



The gift that keeps on giving

Simon Chadwick

As you think back on your career to date, what is the greatest gift you ever received?

My mind wandered to this question one evening recently after I participated in a Zoom group of academics seeking mentors for their students on an important and far-reaching civic project. I watched a video of some of these students recounting the effect of being included in this project and how it had literally changed their lives.

And then it hit me: the greatest gift I ever received throughout my career was being mentored. And I hope that the greatest gift that I can ever give to others is to serve as a mentor to them.

During my (now long) career in research, I was fortunate to have two extraordinary mentors, one in the early and middle stages and the other as I switched my focus and embarked on a new direction. The first was Philip Barnard who would be my boss from early traineeship all the way through my first few forays as a company CEO. During this time, Phil was himself the CEO of the firm in which I worked (Research International UK) and went on to become Global CEO of RI and ultimately the first ever CEO of Kantar. He was (and is) a man of extraordinary vision, someone not afraid to take risks, and a mentor par excellence. He knew when to push you just beyond your comfort zone, when to support you if you fell down, and how to inspire you to be better than your best.

Later on in life, when I decided to branch out into change management consulting, my second mentor was Jay Wilson, the much-revered CEO of Roper Starch Worldwide. Not only did he see the wisdom (I hoped) in my vision, but he supported it financially, spurred me on, picked me up and believed in what we were trying to do. The fact that Cambiar is still here seventeen years later is as much down to him as it is to me and my colleagues.

So, why do such people invest so much in mentorship? Certainly, there is the argument that by mentoring those that work for you, you are fostering future success. But it's also more than that. By becoming a mentor, you are not only paying back the gift bestowed on you but, more importantly, you are paying their gift forward. You are enabling others' success and, in doing so, building a more vibrant future for them and for those around them.

How do you choose whom to mentor?

If there's one thing I have learned, it's not just the people who you think could be stars or who are most likely to succeed. It's also those who may initially seem to be vulnerable or who are

struggling. Great talent may be waiting in such people, but they need the confidence and support to be able to bring it to the fore. I well remember a young lady straight out of college for whom the pressures of the job seemed insurmountable. She would appear in my office in tears multiple times a week. One response would be to conclude that she 'just wasn't cut out' for the job. But I and my colleagues saw the talent that was waiting to be released and so we sought to build her confidence and to give her the tools to become resilient. Today, she is a high-ranking, very successful member of a major management consulting firm. And then there are those who need to be heard, those against whom the status quo seems to be stacked. In our industry, such people have tended to be women and members of 'minority' ethnicity. To mentor such groups is not the selfless thing it may initially seem. Our industry needs diversity and inclusion if it is to succeed in the long term and to mentor those who are trying to break through multiple glass ceilings is actually in our interests. It is also just the right thing to do.

How should I mentor?

There are those who are probably much more qualified than me to expound on this topic, but here are my ten golden rules of mentorship:

- *Listen* to your mentees and learn from their experience
- *Empathize*, don't sympathize
- Use your experience to *advise*, then step out of the way
- Be *honest*, brutally if necessary (one of my mentors told me that a speech I had given was very well done but its content was 'total bollocks')
- *Be there* for when your mentees stumble or fail – and they will
- *Mentor by example* – model the values that you want them to adopt and follow
- *Push* your mentees beyond their level of comfort
- *Encourage* them every step of the way
- *Challenge* them
- And, most importantly, *celebrate* with them.

Where should I mentor?

Obviously, the workplace is the most natural place in which to practice mentorship. It is there that the fruits of your labour will be most evident and profitable. But there are so many other places where you can use your experience, accumulated wisdom and humanity to make a difference. One of the most important to my mind is in universities. Some of the most satisfying mentoring relationships I have had have been in various MSMR programmes. You can also set up mentoring groups (especially in this age of Zoom). There are some wonderful mentoring forums dedicated to the research industry that have sprung up in just the last eighteen months, run by professionals who have nothing to gain but just the wish to help others. Mentor at scale online with content, resources and listening. And, if it moves you, mentor outside the profession as well.

What's in it for me?

Sure, when you mentor people within your company, there can be a tangible reward in terms of improved performance. But there's more to it than that. It's the pleasure of seeing people succeed. It's the satisfaction of seeing your mentees become mentors and role models themselves. And, very importantly, it's the joy in forming friendships that last a lifetime.

And that's the gift that keeps on giving.