

Mentoring Stages in the Relationship between Barnabas and Paul

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The apostle Paul was not born an apostle. The apostle Paul had a clear understanding that he was called to become an apostle by the will of God, and not as a result of man's selection (1 Corinthians 1:1, Ephesians 1:1). He was transformed from a persecutor of the church (Philippians 3:6) to a devoted minister of Christ to the Gentiles (Roman 15:16) who authored 14 books of the Christian New Testament. Although Paul was called to be an apostle by the will of God, his acceptance into the apostolic community came through the sponsorship of an apostle named Barnabas (Acts 9:26-30). This chapter discusses Barnabas's mentoring relationship with Paul as a significant factor in Paul's development into an influential leader in the early Christian church and will also discuss the importance of contemporary leaders forming a mentoring relationship with their followers. Barnabas was an early leader in the Christian church through his financial gift to the apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 4:36), his selection as a representative of the Jerusalem church to confirm the work of God in Antioch (Acts 11:22), and the prominent position his name occupies in the list of leaders in the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1). Mentoring is described as "a relationship in which a more experienced manager helps a less experienced protégé (Yukl 404). Barnabas' relationship with Paul began when he introduced him to the apostles in Acts 9, but his mentoring relationship started in earnest when Barnabas recruited Paul to help him teach the new followers of Christ in Antioch (Acts 11:25-26). Barnabas guided Paul during his development from a novice follower of Christ to the greatest propagator of the faith in the early church. Senior leaders today can follow the example of Barnabas and contribute to the development of the next generation of leaders.

Mentoring

Mentoring is often conceived as a strategy to recruit and retain talent in many work and educational environments (Smith and Zsohar). Burgess writes that there are two types of mentoring, spontaneous mentoring and planned mentoring. Spontaneous mentoring has been around for a long time. Smith & Zsohar posit that positive mentoring experiences occur when two similar individuals,

who seem to have the right chemistry, form a mentoring relationship which evolves in unstructured ways and takes little organizational effort to keep it going. Formal mentoring is more challenging because people do not naturally select one another and not everyone is comfortable being a mentor (Smith & Zsohar). Galbraith & Maslin-Ostrowski mention that within the mentorship process, a mentor often assumes multiple roles to bring about the enhancement of the mentee's professional, personal, and psychological development. The mentoring relationship is clearly not for everyone. Formal mentoring programs must take special care to recruit senior leaders who have the desire and ability to serve as mentors in order for positive mentoring experiences to occur. The mentoring relationship between Barnabas and Paul worked because they each accepted their roles as mentor and mentee and adapted them as they progressed through the mentoring process.

Paul displayed humility by submitting himself in this process. Cohen and Nelson posit that sponsorship includes the concept of subordinating oneself to a senior member of the organization in order to grow and develop within the organization. Paul did not use his considerable Jewish pedigree (Philippians 3:5-6) as a reason not to submit to Barnabas' overtures to come alongside Paul and show him the way in the Christian church. Barnabas plays a role here consistent with his role throughout the book of Acts (Pohill 59). Barnabas encouraged the church in Jerusalem (Acts 4:36-37), encouraged the new believers in Antioch (Acts 11:22), brought Paul along to work in Antioch (Acts 11:25-26), accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:2-3), and took on Mark as mentoree when Paul refused to continue working with Mark (Acts 11:38-39).

This form of mentoring relationship was most likely not new to Paul. As a Pharisee (Acts 23:6) Paul was accustomed to learning from his elders as he developed as a Pharisee (Galatians 1:14). Although he was born in Tarsus in Cilicia, Paul spent a considerable amount of time in Jerusalem under the tutelage of Gamaliel in the strict manner of the law of the Jews (Acts 22:3). His primary concern in the school of Gamaliel was to become as proficient as possible in the ancient traditions in order to advance in Judaism (Bruce). Paul experienced a form of the mentor and mentee relationship at an early age when he was being trained as a leader in Judaism.

