



MENTORING: BETWEEN SHADOWING AND COACHING

Konstantin Belkin, advisor to the Chairman of the Management Board and to the CEO of SIBUR, talks about the advantages and prospects of mentoring within a modern company.

– How would you explain mentoring, how does it differ from shadowing or coaching?

INTERACTIONS WITH THE GROUP WERE FRAMED BY THE FACT THAT I NEEDED TO GET CLOSER TO THIS GENERATION, NOT TO GO AGAINST IT, BUT TO LEARN TO SPEAK THE SAME LANGUAGE

– I always suggest looking at mentoring from the point of view of prescriptiveness, when one person tells another what needs to be done. Shadowing, in this context, is the most directive method, the relationship is “I tell you what to do, and you do it”. Shadowing is resorted to when there is a need to train specialists to have the necessary qualifications in short space of time. This system works well in SIBUR, we always have experts ready to share knowledge and experience. When we were getting ready to launch the ZapSibNeftekhim project, with the help of the Dubler (Shadowing Trainee) programme, we trained 800 specialists at the same time using elements of shadowing. Coaching, on the contrary, is the most non-directive method of development: a coach asks questions and through answering these questions, the mentee then finds a solution himself. Mentoring is a unique blend between shadowing and coaching. A mentor also asks questions, but at the same time can share with the student their own solutions, personal experience, or advice. The task of a mentor is to teach the mentee to consider the context of a problem, and offer solutions from which the mentee can select the most appropriate. Mentoring is not only about moving towards a goal, but also the development of professionals.

The personal experience of a mentor

SIBUR’s senior mentor has 36 years of managerial experience, 38 mentees among the company’s mid-level management, and holds an international standard ICF coaching certificate.

– How long have the principles of mentoring been used in SIBUR? How is collaboration between a mentor and mentee organized?

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– Historically we have always used work shadowing in our company, but we have noticed that this is insufficient for the development of staff. Sometimes it is not only important to look at how something is done, but also have a look at how it can be done best. It is very useful to evaluate several possible solutions to a problem: how else could it have been done, what would you have done if something went wrong. We only started using this method relatively recently, about three or four years ago. And in my own practices, I try to apply this method of professional development, by helping mentees to make their own decisions.

The HR Development Centre of SIBUR identifies promising employees, trains them to a certain level, and then uses different development tools, including mentoring. Along with SIBUR's Corporate University, we pair together mentors and mentees, and as a senior mentor of the company, I work with mid-level managers. Since I have a technical background (I myself went from blue-collar to managing director), I know a lot about how and where my colleagues need to develop. The talent management department identifies potential mentees, and the Corporate University oversees the process. We regularly review and discuss the results of our work.

– How sought-after and effective is mentoring in modern business? How do you assess the future of this approach to personal development within SIBUR's structure?

– As a mix of work shadowing and coaching, mentoring appears to be the most popular form of employee development, and it is more suitable than ever before for modern businesses. We are increasingly targeting young people, but younger people today do not so much like being told what to do, they want to solve and make decisions by themselves. The very notion of mentoring has ancient roots: In Homer's poem, Odysseus goes on a trip and entrusts his son's upbringing to his friend Mentos. The Goddess Athena spies on Mentos and how he delivers his lessons. Then, disguising herself as Mentos, she appears before Odysseus' son. Unlike Mentos, Athena engages in open conversation and treats her student like a person, not like an object. Over time, Mentos has become a household name, and it's precisely the method of personal development delivered by Athena that is most relevant today. In SIBUR we are very thorough in our implementation of mentoring. We understand how it should run, and have built our own system for future development, and we see good prospects.

I AM A SUCCESSFUL MENTOR IF I...



I KNOW HOW TO...

How can I help?
What can I bring/do?



I WOULD LIKE...

Why am I doing this?
How am I involved?



I CAN FIND THE TIME TO...

Place, time,
communication channel

IF THE STUDENT HAS NO DESIRE TO DEVELOP, THIS WILL IMMEDIATELY BE CLEAR TO THE MENTOR AND FUTURE COMMUNICATION MIGHT BE IMPACTED. IT IS CLEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO FORCE SOMEONE TO IMPROVE AGAINST THEIR WILL

– In your view, what is the secret to successful mentoring, what are the most important qualities a mentor and mentee should have?

