Strong collaborators will continue to think of ways to help the weak team member. The best collaborators will try five or six ways to bring along a weak team member before going to a supervisor.

Anyone or anything is a potential mentor. The mentee must take the initiative, tap into the source, and search for knowledge.

# WORKPLACE

**By Sheri S. Williams and John W. Williams**

In many schools and businesses today, the pressure to produce results is far greater than attention to employee learning. If continued learning impacts service for business customers and their communities, then what lessons can we learn from business to support and advocate for educator learning?

This article is a collection of lessons learned by an educator and a human resources professional over the course of separate careers in education and business. We share our individual perspectives and reflect on our experiences as a whole. We hope the lessons learned will be useful to those developing and supporting employee learning in business and education.

Our conversation raised important questions about what kinds of learning resources are the most relevant and useful in both environments. We wanted to identify lessons learned from business and education that could help improve outcomes, specifically how employees acquire the knowledge and skills to serve customers and communities in business and how educators acquire the knowledge and skills to support student achievement in schools. We found some common practices that could be used to a greater extent to sustain professional development in the school and workplace.

## Lesson 1
### MENTORING MATTERS IN SCHOOLS AND THE WORKPLACE.

**A business perspective**

Google "mentor and mentee in business," and you will instantly receive over 600,000 examples of how-to tips, road maps, programs, and agreements. With luck, one may ferret out some truth about successful mentoring. Here are two truths, buried in those 600,000 Google hits, that stand the test of time.

First, mentoring is the result of a persistent mentee. In fact, the mentoring process is by and large the responsibility of the mentee.

Most potential formal business mentors are already too busy to take on a mentoring responsibility. If asked, many say yes and then the process slowly unravels, with meetings cut short, rescheduled, then cancelled altogether.

What works is when a mentee identifies an informal mentor and then stops by the office to ask a question or

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**Collaboration is essential in business.**

**The greatest pitfall for managers is to take personally the resistance to change.**

# WISDOM

**WHAT EDUCATORS CAN LEARN FROM THE BUSINESS WORLD**

get advice on a situation. (Note: The best times are before the day gets rolling or after others have gone home.) When turned away, mentees persist. They keep coming back, with a smile, curiosity, and a desire to tap the mentor's wisdom.

Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric, describes the second of the two truths. He suggests *anyone or anything* is a potential mentor. The mentee must take the initiative, tap into the source, and search for knowledge (Welch, 2011).

**An education perspective**

This business lesson reinforces what educators have learned through in-depth examinations of mentoring and coaching support in school. A study of 116 instructional coaches in a large urban school district in the American Southwest explored factors in the mentoring relationship that impact change in educator practice (Williams, 2013). The study found that mentoring contributes in important ways to continuous educator growth and a focus on instructional improvement.

New teachers, looking for a nonthreatening, trusting, comfortable, and safe place to reflect on their practice, flock to coaches. Coaches, in turn, provide the mentoring needed to develop teacher knowledge and skills, stimulate

personal reflection and clarification, and facilitate student understanding and connections (Petriglieri & DeRue, n.d.). When approached by mentees, coaches say they are more motivated to use what they have learned to deepen and accelerate teacher practice (Williams, 2013).

## Lesson 2
**COLLABORATION GETS RESULTS IN THE WORKPLACE AND IN SCHOOL.**

**A business perspective**

Collaboration is essential in business. Human resource recruiters are good at detecting collaborators. During an interview, recruiters often probe for a candidate's commitment to teamwork and collaboration.

Through a series of questions, recruiters ask candidates to "think of a time when you were on a team. What was your role and the outcome of the team effort? If team members were not carrying their weight, what would you do?" To probe deeper, the recruiter says, "Let's say things get better, then a few days later, the weak behavior returns. What do you do?" Typically, the candidate will say, "I'd talk to them or have the team talk to them. If that didn't work, I would go to my supervisor." With the teamwork question, recruit-

ers find that weak collaborators typically give up and quickly hand off the problem to the supervisor.