The most significant aspect of mentoring in the New Testament is the unique approach to developing leaders Jesus modeled when he taught his twelve disciples. Coleman observes:

Jesus had no formal school, no seminaries, no outlined course of study, no periodic membership classes in which he enrolled his followers. None of these highly organized procedures considered so necessary today entered his ministry. Amazing as it may seem, all Jesus did to teach these men his way was to draw them close to himself. He was his own school.

Instead of offering formal training like Gamaliel, where students would memorize the written law with its 613 precepts and "the oral tradition transmitted by generations of rabbis and preserved by the School of Hillel" (Bruce 710), Jesus simply taught his followers to draw close to him. When Peter and John stood before the religious leaders of the day accused of spreading false teaching, they were astonished that uneducated, common men spoke with such boldness. It was then that "they recognized that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). Jesus instituted a different way of training

disciples, instead of relying on formal education, he called his disciples to live and learn with him as they went through life. For Jesus mentoring was a life-style, a relationship where mentor would impart wisdom to the mentee as they encountered every day challenges.

Mentoring was a life-style for Barnabas also. Barnabas guided Paul by spending time with him and letting Paul observe him interact with new believers at Antioch (Acts 11), church leaders (Acts 13), and non-believers in their first missionary journey. This same mentoring relationship can be used by today's leaders to produce similar results in their leadership development programs.

Research on mentoring also reveals two distinct functions mentors provide for protégés in organizations, psychological acceptance and career facilitation (Kram, Yukl). Kram developed a conceptual mentoring model based on an intensive biographical research study of 18 relationships in corporate setting. Kram found that individuals entering the adult world of work “were likely to encounter a variety of developmental tasks that are reflected in concerns about self, career, and family” (608). Mentors, according to Kram, can be valuable in providing mentees psychological support and career enhancement opportunities. In Paul's case he did not need psychological support. Paul received direct confirmation from Christ that he was chosen to serve God (Galatians 1:12; Acts 9:4-5) and did not need human affirmation in order to fulfill his potential in Christianity. But Paul, as a former persecutor of the faith, needed someone to help him begin his career as a recognized and accepted apostle in the early Christian community. It was Barnabas, risking his reputation and position as a church leader, who finally persuaded the disciples to accept Paul (Acts 9:27-28). Barnabas served both as a sponsor and mentor for Paul and walked him through four stages of mentoring: (a) the initiation stage in Antioch – Acts 11: 25-26, (b) the cultivation stage during their first missionary journey- Acts 13:4-14-28, (c) the separation stage after a dispute concerning the role of Mark- Acts 15:36-39), (d) the redefinition stage of their relationship when Barnabas chose to continue his work with Mark and Paul partnered with Silas on his next missionary journey – Acts 15: 39-41 (Galbraith & Maslin-Ostrowski, Kram, Yukl).

Sponsorship

Sponsors play a key role in preparing newer employees for success in organizations (Scott). Akande writes that sponsorship is the key to success in the corporate world. Sponsorship is defined as “ a relational process in which a mentor having credibility and positional or spiritual authority within an organization or network relates to the mentoree not having those resources so as to enable development of the mentoree and the mentoree's influence in the organization” (Biehl). Paul needed Barnabas to pave the way for him in the network of the disciples much like Joshua needed Moses to place his stamp of approval on him before he could lead the Israelites. Joshua was an assistant to Moses from his youth (Numbers 11:28), but it was only when Moses laid his hands on Joshua that the people accepted him as their next leader (Deuteronomy 34:9). Paul likewise was not able to assume leadership, nor mingle among the disciples until Barnabas spoke up on Paul's behalf (Acts 9:26-28).

Barnabas as the sponsor of Paul had credibility as a leader in the church in Jerusalem (Acts 4:36) and Paul was a newcomer who had a reputation as a persecutor of the church (Acts 9:1-2)

whom the disciples feared. Even after Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:4-5), Ananias, a disciple at Damascus, was afraid to speak to a blinded Paul when he was asked to do so by the Lord because of the “evil” he had perpetrated against Christians (Acts 9:13-14). Paul encountered the same trepidation when he tried to join the disciples in Jerusalem (Acts 9:26). Barnabas, true to his nickname as “son of encouragement” (Acts 4:36) persuaded the disciples to accept Paul. Paul began to preach boldly in the name of Christ (Acts 9:28). Barnabas’ sponsorship of Paul opened the way for him to enter the ranks of disciples.