– Sometime ago, my foreign colleague, Gary Hays, who was a consultant at SIBUR's Corporate University, and I created a formula for successful mentoring. Incidentally, I consider Gary Hays to be my teacher, he has more than 30 years of experience working as a coach. Together we arrived to the conclusion that, first and foremost, a mentor must know how they can help their student. They must not only build on their first-hand experience, but also use mentoring tools, be able to ask the right questions, and find the time to do so. First, I know how to do something, secondly, I want to do it, I like it, and I am committed to the process. And thirdly, I have the opportunity – I have the time, the place and ways of communication with the student.

I often compare mentoring with combustion, for which you need a source of fire, fuel and oxygen. If you do not have enough of one of these things, then combustion cannot happen. In the same way, there are also three constituent parts to mentoring: knowing how to do something, wanting to do it, and having the time to do so. And the student must understand that it is necessary for them to develop, and that they themselves must want to develop. The student must also know what they lack, and have questions which need answering. If the student has no desire to develop, this will immediately be clear to the mentor and future communication might be impacted. It is clearly impossible to force someone to improve against their will.

Lifehacks from an Experienced Mentor

- If a mentee cannot define a problem, the “5 WHYS” rule helps: ask the question “why” five times and draw from the mentee the right topic.
 - Ask questions to think deeply about the issue, a person can take a while to uncover their inner self.
 - Define and ask them to simply name all the emotions, they then lose their grip.
 - Just talk with the student, this is extremely useful.
 - Use any chance you get with your mentee, at the water cooler or even in the lift for effective communication.
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Konstantin Belkin believes that mentors should help their students to make their own decisions

– How does mentoring itself influence the mentor? In which situations is mentoring as useful for the mentor, as for the mentee?

– There are many such examples. I call this “reverse mentoring”, where the mentor also gets a lot out of his own guidance. I will share one example from my own experience. We have our SIBUR Grants programme: out of hundreds of high-school students from different regions, we select those who show interest in working for our company. A total of 150 future graduates come to our classes at the Sirius Education Centre. I was invited to one of these classes as a speaker, and I myself made many discoveries. What is this new generation, and how is it possible to work together? I asked a question, and they immediately picked up their smartphones. Normally in group sessions it is inappropriate to get distracted by your smartphone, but young people today are specifically using their phones to find answers to questions. All further interactions with the group were framed by the fact that I needed to get closer to this generation, not to go against it, but to learn to speak the same language. Conversely, this reverse mentoring does exist and always works for the mentor. It’s also a kind of acknowledgment, and a moral obligation, when you are entrusted with the development of new generations.

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– How has the pandemic impacted demand in mentoring? What is more sought-after today, emotional support or practical guidance from a manager?

– It is clear that the pandemic has impacted the activities of employees, queries are coming in about how to work online and with remote access. Together we are finding solutions that follow from personal experience. But if talking about the form mentoring itself has taken, I now hold more group sessions. They have been a good opportunity to gather audiences together from different regions. Our company has representation in different areas, and online sessions allow employees from all over the country to not only discuss a particular common topic, but also talk amongst themselves. This is very valuable. Of course nothing can replace live communication, but this format does have its benefits.

It's difficult to split mentees' concerns into emotional support and practical guidance. I think emotions and practical aspects are inextricably linked. How to avoid burnout, how to have a work-life balance, knowing in which sphere to develop in order to climb the career ladder. Employees come to mentors with personal concerns about their development. But besides this, top managers in the company are also creating their own "requests" for professionals' development: managerial scope, business acumen, self-evaluation, ability to break out, management style, or teamwork. The task of a mentor is to combine the personal interests of the employee, with the specific requests for development from top managers.

– For the first time this year, on the SIBUR Business Practices learning platform, a management workshop on mentoring was held. What were your thoughts on the webinar, did the audience's reaction meet your expectations?

– My impressions of the management workshop (<https://businesspractices.ru/programs/webinar/353/>) were better than expected, especially in terms of its popularity. 330 people signed up to the webinar and in reality 219 tuned in to listen, this just goes to show how much interest mentoring is attracting. In my opinion, this is the most important way to rate a webinar, I always pay attention to how many colleagues participate in my workshops. Normally there are 20 to 30 listeners, but in this case there were 219. There wasn't even enough time to read the comments in the chat, it was necessary to re-watch the webinar recording. The reactions and comments from the session were very positive, including someone asking for me to be their mentor. This is also very valuable. I would like to take this opportunity to thank SIBUR's Customer Practice Development Division for the opportunity to take part in the webinar.