Strong collaborators will continue to think of ways to help the weak team member. Each time the recruiter asks, "If that action didn't help, what do you do?" the candidate will offer a collaborative suggestion such as, "Do the work with the person; teach them to do the work; ask a trusted friend for advice on how to help them; get a team member they trust to help." The best collaborators will respond with five or six rounds of alternatives before going to a supervisor.

The most important collaboration in performing a job is safety-related. For example, a maintenance task to be performed by two or more people is reviewed before the work begins. The collaborative discussion includes how to do the job correctly, the skills and tools needed, the potential hazards, and the plan to avoid the hazards. The discussion is driven by trust among the collaborators. The consequences of injury, lost time, lost pay, and even death are equally real. Collaboration is essential for safe job performance.

### An education perspective

Collaboration is indeed fundamental to business and school success. Educators are advised to learn the lessons from business recruiters and safety specialists. Hiring strong collaborators who make the safety and well-being of students first is essential in establishing a positive learning culture. Working collaboratively helps maintain and advance educator knowledge and skills and can lead to breakthroughs in practice by promoting cutting-edge procedures, improving collaboration across units, or seeking new ways to streamline operations (Boyep, 2013).

School leaders must take the act of working and learning together to the next level. One way to do this is to provide educators with Garmston & Wellman's (2013) strategies for fostering collaboration, including the development of norms, the concept of adaptivity, and mental maps for planning, reflecting, and problem solving.

Promoting valuable exchanges that improve educational practice and student learning requires that supervisors provide time and resources for collaboration. In the study of instructional coaches (Williams, 2013), we found that the capacity of educators to make dramatic improvements in instruction is more likely to increase when coaches and teachers trust each other to give and receive useful and actionable feedback, when they focus attention and choice on their own learning, and when they commit to collaborate together to solve problems of practice in their schools.

A majority (68%) of the coaches said they wanted "to spend more time in collaborative work with classroom educators" and "to develop and use assets to build a culture of collaboration in the schools" (Williams, 2013).

> **Respect at the individual level is paramount.**

## Lesson 3
### LEADERSHIP CULTIVATES RESPECTFUL CULTURES IN BUSINESS AND EDUCATION.

### A business perspective

Building a culture of respect in a business organization starts with awareness and understanding of a group's cultural values and ends with belief in the culture of the individual. Businesses that honor the cultural values of a group pay attention to language, holidays, appreciation for clothing, dress, and food, and respect for social roles and conventions.

An example of the latter occurred when this human resources consultant conducted a sales training session for a U.S. company in Hong Kong. The participants in the training were Japanese and Chinese employees. As often happens in group meetings, participants sit with their friends. Here, the Japanese sat with each other, and the Chinese did likewise.

The training exercise was designed for the first group to give an objection to the product and the second group to answer or overcome the objection.

The groups were formed by dividing the room in half, which inadvertently placed the Japanese in group one and the Chinese in group two.

When the Japanese group offered an objection to the product, they prefaced the objection with an apology. This was not the Chinese way to object to a product, but the apology was acknowledged, appreciated, and the training continued with the Japanese employees making beneficial and knowledgeable objections.

Respect at the individual level is paramount. Lack of respect is often the root cause of unhappy employees, not to mention grievances and complaints of discrimination. Human resources managers often deal with culturally based issues such as when an employee's performance rating is lowered based on the employee's accent, or when a male employee is accused of not making eye contact with a female manager, or even when the employee is faulted for being too short or too heavy to do the job.

In each case, the issue is perceived as personal disrespect. The short-term resolution to these instances of disrespect is an expression of regret. The long-term resolution comes about when leaders help employees experience constructive solutions and provide the conditions for employees to make meaningful connections with one another.

In the human resources office, a support structure helps employees become adept at respectful collaboration, problem solving, and communication. A critical component is to provide tools for employees to improve skills and knowledge and be able to apply them in all aspects of the corporate culture.

Human resources professionals are not only concerned about getting the work done, but also about how it is getting done. It's not just about acquiring a body of knowledge and practicing a set of required skills; it involves aligning the business mission with one's values, culture, and purpose.

**An education perspective**

Education leaders also recognize the profound impact leadership has on multicultural and diverse school environments. Leaders are responsible for developing and advocating for just and humane schools environments. They are constantly seeking new ways to stay true to the integrity of the school mission, paying attention to the equitable use of resources and culturally proficient practices.