Initiation

Kram describes the initiation stage as a period of time within the first six months to year when young managers develop strong positive fantasies of their mentor’s ability to protect and guide them in their career paths. Burgess calls this the Spring of the mentorship process when people get to know each other and develop personal chemistry as they engage in work assignments. In this phase mentees are exposed to various work place challenges and are “assisted in learning the ropes of organizational life and in preparing for advancement opportunities” (Kram 614). This stage in the mentorship process is valuable for senior leaders as well. Mentors see their mentees as coachable and worthy people to whom they can transmit their values and perspectives of the world (Kram). Barnabas took Paul through the initiation-stage during their year in ministry together in Antioch. Barnabas may have seen in Paul a worthy person to impart his ideals to. Paul most likely saw in Barnabas a man with an open heart who gave to others. Barnabas’ example may be an explanation of Paul’s regular practice of investing in younger leaders like Timothy and Titus. Acts 11 gives us a description of how Paul entered the initiation-stage of the mentoring relationship with Barnabas.

Paul did not immediately begin his work as an apostle after Barnabas vouched for him before the disciples in Jerusalem. Paul had to leave Jerusalem because the Greek speaking Jews in Damascus sought to kill him because of his bold proclamation of Christ (Acts 9:28-29). The believers sent Paul away to Tarsus for safe-keeping. After a period of about three years (Galatians 1:17-18) Barnabas went to Tarsus to seek Paul’s assistance in teaching the believers at Antioch. (Acts 11:25-26). During their year together in Antioch, they were able to teach a great many people during their stay (Acts 11:26). While in Antioch the elders took up a special offering to help the believers in Judea affected by the great famine prophesied by Agabaus (Acts 11:28). Barnabas and Paul were selected to take the offering to the believers in Judea. In this initiation-stage of the mentoring relationship, Paul learned, two vital functions of apostolic work were teaching and ministering to the physical needs of people. This model of meeting spiritual and physical needs is the same undertaken by Jesus during his ministry in Galilee (Matthew 4:23).

One of the lessons we may glean from the initiation-stage is that the mentor should take the initiative to seek out the mentee. The Bible does not say what Paul was doing in Tarsus, but Barnabas recognized Paul’s teaching ability and called him to service. Barnabas took the initiative and helped Paul grow into a key leader in the early Christian church. Organizational leaders today can scout their organization for talented people with potential to become key contributors to their companies. Paul

may have been lost or delayed as a contributor to the rapid expansion of Christianity if Barnabas had not taken the initiative to recruit him to teach in Antioch. Similarly today, organizations may be forfeiting valuable contributions from its members because they have not been recruited for challenging work assignments.

Cultivation

The cultivation (Kram) or Spring (Burgess) phase is a time when initial impressions are tested against reality. Emerging leaders often feel stretched and amazed by how much they have accomplished; senior leaders feel the satisfaction of knowing that they have positively influenced a younger colleague (Kram). It is during this time that mutual trust and respect develop between mentor and mentee (Burgess). We can see this pattern in Paul's first missionary journey.

Barnabas was the senior leader on the first missionary journey. Barnabas was a leader in the first days of the church and is mentioned first in the list of leaders in the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1, 2, 7). As they traveled, Barnabas was willing to take the risk of letting Paul speak on Cyprus and Paul responded to the challenge of a false teacher, even calling a curse on him (Acts 13:9-12) which caused the proconsul of the region to believe teaching of the Lord. Burgess describes this as the need for individuals in the mentoring relationship to be willing to take personal and organizations risks. Barnabas would never know how far Paul advanced unless he tested him. Paul found that he could minister in the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:9). Barnabas was willing to suppress his need to be the leader on every occasion for the good of the organization and his mentee's development. Barnabas or Paul is alternately mentioned first during this missionary journey, indicating that change in the mentor/mentee was underway (Acts 13:7, 13, 43; 14:14; 15:12, 25). Barnabas is mentioned as the lead four times to Paul's two. In the cultivation stage, the senior leader is still looked up to support, but the emerging leader is gaining experience and confidence that he or she can do the job apart from the senior leader.

