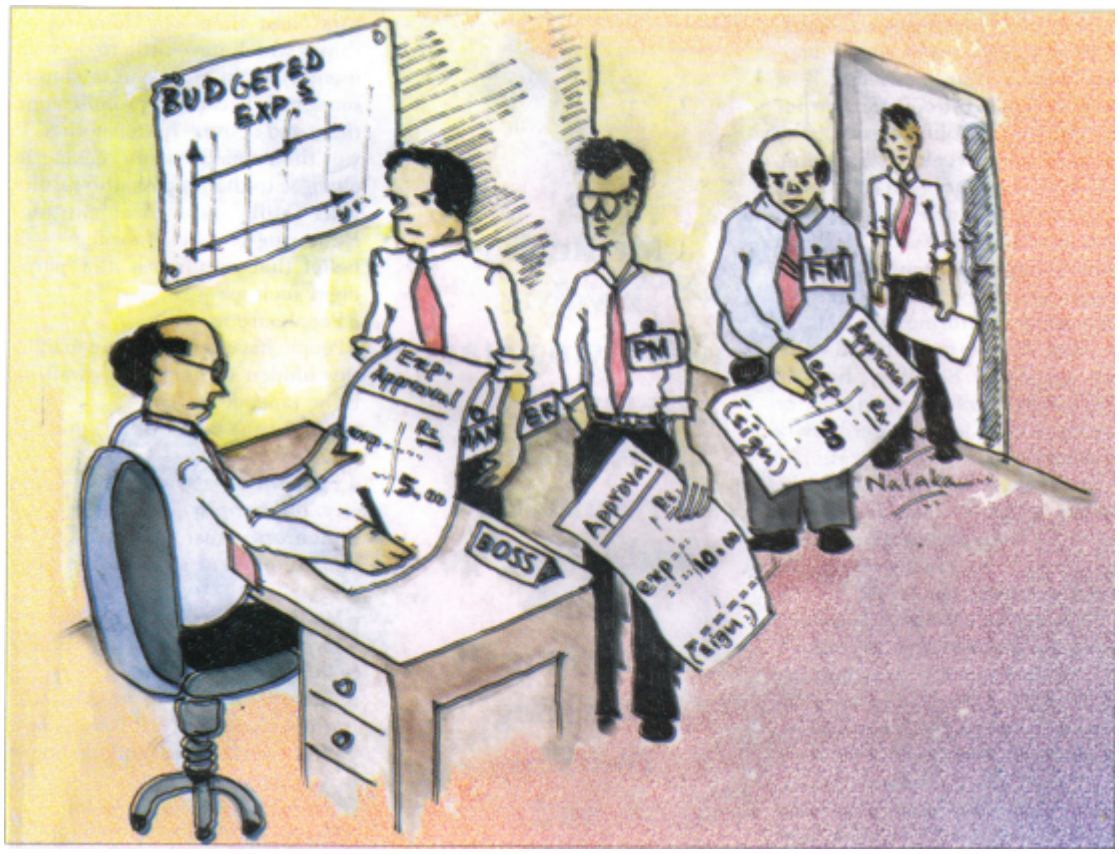
The (Un)Making Of Mentors

If you were to pick up a dictionary to get the meaning of the word ‘Mentor’, you would learn that it is derived from Greek mythology, in which Mentor was the loyal friend of Odysseus, left in charge of Odysseus’ household and son. The word actually means wise and trusted counsellor. Now, with that as the meaning of mentor, isn’t it great to have them in organizations?

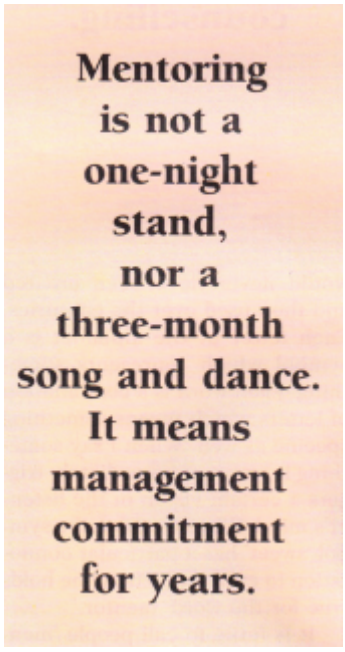
You bet it is. Business history is replete with obscure corporations becoming giants by putting the mentoring concept to effective use. What happens next? Other companies follow suit, or at least try to. Today, more and more companies are experimenting with the mentoring concept.



What is the outcome? Pretty insipid, going by facts. Now, why should a super concept like this go awry? The answer isn’t all that difficult to locate. Many companies want the mentoring concept to take hold in their organizations, but are

unwilling to take it to the full stretch, nor are they prepared to transform their autocratic command-and-control hierarchies. For instance, managers, and I mean senior managers, have to refer back to their bosses for every small item of expense even after departmental budgets have been approved. I myself was a victim of this ‘holding-on-to-the-purse- strings’ mentality during my days as a paid employee. To this day. the Human Resources Managers of most companies do not have the authority to commission a contract or engagement without the top gun or his/her crony giving approval. The same is true for mentoring. Top management will simply not let go and allow people. (who they hired in the first place presumably for their initiative, drive, verve, vigour….etc.) to get on with the job. No, they must stand in the way and impede progress. Here’s a look at the mentoring process.

