

Tell Me, Teach Me, Involve Me: Transformational Leadership, Mentoring, and You

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Abstract

“Millennials,” born between 1977 and 1997, are a unique group, characterized by an approach to work and social media that is more integrated with their lives. The millennial generation uses technology to obtain and transfer information. Popular social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook have become the go-to source for shared knowledge. This knowledge extends beyond the textbook and blogosphere. These young users are logged in and active in a perpetual state of communication. The integration of this technology has become part of their identity and expression. With this realization, there is opportunity for educators to harness this influence and effectively incorporate it into teaching. Old models of teaching and learning need to be reconsidered and mentoring techniques are among the most effective means of reaching the millennials in the classroom. In addition, many elements of transformational leadership are better transferred via experiential activities in the classroom, aided by mentoring approaches. Ultimately, a list of best practices is developed to provide instructors with concrete approaches to mentoring.

Introduction

“Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.”

—Liu Xiang

Educators have a difficult role in the classroom. It is their responsibility to convey knowledge of the topic with a mixture of non-bias, humor, sympathy, and sensitivity to various learning types. Educators are accountable to education standards, curriculum

requirements, and supervisor comments. This has been the environment within academia for several decades.

However, in the professional environment, the workforce has undergone a significant change. Nearly half the employees today were born between 1977 and 1997. These people, known as millennials, share in common with their successive generations a view of work different than the past generations of workers. This view is that work is a part of life, not a separate activity. Job satisfaction is directly linked to personal fulfillment. Friendships are created, skills are learned, and there is a connection between work and a purpose. Motivation is vital in attaining job satisfaction.

While the approach of mentoring in companies has shifted to the line employees, it is those line employees that come directly from the halls of higher education. The younger generation of scholars must have a better understanding of how business connects to both the theory and practical aspects of their classroom experience. One way to make this connection is through transformative leadership. Transformative leadership enhances the motivation, morale, and performance of followers through a variety of mechanisms including idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration, the psychological mechanisms that underlie transforming and transactional leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2008).

Transformational Leadership and Motivation

“I am not a teacher, but an awakener.” —Robert Frost

Transformational leadership is one way leaders and followers help one another advance to a higher level of morale and motivation (Burns, 1978). This same idea also applies to teachers whose strength of personality and vision causes inspiration and motivation for students to work toward common goals. However, the scope of motivation and mentorship is different than years past. Higgins and Kram (2001) believed that the idea of a career confidante is not attractive, leading some to believe that younger workers and students are less respectful. Higgins and Kram believe this is a misrepresentation.

Moreover, they think that youth are not less respectful; rather, how they display cognitive recognition of concepts has evolved.

This evolved cognitive recognition needs to be understood in the context of mentoring. According to Jeanne Meister, co-author of *The 2020 Workplace*, quoted in Khidekel's (2013) *BusinessWeek* article, "The Misery of Mentoring Millennials, "today's new mentorship models are more like Twitter conversations than the long-term relationships of days past. They're short-term and quite informal. And they end before it becomes a chore for either party—like moving on from a just-OK date." Respect remains through leadership and genuine interactions between the student and instructor.

Four Elements of Genuine Interactions

Riggio (2009) discussed four elements of transformational leadership related to genuine interactions: two dealing with a leader's charisma and the other two are what Riggio (2009) referred to as charisma-plus.

Individualized consideration. The first element, individualized consideration, speaks to the psychological side of being a mentor. The mentor offers empathy and support, listens, and places challenges before the followers. Individual contribution is celebrated, which in turn Riggio (2009) believed gives followers aspirations for self-development and intrinsic motivation tasks. The classroom provides ample opportunity for applying individualized consideration.

The apprentice model is academic mentoring. Faculty members impart knowledge, offer guidance, and provide support to student protégés on academic and nonacademic issues (Jacobi, 1991). Professional identity is fostered if mentoring facilitates a psychological adjustment (Austin, 2002) that directly benefits the workplace (Kram, 1985) where both personal and professional growth occurs.

Intellectual stimulation. The second element discussed by Riggio (2009) is known as intellectual stimulation. In the classroom, students can be encouraged to be both innovative and creative. In this setting, new ideas emerge if criticism is kept

constructive or private (as suggested within the workplace). If such criticism is over a mistake, the focus is on “what” rather than “who.” Innovation is fostered by applying practical examples to the lesson plans, including the use of computerized modeling and business simulations.

