

### **Mentoring: The Linchpin to Connect to the Millennial Generation**

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“You choose your beliefs, your neatly tied package of what can and cannot be. With these beliefs we weave the fabric of our religion. But what if God refuses to be defined by what we consider believable? What if truth is not something we create, but something we discover and embrace?”<sup>1</sup> Thus began a full-page ad in *The Gazette*, my hometown newspaper. The first two statements crystallize the concept of truth for many millennials (young people born after 1980). The two provocative questions that concluded the advertisement, however, should shake millennials to the core if they are willing to reflect honestly on how they would answer such queries. But how do we then go about teaching the truth to the millennial generation so that they will value, internalize, and then act on the truth?

Josh McDowell, the well-known Christian apologist, stresses the importance of making a “relational connection” when teaching absolute truth to the millennial generation.<sup>2</sup> What Josh McDowell is describing here is the first step in the process of mentoring. Bobb Biehl, in his book entitled *Mentoring: Confidence in Finding a Mentor and Becoming One*, argues that the process of mentoring is the linchpin to connect one generation to another.<sup>3</sup> Mentoring is not very elaborate, and it doesn’t take a rocket scientist to figure it out, but it’s crucial in making the connection between generations.

In the research on effective schools, an interesting finding was evident in effective school climates that were serious about learning and that exhibited a high rate of retention (students staying in school). The average adult would probably assume that teenagers would want to stay in school because of their relationships with their friends. The research, however, showed that the number one variable that led to high retention and that contributed to a stable learning environment was the relationship of the adult staff to the students.<sup>4</sup> What a surprising finding! However, my twenty plus years as an educator have shown this discovery to be true. In fact, as a high school principal, I would pass on this lesson to my young teachers every year by urging them to avoid one particularly common pitfall—trying to become just another friend to their students. In my experience, the truth is that most students already have enough friends. What they don’t have is enough adults in their lives.

So exactly what do we mean when we use the term *mentoring*? Paul Stanley and Robert Clinton, authors of *Connecting: The Mentoring Relationships You Need to Succeed in Life*, propose an expanded definition of the word, stating that *mentoring* is “a relational process in which a mentor, who knows or has experienced something, transfers that something (resources of wisdom, information, experience, confidence, insight, relationships, status, etc.) to a mentoree, at an appropriate time and manner, so that it

facilitates development or empowerment.”<sup>5</sup> It’s important to note the key phrases in this definition as we begin to explore the concept of mentoring. Mentoring is relational connection that involves varying levels of involvement and degrees of intensity with the goal of empowering the protégé.

The first key phrase in the definition is that mentoring is a relational process. This relational process is the foundation for a mentoring relationship. A mutual attraction is the necessary starting point in any relationship. The protégé is often attracted to the mentor for his or her experience and skills, perceived wisdom, and modeling of values, character, and integrity. In turn, a mentor is often attracted to the teachable spirit and potential in a protégé. The protégé must be willing and ready to learn from the mentor. If the protégé does not have a teachable heart, there is little a mentor can accomplish.

Stanley and Clinton continue in their definition of *mentoring* with two additional key phrases that refer to “levels of involvement and degrees of intensity” with the “goal of empowering the protégé.” Stanley and Clinton outline a helpful model of mentoring styles that have the goal of empowering the protégé. The model follows a progression of increasing intentionality in terms of goals and objectives and a progression of increasing intensity, particularly in terms of a time commitment.

The first level of mentoring styles is what is called *passive mentoring*. There are two distinct styles of passive mentoring: the contemporary model and the historical model.<sup>6</sup> The contemporary model is a living person who is involved in the process of mentoring but is not making a deliberate effort other than living a life that provides a model for a protégé. The historical model is one in which the mentor is no longer living yet mentors a protégé through personal legacy. These mentoring styles can be thought of as “hero” styles since the protégé looks to the mentor from afar with little or no mutual intentionality or intensity in the relationship. These are the only mentoring styles that are not predicated on a relational connection.

