

Should You Become a Mentor?

Written by Steve Marr

Wednesday, 25 March 2020 16:55

I try to coach or mentor 1-5 businesspeople at a time. I believe this is part of my calling. I want to strengthen others in business and use biblical principles in my mentoring. My perspective is that most business owners and leaders don't see themselves as mentors. Some large corporations may have structured programs for mentoring, but most do not.

For example, you can read a sales book, attend seminars and even engage in expensive training as a part of a mentoring program. These may provide an excellent return on your investment. However, there are many aspects of sales that you cannot learn from a book or training session. Selling involves reading the prospect's body language, discerning what the customer wants and reacting to questions that are not predictable or can be scripted. I read that no battle plan survives the initial contact with the enemy. Similarly, most sales plans don't survive much past 60 seconds into a customer contact.

Business leaders who have demonstrated good decision-making are unable to explain how they applied principles to specific situations. There are simply way too many variables. In a specific business, a leader begins to understand what works and what doesn't. For example, in most instances, hiring members of the same family is not a good idea. However, there are some cases where hiring family members works quite well. Experience makes a difference in making the correct judgment.

Recently I met with "Tony" who wanted to start a landscape business. He had limited experience from working for his uncle but really didn't know where to start. The key pieces of advice I offered were:

- Clarify the specific work you will offer.

In this instance, Tony wanted to provide inexpensive backyard landscaping for new homes.

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- Create an inexpensive website.

Use it to inform potential customers. Obtain as many customer reviews as possible.

- Use door hangers to target specific neighborhoods.

I advised Tony to go back to the same houses at least twice, if not three times, over a specific time period. I explained that the response rate to these door hangers should be 2-3%

- I advised him to require 50% cash down before starting a job.

This protects him in the beginning stages of his business. He won't be left empty-handed if the customer fails to pay.

- Accept credit cards.

Initially he didn't want to take credit cards, but I strongly advised him to. Many customers, particularly those in new homes, don't have a lot of cash. However, they do have credit cards and are usually willing to use them.

- I counseled him to prioritize his available cash.

Tony had \$7,000 he wanted to use to buy a truck. I advised him to buy a \$3,000 vehicle and invest several thousand dollars in marketing. This would leave him cash reserves to help him get the business started.

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- I advised him to pay attention to his appearance.

I specifically suggested that he shave or trim his beard to create a professional look that customers would trust. After all, he was no longer a hired hand; he was a business owner.

- I recommended purchasing inexpensive T-shirts or jackets with his business logo.

This would communicate that Tony ran a business.

Tony had purchased my book, *Roadmap to Success*, but these tactics wouldn't have been in the book because the book covered more general topics. For example, I didn't recommend door hangers in my book because they would not be appropriate for all business. However, they worked well for Tony. Besides, he had extra time for the door-to-door placement.

When I mentor a person, I maintain certain guidelines. I ensure they listen and apply what I suggest. This doesn't mean they have to do everything "Steve says." However, if Tony comes back to me in a few weeks without accomplishing any of the eight items I recommended; I don't feel I could spend time helping him.

Do you know the 1980s movie, *The Karate Kid*? Mr. Miyagi coached teenager Daniel both in karate and in life lessons. The movie is a great example of how a mentoring relationship benefits the mentor and the mentored.

The benefits to the one mentored should be obvious. However, I believe there are valuable advantages for the mentor as well. When we work with others, we sharpen our own skills. We can't suggest an action; we must explain why the action will be successful. It means we must really understand why we think and act the way that we do. It's the idea that we learn by teaching.

We see a classic example in Scripture where Paul wrote specific letters of instruction to

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Timothy. He told him to locate one or two individuals to mentor in godly ways by following Paul's mentoring example.

No matter where you are in your business, who could you mentor? Make an investment in your business by helping someone else build theirs.