Towards a Modern MENTORING

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Abstract
The promoters of mentoring in education try to strengthen the view of those who recognize and appreciate the role of the mentors in achieving performance. Phrases such as „I have had a good mentor” have become very frequent; mentor means a trustworthy adviser, a friend, a wise person, a guide, a teacher of reference, a close adviser etc.
The definitions of mentoring are many. Seen as a generalized process, in the sense that it can be found everywhere, in family, school, peer group and organization, we consider that mentoring is a form of manifestation of the organizational culture in which a person invests time, energy, knowledge and skills in stimulating the development of another person, due to professional obligations and mutual interests.

Key words: student, disciple, teacher, mentor, mentoring, education, study, knowledge, information.

The overall educational process is undergoing utmost turbulences, more than ever, and traditional educational methods are increasingly questioned by methods seen as modern and new; mentoring is one of them.
Traditional education is connected to the teacher, teaching goals, rigour and discipline, knowledge transferred mainly from the teacher to the student, assessment of the level of knowledge, hierarchy of students according to their marks, register, diploma, certificate etc.
The promoters of mentoring in education try to strengthen the general view of those who recognize and appreciate the role of the mentors in achieving performance. Phrases such as „I have had a good mentor”, have become very frequent; mentor means a trustworthy adviser, a friend, a wise person, a guide, a teacher of reference, a close adviser etc.
The word originates from Homer’s Odyssey, where we find that Odysseus, king of Ithaca, before going to the Trojan War, gave to Mentor, his best friend and a wise man, the task to manage his property and his assets, as well as the education of his son, Telemach. Consequently, Mentor started to play a major role in Telemach’s education and evolution.
Great personalities of universal culture have admitted, ever since, that they had their own mentors. Socrates was Plato’s mentor, Archimedes was Galileo Galilei’s mentor, Hyden was Beethoven’s mentor, Freud was Jung, Rodin was Brâncuși’s mentor, Peter Drucker was Jim Colins’s mentor, Douglas McGregor was Warren Bennis’ mentor, Warren Bennis was Tom Peters’ mentor. Many of today’s
scientists of global recognition proudly admit that they are continuators, in various fields, of what they started with their great mentors. Some entrepreneurs and famous managers explain their success in business through the role played in their lives by mentors whose advice became strong principles. This explains phrases such as „Behind a successful man, there is a wise woman, or behind a successful man, there is a successful man”; often, a person can play a major role in another person’s life.

The roles of the mentor are as various as the cases where a person may enjoy another person’s help. A mentor may acquire the role of best friend, adviser, supporter, objectivity-assessor, added value-assessor, umbrella, solution giver, trust inspiring person, life example, professional example, family example etc. Basically, the role of the mentor appears in educational processes – when the senior knows more than the disciple wants to accumulate, in consulting – when, under various contexts, the disciple needs clear criteria to choose, or for confirmation – when disciples needs an anchor to trust their own actions, or for models – when disciples wants to develop and they need competent and oriented training etc.

The Romanian dictionaries explain that mentor is „a spiritual leader, an educator”\(^1\).

In time, educational institutions, cultivated a certain type of personality of the mentor. Teachers were considered to be mentors of the generations they were teaching in schools. As social, economic and cultural life developed, heads of structures and managers, due to their educational mission, were also considered to be mentors. However, the teacher, the head of a structure and the manager are not considered to be mentors by definition. They are the official side of the educational action, while the capacity of a mentor suggests that the disciple confirms it. The teacher, the head of a structure and the manager became representatives of an official and collective side of a relation that aims at objectives, a harmonization of the educational behaviour, while the mentor became a synonym for individual success, as responsibility of both parties and as a competent response to the initiative of “treasure hunters”. For them, the mentor has psychological and professional resources to preserve objectivity at all the three stages of the educational act: transfer of knowledge, assessment and designing of solutions for given situations. The mentor facilitates creative thinking, connects the disciples to the issues, suggests solutions according to the moment, cultivates the disciples’ trust in their own forces, enjoys the others’ success.

We can therefore identify two types of mentors: a formal mentor, within an institutional framework, with obligations, mission, a profession, planned, organized, coordinated and rigorously checked actions, and an informal mentor, evolving as such, with no planning, but with an extremely positive and productive emotional weight.