Inspirational motivation. The third element, inspirational motivation, is where the leader articulates a vision. As Peter Drucker advised executives to create a vision that would be compelling enough to set the tone, spirit, and values for the company, so too should teachers set the vision as transformational leaders. When teachers have a vision, they are able to inspire students.

When teachers inspire, motivate, and challenge students to leave their comfort zones, students will invest more effort in tasks and will be more optimistic about their abilities. This visionary aspect of transformational leadership will convey the purpose, provide energy, and help students make progress on their goals. To motivate students, teachers must allow for creative thinking and innovation (Walter, 2010).

Instructors are uniquely positioned within academia to be a mentor precisely because they also serve as role models. Burns (1978) stated, “the transformational leader . . . recognizes and exploits an existing need or demand of a potential follower . . . [and] looks for potential motives” (p. 4). Instructors can use their own skills and charisma to influence students through the method of mentoring. Mentoring allows for subtle influence to happen.

Idealized influence. The fourth element, according to Riggio (2009), is idealized influence. Here the transformational leader offers respect and encouragement, a positive behavior that is mimicked by students to others. This repeated positive behavior offers admiration and reciprocated respect between the instructor and the students (Liu, 2013). Instructors, as transformational leaders, give students a sense of meaning and challenge fostering the spirit of teamwork and commitment with optimism. The classroom gives instructors opportunities to provide the encouragement

(that graduates might not later get in the workplace) to pursue leadership roles (Khidekel, 2013).

These four elements provide a foundation of respect, encouragement, and influence. To motivate students, instructors must allow for creative thinking and innovation by moving beyond the traditional business school models and examples. Instructors' professional experience and personal aspects of their lives need to be incorporated into the instruction through genuine interaction and stories. Incorporating personal stories add legitimacy to the lessons, and are often retained long after the course is completed.

Foundation of Mentoring: Tacit Knowledge

While some principles of leadership can be taught in a traditional academic environment, there seems to be an intangible element to leadership that is more difficult to transfer via traditional teaching methods, called *tacit knowledge*. Tacit knowledge is the sixth sense, or the "gut feeling" great leaders have about the right decision that needs to be made on the spur of the moment, for no apparent reason. Tacit knowledge, or the unknowable part of these decisions, is an essential element of leadership development. The problem with tacit knowledge is that it is from the subconscious, elusive and rather nebulous. So how can this leadership skill be communicated or taught?

Mentoring provides opportunities for tacit knowledge learning to take place, especially among millennials. However, for this type of learning to be successful, three components are needed:

- First, a school's administration must create an environment conducive to the mentoring situation. The administration must allow the space and freedom for faculty to do what they need to do, and an academic model must be in place that allows for diverse approaches to teaching and learning.
- Second, the curriculum has to be flexible enough to allow for the needs of the mentors and students to be accommodated. Curriculum and

assessment practices that allow for multiple pathways to achieve learning outcomes that can also be demonstrated in various ways would be the best approach. Mentoring is one example of high-level faculty involvement on the “front lines,” so having a large stake in the curriculum development and assessment-design processes, with a flexible outcomes-based model, is key to supporting the mentoring classroom.

- Third, to grow the ideal mentoring situation is to implement teacher training that includes solid elements of leadership training and modeling, psychological approaches to nontraditional learning in the classroom, emotional intelligence training, and techniques for fostering critical thinking.

Best Practices for Mentoring in the Classroom (and Beyond)

An essential outcome of this chapter is to provide a list of best practices to foster the development of transformational leadership in the classroom via tacit knowledge enhancement through mentoring. Generally, activities that replicate real-life experiences where the instructor can embrace the mentoring role are ideal. Here are some examples of proven practices:

Case studies. Realistic, detailed case studies can mimic real-world analysis and decision-making processes. Case studies have long been used in business schools, laws schools, medical schools and the social sciences, but they can be used in any discipline when instructors want students to explore how what they have learned applies to real-world situations. Case studies come in many formats, from a simple “What would you do in this situation?” question to a detailed description of a situation with accompanying data to analyze. By presenting a series of case studies that have a certain level of overlap and parallels, students can be taught to recognize patterns that eventually become internalized and become part of their core body of tacit knowledge. The case study process can also include a reflective component.

