

Creating Lifelong Ties Through Mentoring

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Seven years have passed since I first began to serve as a mentor for the CEIBS MBA Mentoring Programme. Through dialogue and discussions with participants on topics like career, mindset, choices and life, I have been deeply moved by the students’ enterprising spirit and filled with a sharp sense of responsibility.

When I think back over these seven years of mentoring, vivid memories flit through my mind. Back when I began, equipped with the expertise and skills for career mentoring, I had just changed my role from a professional manager to

an executive coach. I was excited to participate and select six mentees. With enthusiasm and great admiration for the students, I held a heart-to-heart talk with each participant for an hour each month. I was deeply impressed by the differences between Chinese and foreign participants in terms of character, cultural preference, style of communication, life experience, and career experience.

Each autumn, mentors bid farewell to old participants and welcome new mentees. When choosing new participants, I like to read through their applications. Although we barely know each other, I am convinced we





will hit it off if the applicants have learned about my career experience and file an application that tugs at my heartstrings.

So far, I have mentored 26 participants. Since graduation, most have moved up their career ladder and started a family. Each year, we throw one or two parties to share our latest

life experiences and exchange ideas about how to quickly adapt oneself to a new working environment, get along with colleagues, strike a balance between work and life in a high-pressure, fast-paced environment, grasp opportunities for promotion and career progress, and maintain peace of mind.

One participant in particular left a deep impression on me. When we discussed his career, he came up with unique ideas for career paths such as office work, consulting service or entrepreneurship. When we probed further down these paths, taking lifecycle into account, he naturally added family — a critical component





— into his career planning. With a clear blueprint in mind, he is now making huge strides, braving the difficulties he encounters. It gratifies me to see that he has juggled his career and home commitments, making his life even more colourful than he expected seven years ago.

I am also appreciative of another participant who is independent-minded and highly motivated. With strong learning capability, she dares to place herself in completely unfamiliar surroundings. As she charts her own career course, she continues tapping into her potential to push the envelope. I am all ears whenever she holds forth on her recent experiences. With a ready smile, she appears quick-witted, sure-footed, and well-cultivated. I find in her a maturity rare among her peers.

Over the past seven years, I have also met some peers who are on the same wavelength. They are my mentors, fellow alumni and friends. Sometimes we chat about why we decided to participate in this mentorship project and continue to keep at it. All of us agree we have learnt from participants as much as they have from us, particularly in terms of self-perception and mentoring capabilities.

Recently, I have been thinking over



how to become an excellent mentor for the Mentoring Programme. Is it good timing to chat with participants and encourage them to explore their inner thoughts when we are both worn-out physically and mentally? Will these students find any enlightenment from our advice, especially as we are judging them through our own values and experienced perspective? Do professional mentors need to improve themselves through learning and practice?

After thinking over these questions, I believe the qualities of a professional mentor are as follows:

1. Sense of responsibility:

Casting aside prejudices, the mentor is duty-bound to encourage participants to speak their own mind;

2. Curiosity: Instead of boxing himself/herself in or preaching blindly, the mentor should be

curious about participants' life experiences, career objectives, thought pattern, and lifestyle, and willing to spur them on to move out of their comfort zone and make forays into known and unknown territory.

3. Empathy: The mentor should put himself in participants' shoes in order to gain deep insights into their ideas by applying the golden circle (Why-How-What).

4. Tolerance: The mentor should be open-minded to participants' distinctive personalities and ready to learn from them with humility. The shift of perspective from the singular to the plural, from the present to the future, and from the subjective to the objective will open up broader vistas for both mentors and participants.

I have benefitted from the Mentoring Programme and have now accumulated some experience in career mentoring. Beginning last year, I have written many articles on career development and published them on the public WeChat account "4E4U", in the hopes that more young people will get ahead in their career through contemplation, exploration, reflection, action and accumulation.

The annual mentoring programme is about to kick off. I hope that last year's participants will make some progress. I am also excited to take up with new mentees. Everyone follows a road of his own, but it can be a memorable experience to meet a mentor along the way and forge lifelong ties.