\(^1\)DEX, Dictionarul explicativ al limbii române, Academiei Publishing House, Bucharest, 1973, p.321
Following the implementation of the great scientific and technical discoveries, this new century finds mankind faced with a global economic challenge: to meet social needs in a customized manner. Customized marketing suggests that the production of consumer goods and services should take into account the expectations of each consumer, and the efforts to keep the customers are a major component of the vision of a successful entrepreneur. Similar processes take place in educational fields, where there is a increasing need to enforce individualized methods of knowledge acquisition and training of professional and life skills. Students have become demanding in their relations with their teachers, and with those entitled to consider themselves their mentor. Phrases such as: I know better how to do it, I like / I don’t like the teacher’s method, Don’t tell me how to proceed, I’ll do it my way, I trust I am doing the right thing, Only him/her can be my professional and moral example, I want to be the master of my time etc. – cause trouble to the entire educational system. Teachers find themselves in the position to be assessed, to be accepted or rejected, and students become increasingly brave in naming the people who have a certain role in their personal becoming. In fact, students declare all that they want to learn but only what they need, through methods they agree upon and that motivate them. An increasing weight is therefore placed on the emotional side of the connection between the student and the teacher; the mentor becomes an adviser, a counselor, a wise person etc. who dedicates oneself to the disciple who has chosen him/her. Like in Homer’s Odyssey, the modern mentor accepts the mission and serves the disciple, thus becoming a moral and professional example for his evolution.

Mentoring – to be chosen as a mentor and to act as a mentor - has imposed itself recently, as a sort of retro fashion, as a consequence of the recognition that a person can be some one else’s mentor. The definitions of mentoring are many. It is a process that can be found everywhere, in family, school, peer group and organization. Mentoring is a manifestation of the organizational culture in which a person invests time, energy, knowledge, skills, in order to develop another person, due to professional obligations and mutual interests. If the traditional form of mentoring placed on one side a unique mentor, and on the other side, a group, a class, a team, a working group, etc., the current form of mentoring implies a disciple and several mentors, the role of the mentor can be played by anybody, successively or at the same time, by a friend, a parent, a teacher or several teachers, a colleague, a manager etc. Like in erecting a building, when the builders build the foundation, then floor by floor, the installations, then the roof, and the functionality of the building etc., the building of professional education and life education of the disciple is the outcome of a harmonious action of several mentors, who support when they are needed.

In mentoring, the mentor and the student (disciple) should have the following characteristics:

2 According to Lucia Lazăr, Mentoringul, un concept vechi în haine noi, article, Manager Express, July-August 2013, p. 25-27
- **The ideal mentor**: good interpersonal abilities, objectivity, equal footing relations, flexibility, easy to prove competences, experience, non-aggressive attitude, propensity to develop initiative and independence, sincere, self-confident, objective assessment, mobilizing, trustworthy, motivated to succeed, open to accept power and risk, loyal, committed, able to develop relations, flexible and adjustable, aware of himself, well organized, able to accept challenges and to receive constructive feedback etc.

- **The ideal student**: willing to learn and develop, intelligent, able to learn quickly, ambitious, motivated to succeed, willing to accept power and risk, loyal, committed, dutiful, able to develop relations, flexible and adjustable, self-aware, well organized, open to accept challenges and to receive a constructive feedback etc.

Consequently, the mentor, the disciple and the organization acquires new qualitative valences, in the sense that the disciple: develops his/her abilities to learn, to analyze and meditate, expands his/her professional and organizational knowledge, becomes more self-aware, more self-confident and more willing to take risks, acquires the ability to receive criticism, has the chance to learn in a more personalized manner, from recognized experience etc., the mentor: improves his/her level of awareness of his/her own gaps in learning, develops his/her ability to receive and give advice, updates his/her professional knowledge, improves his/her communicational abilities, has the chance to be appreciated and to be promoted etc., while the organization: increases the level of satisfaction and morality of its employees, expands its base of abilities and competences according to its own strategic objectives, improves services through developing everybody’s competences, develops trust in competent support of the experienced ones, supports team work and efficient cooperation etc.

In the traditional educational system, the teacher transfers his/her knowledge to students; education is based on knowledge transfer, which generates motivation but also demobilizing attitude, lack of interest, rejection of the educational effort. Mentoring, without ignoring the teaching objectives, focuses on catalyzing the interest of the disciple, on supporting the disciple in achieving his/her vision of life. Mentoring implies a joint effort to shape a vision.

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