In the study of instructional coaches (Williams, 2013), coaches served as part of the leadership team. In their reflections about the work, coaches said they must do more to create a supportive culture for differentiated learning.

Achieving equity and excellence won't happen in the absence of culturally proficient practices that are rooted in educator mindsets and beliefs. Coaches understood the limits of their knowledge and took pride in mobilizing diverse resources for professional learning across cultural differences. They saw their own investment in learning about language, culture, poverty, and disability as an important starting point for the effective support of teachers.

# Lesson 4
**MENTORING, COLLABORATION, AND LEADERSHIP ARE ALL ABOUT CHANGE.**

**A business perspective**

The failure to manage change has dire organizational consequences. A recent documentary, *Silicon Valley*, is a case in point (MacLowry, 2013). In the late 1950s, Nobel laureate William Shockley left Bell Labs to establish his own company near Palo Alto, Calif.

He recruited some of the best technology experts in the U.S. to join him. Shockley, credited with inventing the transistor, focused the business on transistors. His employees eventually wanted to explore and develop microchips. Shockley resisted the change and insisted the focus be transistors.

As a direct result of this unwillingness to change, eight of his brightest engineers and chemists left to form their own company. Among them was Robert Noyce, second only to Shockley in knowledge of the applications for transistors. The new start-up company was funded by Fairchild Camera and Instruments.

At Fairchild, the work would be on silicon chips. When the group, under Noyce's leadership, went on to perfect integrated circuits, Fairchild resisted the product change. Many left, including Noyce, who would then begin a new and ultimately very successful start-up company, Intel.

From Silicon Valley, we learn that the most difficult part of change management is taking the resistance to change personally. A leader will get some resistance to change. Unfortunately, when resistance is perceived as personal, the leader tends to think, "This is such a good idea, so who in their right mind would oppose it? In fact, it is such a good idea, they must like it, but don't like me." Shockley and Fairchild took it personally.

**An education perspective**

The above lesson is particularly telling for educators. Failure to support teachers through the change process can prevent the best new ideas from being implemented. When mentors and leaders recruit creative candidates and collaborate with them in continuous learning, new innovations and start-up initiatives have a chance of taking hold.

New ideas get tested in small actions, in every classroom, week after week. It happens when educators adjust what they do to meet student needs, and when they reflect on what they think about and believe about learners and the learning process. Reeves' (2007) influential work on change reminds us that when the relationship between educators and mentors is characterized by agreement that "a change in performance will be useful," then all are bound to "a clear commitment to action" (pp. 89-90).

Readiness for change in implementing a new program varies widely across schools. When equipped with the skills and knowledge to develop and facilitate the adaptive work of the schools, leaders can build capacity for the spread of best practices. Change requires de-escalating the power differential and breaking down the barriers that impede employee productivity through mentoring, collaboration, and responsive leadership. One coach summarized the work by saying, "We are refining our coaching skills to guide teachers rather than to force a change."

**PUTTING THE PERSPECTIVES TOGETHER**

The lessons learned from the business sector speak less about how professional learning is conducted and more about why it is essential to keep the focus on employee learning and growth. While specific learning practices differ in business and education, leaders in both fields emphasize the importance of sustaining a learning culture that impacts results.

The business approaches described here emphasize the relationship between mentors who value their customers' and community's needs and the mentees who hunger for knowledge. Mentors are powerful socializing agents. They provide time and space for employees to examine their experiences from multiple perspectives. Mentors provide a safety net for employees who work in changeable and even chaotic workplaces. They provide strategies for accelerating or redefining career goals and support for employee aspirations and efforts (Petriglieri & DeRue, n.d.).

Solving the urgent problems that face our nation's schools requires that we reset our priorities and resources on continuous educator learning, where educators solve problems together in facilitated leadership teams and learning communities.

Educational practices that leverage mentoring and collaborative leadership can be used to a greater extent to build educator capacity and respond to the needs of diverse students. Rigorous organizational direction and support is needed to make continuous learning a part of the daily work in our schools.