A Mentoring Relationship: Challenges and Gains

Transformative Leadership Program for Women Professionals in the WEFE Nexus.

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My own mentoring journey

My Mentors

- Several in my own life, at different points of time, mostly women but a couple of men too
- They helped me tremendously when:
  - Deciding about my first job – in a remote high mountain area in the early 90s – being the only female
  - Making job transitions later in life
  - Having conflicts with leaders in different spaces
  - Balancing different parts of life

Being a Mentor

- Mostly younger colleagues in different organizations that I worked in – and mostly women
- A few young graduates
- Mostly professional issues, occasionally personal discussions
- The “professional was personal” for most women
My “formal” mentoring experience

• Opportunities given by the AWARD Mentorship Program:
  ➢ Introduction/reminder about Tools such as the Purpose Road Map; Communication and Active Listening, Conflict Management
  ➢ Time and space for Mentors-Mentees to sit together, focus and share
  ➢ Crafting an action plan to follow up on, post workshop
  ➢ Follow up by the program – reminders and reporting
  ➢ Got to know a young, serious, passionate professional

• Developed a work/professional relationship with my “mentee”

• Challenges
  ➢ Very little “formal” time - post workshop
  ➢ Inadequate grounds for a “Community of Practice” – particularly with the wider community
  ➢ The “professional” relationship encroached on the mentorship process
  ➢ Hence the need to create a “safe space” once again
Taking the Learnings Forward

• Introduced a Mentorship element in the program:
  ▪ *Developing Leadership Capacity for WEFE Nexus Actors in Nepal*
• Identified WEFE/GESI Experts as Mentors - all of whom volunteered
• Some were “specialists” others “generalists” (but GESI Champions)
• Gave participants three choices for potential mentors on our list and did our best to match them
• Due to limited numbers, some Mentors had two Mentees

• Only a few pairs actually worked together over the 6 month “training project” period
Reflecting on the Lessons Learnt

• Which pairs worked well? When:
  • Mentees got their first choices
  • Mentors were “Specialists” with high profiles – government, INGOs
  • Gender differences did not seem to matter as long as the expert was in a “high” position
  • Mentors were proactive

• Why did the Mentorship element not work so well?
  • Mentees did not fully understand what a mentorship relation is; the potential of it and thus the value of it
  • Some Mentees did not know their Mentors at all, others not too well – thus issues of discomfort, trust, safe space?
  • Lack of time on the part of the Mentees, mostly!
Reflecting on the Lessons Learnt

- For a good Mentor-Mentee relationship
  - Demand driven rather than supply driven
  - Trust, confidence and access is the foundation
  - Mutual respect, co-learning and sharing helps it grow
  - Coaching and communication skills – is key – especially for Mentors
  - Questioning and sharing options rather than prescribing by Mentors
  - Unequal power relationship between the Mentor and Mentee needs careful handling – a mutual pact and mutual respect necessary

- For women professionals, in particular
  - The personal is professional, and vice versa
  - Sharing, caring and unburdening can build strength of mind and purpose – it is not a weakness!