Which reminds me of another interesting phenomenon. A company decides to set up a mentoring system without training would- be mentors. Worse, each mentor has around 50 persons under his/ her tutelage. What’s this mentoring or driving a herd of buffaloes? Mentoring is a one-on-one- process not one-on-fifty. Mentoring involves identifying talent, then nurturing and building that talent so that it can be unleashed at the competition two years or twenty years from now. Mentoring also means things like wise, loyal, and trustworthy.

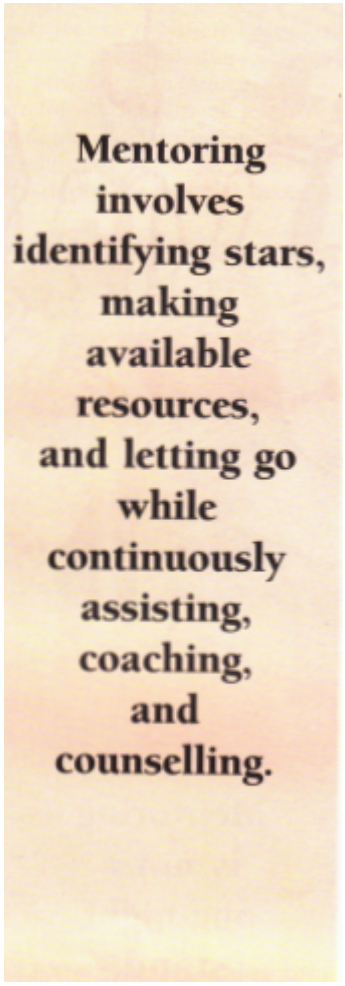


Mentoring is not a one-night stand, nor a three-month song and dance. It means management commitment for years. Nothing good ever happened overnight,

except by accident. And there is no known method of orchestrating accidents. They are sudden and simply happen without your knowledge. How long did it take the company owner to build his beautiful house? Did he do it in three weeks? Mentoring. like building your beautiful villa, is a carefully planned activity, with tons of effort. Just look at 3M if you want to know about mentoring. No single company has had greater success in mentoring than 3M.

How do you make bread without any flour? Similarly, how do you create stars and then mentor them without fostering creativity and innovation in organizations? Just as bread sans flour would be rather funny to taste, stars and mentors sans creativity, innovation, and freedom would be equally useless members.

Mentoring involves identifying stars, making available resources, and letting go while continuously assisting, coaching, and counselling. The role of the mentor is developmental, not administrative. Any company that creates a cocktail of these two functions is in for a rude shock in double quick time. I don’t mean that mentoring will take away all your time. It doesn’t have to be. But the mentoring role has to be devoid of administration. It is meant to help potential stars dazzle, delight, bewitch, and fascinate. Worse, mentors who are not trained to mentor in the real sense will then spend all their time defending what they are doing (or not doing). It’s likely to degenerate into a brouhaha that adds to the existing confusion. It is a lot better to steer clear of mentoring and retaining the status quo. Management often seems to forget that once expectations are raised and nothing is delivered thereafter, credibility goes for a six and with it goes morale. Result-simple and pure distrust, apathy and shock, followed by inaction.



Man is driven by symbols. If that weren't true, the alphabet would never have been created and then used over the centuries. Each letter in the alphabet is a symbol which represents something. Each word is a combination of letters which means something specific as well. When I say something is sweet, it immediately triggers a certain vision in the listener's mind. Why? Because the symbol 'sweet' has a particular connotation to everyone. The same holds true for the word 'mentor."

It is futile to call people 'mentors, and then ask them to do things which have little to do with mentoring. In fact, such a step is retrograde because it promises one thing and delivers quite another. If we then make some cosmetic changes to the process, the results will still be disappointing. Mentoring is a belief system-a belief that requires a new paradigm such as:

■People are assets.

■People have remarkable capabilities hidden in themselves waiting to be tapped.

■Mentoring takes time- lots of time.

■Corporate patience is a necessity, not merely desirable.

■Mentors must themselves be champions and outstanding people.

■Mentors must have been mavericks when they were young and held junior positions.

■Mentors must understand what it is to be frequently frustrated by policies, procedures, and mediocre management.

■Mentoring is a full-time job.

■Mentors should have only one or two persons under their tutelage.

■Mentors must know their charges like the back of their hands.

■Mentoring does not stop at 5 p.m. It is a continuous process.

■Mentors must have authority to take decisions that affect their charges.

■Mentors must have the unabashed freedom to destroy bureaucratic systems and procedures that cripple their charges.

■Mentors must be evaluated on their success rate of mentoring

■Mentors must constantly meet amongst themselves to learn from each other.

■Management must regularly celebrate its mentors' performances publicly.

Isn't it time that corporate chiefs put on their thinking caps and got some real mentoring under way?