneapolis and nationally. At the local level, as a community member, attending community meetings and events, volunteering or simply keeping your yard clean is all positive – and infectious. People's actions and attitudes generally reflect those of the people around them. Finally, as individuals, we need to notice and act on opportunities to help others succeed. It is here, at the most personal level, where transformations can occur almost before your eyes.

Some large corporations have formal mentorship programs designed to connect workers with others who can bring them up in the company. Many organizations talk about "onboarding": systematically attending to new employees in order to welcome them into the fold. However, most of us work in smaller companies without elaborate programs like these in place. Wherever you work, chances are that endless opportunities exist to use your experience and knowledge to lead and help someone else.

Your day starts out hectic, as usual. You have too many projects, not enough time, family issues on your mind and an overbearing boss. When the new hire asks you where the coffee pot/restroom/exit is, you have two options: glare, or take a deep breath. Either choice will impact the new hire. So you choose the deep breath. You realize that this new co-worker was hired to help you out, to take some of the work off your plate or to otherwise move things forward. You remember that he's not there to steal your position, only to work alongside you. In ten seconds, you can direct him to the coffee pot/restroom/exit and be back to your work. Good choice. An hour later, when you need something from this new hire, chances are you'll get a positive response. A small success, a win-win.

Talking to people nearing the end of their career, I hear about the best and worst of times employment-wise. Often, seasoned employees express that their greatest satisfaction came through mentoring others. They tell me that it's not how far you go, but how many people you brought with you that makes or breaks a career, and I believe it.

As a citizen, neighbor and co-worker, every individual has the power and ability to influence others. When Martin Luther King, Jr. accepted the Nobel Prize for peace in 1964, he acknowledged that the struggle for peace and freedom from oppression was not yet over; his

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expectation was that the creative work of good people would continue to move us toward a more peaceful, integrated society. Reaching into the community for the sole purpose of doing good is in line with MLK's ideals. Consider becoming a mentor to others, formally or informally, and enjoy the countless benefits which will inevitably circle back to you.

Julie Desmond is a recruiter with Hunter Hamilton Professional Resources in Minneapolis. Write to Julie@insightnews.com.