Role-playing. Like case studies, role-playing helps students mimic the decision-making process, but adds a context that enhances the use of tacit knowledge. It takes the case study out of a strongly text-focused environment into one where the decision-making process imitates life and allows students to think in the moment and react to a “live” situation. Role-playing, the “physicalization” of which Simsarian (2003) described as taking “brainstorming to bodystorming,” includes the following benefits: (a) it brings “teams onto the ‘same page’ through a shared vivid experience that involves participant’s muscle memory” (p. 1012) and (b) it creates “the ability to viscerally explore possibilities that may not be readily available in the world” (p. 1012). To maximize the effectiveness of role-playing in terms of its development of tacit knowledge, the background reading and discussion of the situation and roles can be done before coming to the class session where the role-play is to be enacted, either at home or in the prior class session. The students should be instructed to be in their role for the entire class and immerse themselves in their roles. The more such “realistic” conditions are created, the more likely it will be that the students will delve into the thought processes and practice the tacit elements of transformational leadership. A key component of role-playing is to reflect individually and debrief as a group once the exercise is over. This additional reflective step will enhance both learning and retention, and serve to further internalize the indefinable elements of leadership.

Discussions. The process of discussion itself can aid in the acquisition of leadership skills. How students conduct themselves in discussions, especially when considering controversial topics or when controversy arises during a debate, is intrinsically a good opportunity to develop transformational leadership skills. The key here is in mentoring with moderation. The skilled teacher will know when to intervene, and when to let things carry on unimpeded, as both situations can lead to great learning. There are many resources on how best to moderate discussions, but it is important to allow students to take the lead and solve problems, both individually and collectively, to maximize the potential for development of tacit knowledge elements. Moderation of discussions, then, needs to include timely, probing questions, and less

“preaching” toward a specific agenda. Again, a discussion’s real-time-based nature encourages students to rely more on intuition and gut instincts, rather than theory. This context supports the transfer of the tacit aspects of transformational leadership.

Teams/cohorts. With the two-heads-are-better-than-one approach, students can play off one another’s ideas and learn from each other. The communication skills necessary to analyze a problem within groups can assist with the development of social intelligence. Most companies have team units within their organizational structure, so working in teams provides another real-life situation. Hansen (2006) pointed out that one of the main downfalls of running teams in the classroom is that there is not enough guidance, which is where the teacher’s involvement can make or break the success of the team experience and tilt the balance in favor of a positive learning experience. In more well-established, long-term cohorts, students can develop similar skills over the long term, which can bring a richer interplay as they learn how to function as a more integrated unit.

Problem-based learning (PBL). In problem-based learning, teams focus on problem solving, collaboration, and self-learning, as they are guided by an expert. Hmelo-Silver et al. (2007) asserted that “the PBL learning environment is highly effective and promotes cross-disciplinary approaches, and pushes students to explain their thinking to help them build a casual explanation or identify the limits of their knowledge. This helps support students in sense making and in articulating their ideas” (p. 101). Similarly, a micro-environment can be set up over a longer period in the classroom to foster these skills; however, it might make more sense to put the students in internship positions instead.

Internships. Internships do not just replicate a real-world business environment but are the real world. Provided the internship is properly overseen, administered, and mentored, students can have the added benefit of the combined practice component and a classroom-based component that focuses on the experiential learning of the internship. Knouse and Fontenot (2008) stated that internships “may create satisfying experiences that motivate students to continue along a career path” (p. 61) and may

also “create realistic expectations about the world of work and help clarify students’ career intentions” (p. 61). A highly organized approach to internships, where a considerable amount of time is spent debriefing the experiences and reflecting on the learning, can be quite effective.

Business simulations. In a way, computer-based business games, like Capsim, are a form of problem-based learning. While relatively simplified in comparison to a real business setting, simulations do provide opportunities to make informed decisions in relatively short spans of time, which enhances tacit leadership skills. Peterkova (2011) noted that business simulation games provide “support for development of [a] student’s creative abilities,” enhancing their “fluency,” “flexibility” and “originality,” and ultimately develops the “intuition” of the players (p. 459). If the simulation is enacted in groups, it combines the advantages of team learning with the advantages of the simulation, and can provide opportunities to develop negotiation skills and leadership skills within the team dynamic.

