

The Gift of Mentoring: Sharing lives and Making impact

Peter Drucker, Max De Pree and Walt Wright – what do these leaders have in common? Well, Drucker mentored De Pree who in turn mentored Wright.

Recently, I had the unique privilege of attending a conference on Mentoring, featuring internationally acclaimed management guru Peter Drucker, Max De Pree who is the former CEO and chairman of Herman Miller, as well as recipient of *Business Enterprise Award for Lifetime Achievement* and *Business Hall of Fame*, and Walt Wright, the CEO of De Pree Leadership Center.

Although Drucker could not be present at the conference as he was recuperating at home, we were treated to a day of great insights on the subject of mentoring. De Pree shared about the impact Drucker had made on his life and in turn how he had influenced Wright as well as a host of other leaders who were his mentees.

At the conference, I discovered the power of mentoring. I realized then that this was one of the best ways to apply the REST (**R**eflect, **E**njoy, **S**erve and **T**emper) principle, which I shared in the last MetaTrends.

In my own life, there have been two mentors who have influenced me most profoundly - Em Griffin and Peter Chao.

They have kept me focused and sharpened my leadership capacity.

Em, a professor of communication at Wheaton college, Illinois, USA, and internationally acclaimed author of the book, *A First Look at Communication*, a standard text for tertiary education in that field, had been a mentor since my days at Northwestern University, where I got my Ph.D.

Spotting potential

It was Em, who recommended and endorsed my application to that prestigious university. At that time, I had little credibility and my education was in another discipline. Em has always been a good friend. I am sure it was his credentials that got me a place at Northwestern. I was not exactly sure what he saw in me then to give me such a high recommendation to the university.

But Em believed in me. He encouraged me to apply for the best university and backed me up. A good mentor is one who sees the potential in another and is willing to risk his reputation and resources for that person.

Sharing wisdom

During my first year of the Ph.D. program, I was appointed teaching assistant at the university in the area of interpersonal communication. As a young upstart in that field and having to teach American students for the first time, I felt intimidated to say the least. Yes, you guess right! I sought help from Em the authority and teacher of that subject for many years.

He not only made time to see me. He brought a whole box of resources, consisting all his teaching lessons, creative exercises, extra notes. He explained each lesson and shared his pedagogy.

He then plonked all the materials into the trunk of the car, which he had given me and said, "This is yours. I am sure you will do a great job." He literally shared everything with me. I was overwhelmed by his generosity. This is so unlike the Chinese kung-fu master who would always keep 10% of his secrets from his disciples. If each generation of kung-fu master followed this pattern, we would be left with the lowest level of kung fu skills today!

Becoming accountable

Em and I met every month for the three years I was at Northwestern. Our monthly meeting was a time of exchanging ideas and challenging my perspectives. He always treated me as an equal. He was a great listener. It was a partnership of trust.

Even after my return to Singapore, we have continued to keep in touch through emails, convention meetings, or over a meal whenever I visited US. Each time, he would enquire about my family, especially my relationship with my wife, Alison.

Last month, when I sent him the REST article, he thanked me for the principle and then shot back a tough question, "Does Alison (my wife) really think I practice these principles as well?" It was typical Em, always unafraid to ask the tough question. That is why I like Em. He keeps me accountable.

Peter Chao is my partner in ministry. He has often quipped about our relationship, "We have known each other for thirty-four years. There is nothing John would not do for me and there is nothing I would not do for him. So for the past thirty-four years, we have done nothing for each other!" Not only is he a great friend but also a mentor extraordinaire.

Role-modeling truth

Peter shows me the beauty of truth and excellence. He is one who never stops pushing me to reach my potential, always challenges me to raise the bar. His standard of excellence is not only of performance but also of courtesy, kindness and generosity. He embodies all that he preaches. He cares deeply for people. You can never out-give him. He is an exemplary role model.

Sharing values

A mentor provides a safe sanctuary to gain perspectives. Peter and I have spent countless hours discussing life's concerns: business, family, worldviews, and ministry. We share many dreams together. We challenge each other. Over time, we have many shared values:

- People are like rainbow – a mystery of potential and the leader's job is to unleash the potential.
- Leaders are fallible and they need a community of accountability
- Be generous. All you lose is money.
- Leaders need to develop emotional, intellectual and spiritual hinterlands to survive the long haul.

That is the beauty of mentorship – iron sharpening iron. It is a partnership of learning, sharing and caring.

Leaders need mentors. Those who lead can be the loneliest people. We need mentors who can share our challenges and struggles, yet accepting us as we are. The need of leaders for mentors has become even more acute after the Emron crisis, whereby the CEO's integrity was put under severe test. We need mentors to keep us accountable. Walt Wright describes mentoring as "an intentional, inclusive, and voluntary shared relationship of learning together." We bring our complete selves to the relationship – warts and all. It is a relationship between two vulnerable human beings, committed to growth and not cloning.

When De Pree was asked, "Why mentoring?" His answer, "There is an enormous need for it. People need mentors. And all of us have something to give."

If you don't have a mentor, go find one.
Or be a mentor to someone.
Either way, you will not regret it.

John Ng, *Ph.D*
President
Meta

Tel: (65) 6419 5255
Fax: (65) 6227 7170
Email: john@meta.com.sg

Copyright © Meta Pte Ltd