

Deacon Mentoring

“Spiritual mentoring is a triadic relationship between mentor, mentee and the Holy Spirit, where the mentee can discover, through the already present action of God, intimacy with God, ultimate identity as a child of God and a unique voice for kingdom responsibility.” *Anderson/Reece model of Spiritual Mentoring*

“ . . . We are not asked to make this journey solo.” *Anderson/Reece*

The word “mentor” is defined as a “wise and trusted counselor or teacher”. Although mentoring does not appear specifically in the Bible, Scripture does give us numerous examples of mentoring. Moses was mentored by his father-in-law Jethro, first as son-in-law and then as a leader ([Exodus 18](#)). The mentoring relationship between Eli and Samuel prepared Samuel for the tasks and responsibilities that were his after Eli’s death ([1 Samuel 1–4](#)). Jesus mentored His disciples ([Luke 9](#)), and both Barnabas and Paul excelled in mentoring ([Acts 9–15](#)).

Jesus made His style of mentoring clear: He led so that others can follow. He said, “If anyone will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me” ([Matthew 16:24-26](#)). Because He is our leader and we are to follow Him, Christian mentoring is a process dependent upon submission to Christ. Neither the mentor nor the candidate controls the relationship. As such, the process is best characterized by mutual sharing, trust, and enrichment as the life and work of both participants is changed. The mentor serves as a model and a trusted listener. The mentor relies on the Holy Spirit to provide insight, change lives, and teach through the modeling process.

The Mentor’s Heart

Mentors are not perfect. Some people may hesitate to mentor an emerging leader because they feel inadequate. Mentors are models for their mentees, and any human model is fallible. But the mentor’s transparency will help the mentee to deal with his or her own struggles. Mentors need to be authentic God-seekers and Christ-followers who are willing to help others in their own development.

Biblical mentors seem to share some key values. They do not attempt to build their own kingdoms, but focus on the kingdom of God. Their leadership is based not on the manipulation of power, but on an attitude of servanthood. Brokenness before the Lord characterized by humility makes their lives compelling to others. They are not lone rangers; they are team players. They have decided to invest in others and make leadership development of others a priority in their ministry.

Putting Mentoring into Practice

Some organizations implement formal mentoring programs where more experienced members are teamed up with younger individuals in order to help them learn the ropes. Studies have shown,

however, that informal mentoring based on mutual willingness of the participants is more effective in the long run. Mentoring relationships go through at least three stages.

The first stage is *initiation* or *attraction*. At this stage, mentors and mentees see characteristics that draw them together. Mentors may identify potential in an emerging leader and approach that individual to develop a mentoring relationship with him or her. On the other hand, emerging leaders may see individual qualities in a more experienced individual that they may want to emulate, or skills that they wish to develop.

A second stage in mentoring relationships is the *cultivation* stage. In the first stage, mentor and mentee often lay out the expectations they have of the relationship. Some commitments may be made as to frequency of communication and the level of transparency they wish to maintain. In the cultivation stage, the relationship begins to bear fruit as mentor and mentee share with one another and face challenges and opportunities together.

The third stage is *separation*. Separation eventually comes, whether due to changes in assignment, location or the felt needs of the participants. Paul and Barnabas separated even after Barnabas had been used of the Lord to open great doors of opportunity to Paul. This stage can be painful, but it is necessary as the mentee continues to grow developmentally. Often, mentoring relationships will evolve into peer relationships marked by continued mutual support. Wise mentors will be sensitive to this need and will release mentees to pursue God's vision for his or her life.

Mentoring Tips

Mentoring is not an exact science, but there are six basic principles that can guide mentors develop effective relationships with mentees.

1. Mentors are role models. Mentees are often drawn to mentors because they want to be like them in some area. While communicating information and knowledge is important, mentors should first keep watch over their own lives and ministry so as to maintain an effective example for the mentee to follow.
2. Mentors should pray for and pray with the mentee. The Holy Spirit is the primary agent of spiritual development. Apart from his working in the mentee's life, the mentor labors in vain.
3. Mentors should seek to provide opportunities for the mentee to gain ministry experience. By sponsoring the mentee, the mentor can often open doors to new leadership development.
4. Mentors must listen to the mentee. Sometimes well-meaning mentors have pat answers for life problems. Trust will grow in the relationship as the mentee senses that the mentor is truly seeking to hear and understand the mentee's needs.
5. Mentors should give guidance to the mentee. However, unless there are clear scriptural commands at issue, allow the mentee to make his or her own decisions before the Lord. For instance, in considering a change of ministry, help the mentee examine matters of spiritual gifting, call and future

goals. But the final decision must rest upon the mentee as he or she takes responsibility for discerning and following God's will.

6. Mentors should be sensitive to cultural differences that influence the expectations that mentees have of mentoring relationships. Some cultures expect that mentors be more or less directive. Others may require the mentor to be much more paternal and to become much more involved in the mentee's family and personal life. Cultural sensitivity, wise transparency and a winsome spirit will go a long way in nurturing the mentoring relationship

Recommended Reading:

Krallmann, Günter. 2002. *Mentoring for Mission: A Handbook on Leadership Principles Exemplified by Jesus Christ*.

Sanders, Martin. 2004. *The Power of Mentoring: Shaping People Who Will Shape the World*.

Mentoring Plan for Deacons

1. Connect a new deacon with someone who has experience in the role. Spend time in the first meeting exploring the "Charge to the Deacons" and exploring personal call and giftedness. What stands out for you in the charge? What resonates deeply and inspires? What gifts do you bring to the table? What do you see as (potential) personal challenges?
2. Go over the nuts and bolts of diaconal ministry specific to your church context. Who collects the money? How is the offering schedule set each year? Who is on your benevolence list? What ministry work is the diaconate engaged in? What is required for each role of the diaconate (Chair, Treasurer, Secretary etc.)? Does the diaconate have a *Workplan* that reflects wholistic community, justice and benevolence ministry?
3. Consider using Diaconal Ministries Canada *Spiritual Gifts Inventory* tool to explore the personal giftedness of the new deacon. Share personal stories of faith and service. This is helpful in building the mentoring relationship and allowing a mature, wise person of faith to speak into a younger person's life and prompting a hunger for greater work with God.
4. Ask questions!! I would start with questions of passion. Questions like, *What kind of conversation would keep you up late at night? What are you passionate about that might surprise other people? When you look at the church, or outside the walls of the church, and*

you consider the fact that the church could make a difference in some of these areas, which ones excite you the most?

I would also ask questions about their past. *What have you done in the past that brought you a lot of energy and success? What are some areas or competencies that you have that when you used them you had successes, and things happened and changed because of it?*

I would also ask them questions of maturity. *Tell me a little bit about your journey with God.* I also ask people, *"When has been a hard time between you and God, when you have doubted him or haven't felt his presence? How did you get through that?"* And then I always ask, *"What has been a hard time in your life?"* For a leader to be effective, they have to be very aware of their woundedness, their brokenness, their pain and suffering.

5. Develop leadership skills and start by reading Ephesians together. The primary job of deacons is to equip the body for the work of ministry. That means leaders have to be really well-versed in spiritual gifts. This vision of leadership involves looking across the horizon of the church and seeing who the people are, what gifts God has deposited in them, and how they can place them in areas that line up with those gifts to leverage the power that God has placed in them.

This is the power that pushes the church into the future.