In the second level of mentoring styles, *occasional mentoring*, the intentionality and intensity of the relationship between the protégé and the mentor is more significant than in the passive level of mentoring. There are three distinct styles of occasional mentoring: the counselor, the teacher, and the sponsor. The major thrust of the counselor mentoring style is the mentor’s attempt to empower the protégé through timely advice and correct perspectives on viewing oneself, others, circumstances, and ministry. The main emphasis of the teacher mentoring style is the mentor’s endeavor to empower the protégé through the knowledge and understanding of a particular subject. The primary objective of the sponsor mentoring style is empowering the protégé through career guidance and protection as the protégé leads an organization.<sup>7</sup>

In *intensive mentoring*, the third and final level of mentoring, the intentionality and intensity of the relationship between the protégé and the mentor is the greatest of all the levels of mentoring. There are three types of intensive mentoring: the discipler, the spiritual guide, and the coach. Using the discipler mentoring style, the mentor strives to empower the protégé to adhere to the basics of following Christ. The central purpose of

the spiritual guide mentoring style is the mentor's empowering the protégé through accountability, direction, and insight for questions, commitments, and decisions that affect spirituality and maturity. Finally, the ultimate goal of the coach mentoring style is to provide motivation and impart skills that are then applied to meet a task or challenge.<sup>8</sup>

It's quite obvious that it would be highly unusual to find a mentor who could fulfill all of the mentoring styles—contemporary, historical, counselor, teacher, sponsor, discipler, spiritual guide, and coach. However, all mature believers are called to be passive mentors by serving as godly models through their lifestyles. Paul challenges believers in 1 Corinthians 4:16–17 to take up the mantle of being lifestyle mentors by modeling their lives after his. As Paul writes, “I urge you to imitate me. For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.”

Paul provides a great example of modeling an authentic, mature devotion to Christ. So too the adult generation needs to model a life of authentic devotion to Christ. The passive mentoring that takes place when millennials watch an adult walk in the presence of God during bad times will have a far greater impact than any sermon they'll ever hear. Our challenge as Christian educators is to follow Paul's example by letting the next generation know all about our teaching, way of life, purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecution, and sufferings so that they will see an authentic romance with God.

The key to accepting the responsibility of being a mentor to the next generation is to be intentional about exploring how to become involved in their lives. All Christian educators interested in maximizing their mentoring role should carefully evaluate their personal experience, personality bent, passions, interests, expertise, and gifting. Then they must look for ways to use these to invest in the lives of young people. As a school administrator, I prayed that God would provide just the right mentoring style for each student through the unique gifting that He had given to each teacher. Our task as a faculty and staff was to be intentional about capitalizing on our own personal passions and gifting and on each mentoring opportunity in order to impact young lives for eternity.

In his book *What's So Amazing About Grace?* Philip Yancey develops a word picture that provides the adult generation with a powerful reminder for the approach that must be taken when mentoring the millennial generation. Yancey says:

A phrase used by both Peter and Paul has become one of my favorite images from the New Testament. We are to administer, or “dispense,” God's grace, say the two apostles. The image brings to mind one of the old-fashioned “atomizers” women used before the perfection of spray technology. Squeeze a rubber bulb, and droplets of perfume come shooting out of the fine holes at the other end. A few drops suffice for a whole body; a few pumps change the atmosphere in a room. That is how grace should work, I think. It does not convert the entire world or an entire society, but it does enrich the atmosphere. Now I worry that the prevailing image of Christians has changed from that of a perfume atomizer to a different spray apparatus: the kind used by insect exterminators. *There's a roach!* Pump, spray, pump, spray. *There's a spot of evil!* Pump, spray, pump, spray.

Some Christians I know have taken on the task of “moral exterminator” for the evil-infested society around them.”<sup>9</sup>

The challenge is the uncompromising teaching of absolute truth while not coming across as bug spray. Instead, we should be about the business of dispensing the “perfume of Christ.” Would the average millennial characterize the adult generation as bug spray or the perfume of Christ? If we walked into a room, which scent would a millennial experience? If the millennial generation begins to view our “preaching the truth” as a form of bug spray, then we’re inoculating them with small doses of Christianity to keep them from “catching the real thing”—whether we realize it or not. We would do well to heed the apostles’ exhortation to dispense God’s grace while teaching absolute truth to the millennial generation so that they will catch the real thing.

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1. *Colorado Springs Gazette*. 2002. Advertisement, 31 March, sec. A, p. 7.
  2. Josh McDowell. 2000. The disconnected generation, *Josh McDowell’s Project 911*, Josh McDowell Ministry, p. 8.
  3. Bobb Biehl. 1996. *Mentoring: Confidence in finding a mentor and becoming one*. Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, p. 144.
  4. Ronald P. Sykes. 1998. School climate: Building a positive learning environment. Keynote presentation at the Conference for Chief School Administrators, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 2 December, in Atlanta, Georgia.
  5. Paul D. Stanley and J. Robert Clinton. 1992. *Connecting: The mentoring relationships you need to succeed in life*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, p. 40.
  6. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
  7. *Ibid.*
  8. *Ibid.*
  9. Philip Yancey. 1997. *What’s so amazing about grace?* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, p. 158.