Leadership modeling. Modeling can either take place in the classroom, with the teacher modeling leadership behaviors, or via a job-shadowing arrangement, when a student can observe firsthand a leader in action. Again, reflection and debriefing are important to enhance the transfer of tacit knowledge in relation to leadership skills. In the case of job-shadowing, it is possible that leaders might not be able to articulate why they made certain decisions, so an analytical discussion of what happened can be eye-opening to all.

Guest speakers. Bringing in an experienced manager to present in class can bring the tacit elements of transformational leadership to the forefront, especially if the students have the opportunity to interact with the speaker in a question and answer forum. According to Griffin (2012):

Some experienced business leaders are able to articulate what goes through their minds when faced with situations where they have to make snap decisions based on intuition or “instinct.” If students have an

opportunity to interview the speaker, they can participate in the exploratory process firsthand, and their line of questioning (as a guided learning experience) can help them understand the process of tacit knowledge acquisition.

Reflection and journal keeping. Many teachers reflexively roll their eyes when they hear professional development trainers suggesting that learners reflect on something they want their audience to think about and explore further. While stopping to reflect on an experience annoys many teachers and businesspeople, and they criticize it as “too touchy-feely,” there is some value to looking back at something that happened in the classroom or workplace and thinking further about it, analyzing what happened and why it happened. Hiemstra (2001) stated that journaling “becomes a tool to aid learners in terms of personal growth, synthesis, and reflection on new information that is acquired” (p. 20). He also noted that there “is the potential for a journaling technique to promote critical self-reflection where dilemmas, contradictions, and evolving worldviews are questioned or challenged”—in other words, it’s how students can work things out in their minds. Further, keeping a journal is one effective way to track tacit elements, especially if written at the time of a critical decision that was made in a seemingly intuitive manner. Reflection also helps students see both the details of the situation and better understand the big picture.

Break it down/big picture approach. In mentoring situations, teachers need to get students closer to examine the details of the situation, and farther away to view the big picture and understand the broader meaning and application of what they’ve experienced, “sort of like taking a close look at the pixels and then stepping back to view their overall effect” (Griffin, 2012). The teacher can strategically use questions to guide students to both a better understanding of the minutiae of the situation and the broader significance and applications that can be extrapolated or generalized to a different context.

Field trips/shared experience. Rather than talk about operations management in the classroom, instructors can take students on a tour of a production plant and ask

the managing supervisor some relevant questions. Greene, Kisida, and Bowen (2014) underscored the enhancement of critical thinking skills, empathy, and tolerance in students as beneficial outcomes of field trips. The shared experience of the group on the field trip also has lasting learning value for the mentor since it can be used extensively and broadly to explore a number of related concepts that help foster transformational leadership skills.

Technology to enhance the mentoring experience. Millennials are often connected via social media, including chatting, Facebooking, WhatsApping. Teachers can use these social media forums to promote learning. Using Facebook or other social media that many students regularly monitor is one way to strengthen and enhance the mentoring experience. In these environments, students have been known to quickly take over, posting links to articles, videos, and web pages that are relevant to the course topics. The advantage over online teaching platforms, like Blackboard or Moodle, is that almost all the students are already tuned in, and participate naturally as just another aspect to their social media lives. Posts are quickly seen by the majority of the students in the course, and these forums lend themselves to more engaging materials (e.g., funny videos related to the topic). Instructors can steer discussions toward “educational” content, and toward topics that enhance the mentoring role. The “cool factor” of these forums enhances student engagement.

A Final Word

One common trait of millennials is that they are well connected to technology, constantly texting, tweeting, and talking in online forums. And yet, many traditional instructors often try to teach students through conventional means such as lectures, slide presentations, and other one-way, uni-dimensional, text-based means. Even in online teaching platforms, where we have the world of the web at our fingertips, we often try to teach them in an overly text-heavy environment.

To reach millennials, and to more effectively address a wide range of learning styles, it is important to move beyond text-centric approaches to teaching. Good teachers know

that each “new” teaching technique or approach can be added to their toolbox, to be used at the appropriate times. The approaches discussed in this chapter, to enhance the transfer and development of tacit knowledge in support of mentoring transformational leadership skills, are simply more tools that can be added to the toolbox. The sophisticated task of moving ideas into a different medium can support the development of tacit knowledge, and, by extension, can aid in the fostering of those intangible transformational leadership skills. Any mentoring approach should be filled with visual and tactile opportunities for all types of learners, but especially for millennials.

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