



## Mobley's Musings– Don't Envy - Imitate

Have you ever envied a coworker who seems to have a “superpower,” like diffusing conflict or closing a deal? When one of my executive clients, Scott, sees someone with an awesome gift, he doesn't get jealous or feel threatened. Instead, he studies what they do and practices it until he has developed that capability for himself.

Scott noticed that another leader, Kent, was able to get people to set aside their positions and move in a common direction. It's a valuable skill that not many others had. So, for the next few meetings, Scott stepped back from the content to focus on the process that Kent used to facilitate group decision making. When someone offered a proposal, Scott noticed that Kent would take on that person's perspective as if it were his own. This allowed the person to feel acknowledged and seen. Then Kent asked for feedback from the group, and Scott saw that people were more forthcoming knowing that Kent did not have personal ownership of the position. Kent heard the pluses and minuses of the idea and asked questions about the good parts as well as what concerns people had. Because they didn't see Kent as a threat, the group relaxed and were open about what didn't work. Soon the whole group was collaborating on how to overcome the problems, and Scott mentally bowed to Kent's superpower.

Next time you admire someone's ability or skill, try Scott's approach of observing, analyzing, and practicing. Of course, you can also ask those with superpowers to mentor you on what they do. They will appreciate your acknowledging their skills and may be able to speed your learning.

Sandy



Sandy Mobley

### Ask Sandy

#### Should Mentors have all the answers?

I hear clients say they want to mentor staff but aren't sure of the right approach: should they give advice or help the person find their own solutions?

When people find their own solutions, they tend to be more committed to taking action than when someone tells them what to do. And the solutions they come up with seem to fit better with their skill set than solutions someone else might recommend for them.

Leslie asked her mentor, Deepa, for help deciding whether to stay on a technical path or become a manager. Deepa enjoys creating high-level strategy for her department and developing her team members. She finds it much more rewarding than coding and project management, but she isn't sure what is right for Leslie. She asked Leslie what she thought about the technical path and what she envisioned for herself in a technical career. Leslie said she was never bored with technology — it was constantly evolving and creating opportunities to solve more complex problems. Deepa felt the same about managing people, but she didn't want to influence Leslie.

She asked Leslie how she liked working with others. Leslie said she enjoyed working as part of a team where each person had something unique to bring to the table. She felt that it led to more successful solutions when people approached an issue with different perspectives and skills sets.

From their discussions, Deepa thought Leslie would likely find success and fulfillment on either path, which wasn't the answer Leslie was looking for. Unable to help Leslie get clarity, Deepa suggested she talk to Francie — who had been promoted recently from a technical job to a managerial position — to find out what she liked and didn't like about the new role. Talking to Francie gave Leslie more insights, but she realized the only way to make the right choice was to gain experience in a managerial role. Leslie asked her manager for help arranging a managerial internship or short-term assignment so she could assess the fit.

Mentors should realize that sometimes there are no clear answers, and the best assistance they can provide is helping people think through options.

If you have questions you'd like Sandy to address in future newsletters, email them to [sandy@learningadvantageinc.com](mailto:sandy@learningadvantageinc.com)



## Small Steps Can Make a Difference

Lately I find people getting caught up in big issues they have little chance of resolving, such as reversing climate change, ending wars, or solving world hunger. They often dwell on how unsolvable the situations are and end up frustrated and angry.

When the immensity of what needs to be done is overwhelming, think in small steps. For example, a glass jewelry designer and teacher wanted to do something to help the people in the Ukraine. She decided to create pins, pendants, and earrings that incorporated the blue and yellow colors of the Ukrainian flag and sell the jewelry to raise money for Ukrainian refugees. She hasn't succeeded in ending the war, but she is taking action to help those who are enduring it.

Another woman who is concerned about the environment realized that a great deal of plastic from cleaning products ends up in landfills because the containers aren't recyclable. She worked with two scientists to create concentrated cleaning powders that can be mixed with water in reusable containers. Not only are the products effective, but she has developed a thriving company while helping the planet.

Some organizations have chosen not to hold annual parties and instead donate the money budgeted for them to causes selected by the employees, such as cleaning up the oceans, building affordable housing, or eradicating disease. Often it's just a handful of employees who, taking small steps, gain buy in from their coworkers and champion these ideas with senior management. For many, knowing they are helping others brings more joy than any company outing or party.

All around us are people doing something to make a difference: they may be getting groceries for elderly neighbors, tutoring or mentoring kids, or cleaning up a park so that the beauty of nature can be enjoyed by everyone.

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