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What the Best Mentors Do

few common principles.

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Over the past three years, as part of my forthcoming [book](#), I've been researching how leaders can better judge and develop their talent in light of a changing, more purpose-driven, more tech-enabled work environment. Having interviewed close to 100 of the most admired leaders across business, culture, arts, and government, one important characteristic stands out: They do everything they can to imprint their "goodness" onto others in ways that make others feel like fuller versions of themselves. Put another way, the best leaders practice a form of leadership that is less about creating followers and more about creating other leaders. How do they do that? I've noticed four things the best mentors do:

Put the relationship before the mentorship.

conventional failure over unconventional success; good mentors should encourage exploration of the latter.

Be more loyal to your mentee than you are to your company. Of course, we all want to retain our best and brightest. We also want our people to be effective in our organizations. That said, the best mentors recognize that in its most noble and powerful form, leadership is a duty and service toward others, and that the best way to inspire commitment is to be fully and selflessly committed to the best interests of colleagues and employees. Don't seek only to uncover your mentees' strengths; look for their underlying passions, too. Help them find their calling. Most of us have experienced people, such as friends, religious leaders, and family members, who serve as our anchors and guides outside our workplaces. Why can't we bring this same high level of trust and support *inside* the workplace? In a lot of cases, we owe it to mentees to serve as something more than just career mentors.

The best mentors avoid overriding the dreams of their mentees. If an employee and a job aren't a good fit, or if an ambitious employee realistically has limited upward mobility in a company, a good mentor will help that employee move on. They might be better suited to another role within the organization, or even to a new path somewhere else.

At its highest level, mentorship is about being "good people" and having the right "good people" around us — individuals committed to helping others become fuller versions of who they are. Which is why the organizations and leaders I've come to admire most are the ones devoted to bringing others along.

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