A lesson learned in this stage is that the senior leader should give the emerging leader opportunities to lead under the watchful eye of the mentor. Should Paul have faltered, Barnabas would have been there to pick up the pieces without jeopardizing the organization's mission. The cultivation period is a good time to test the protégé to confirm that the development anticipated has materialized.

Separation

The separation or autumn stage of the mentoring relationship brings significant change to the mentoring relationship for both the mentor and mentee. The separation can be structural, the mentee may get a new job assignment that brings him/her into a parity relationship with their mentor, or the mentor can be assigned to another department. Often some turmoil arises that upsets the balance of the relationship in the cultivation stage (Burgess). The mentor and mentee become aware that they no longer are benefiting each as much as they used to. Galbraith & Maslin-Ostrowski describe this as time when the mentee is excited and anxious about being on their own and away from their mentor.

The mentor also feels a sense a loss that usually can only be recovered through pouring themselves into a new mentoring relationship, similar to what Barnabas does with Mark (Acts 9:39).

Barnabas and Paul separate over the role Mark should play when they decided to return to the places where they had preached the gospel (Acts 15:36). Barnabas wanted to take Mark on the journey, but Paul was convinced this was not a good idea because Mark had abandoned them during their first journey. During the initiation or cultivation stage of the relationship, Paul as protégé would have most likely deferred to the senior mentor Barnabas. At the separation stage, Paul the now experienced mentee is no longer looking to Barnabas the mentor for guidance, but views the mentor as a peer with whom he can dispute (Acts 15:39). Kram describes separation as a normal part of the mentoring relationship. Burgess mentions that separation refers to a “psychological separation, not rumination of the relationship. The mentee may no longer feel helped; the mentor may no longer feel able to help (442)”.

The conflict over Mark may have finally convinced Barnabas that he no longer had anything to give to Paul and that it was time to take on a new mentee. Leaders should know when to end the mentoring relationship. Even though the feeling of loss and anxiety may always accompany the termination of a mentoring relationship, leaving before the relationship goes sour would be helpful. Separation does not mean the end of the relationship but an opportunity to redefine the mentor and mentee relationship.

Redefinition

In the redefinition stage, the mentor and the mentee recognize a shift has occurred and their previous mentoring relationship is neither needed nor desired (Galbraith & Maslin-Ostrowski). In Kram’s research, most of the relationships studied reached friendship despite the individuals having infrequent contact or opportunities to support each other. Burgess writes that “the partners decide on the course that their relationship should take” (442).

Barnabas and Paul came to a very abrupt end in their mentoring relationship. They each decide to take on new partners and continue their missionary work. Barnabas took Mark (Acts 15:39) and Paul took on Silas (Acts 15:40). It is difficult to know what happened to Barnabas and Paul’s relationship since Barnabas disappears after this episode is recorded. The clues that can be gleaned from the biblical text indicate the redefinition of their relationship was respectful and focused on spreading the gospel. In Acts 15:41, Paul is depicted of having a fruitful ministry throughout Syria and Cilicia, while Barnabas focused on Cyrus. Even though they were no longer mission partners, they redefined their relationship as colleagues work in different locations. A sign of this redefinition in the relationship may be found in 1Timothy 4:11 where Paul asks that Mark come to him because he is useful to Paul in the ministry. One can imagine that Paul saw the wisdom in Barnabas’ decision to invest in Mark and remembered being the grateful recipient of Barnabas’ mentoring relationship.

Paul as mentor

Paul undoubtedly remembered the ministry he received from Barnabas when he began his ministry during their mentoring relationship. According to Biehl, Barnabas' mentoring ministry can not be underestimated. Biehl (33) posits

So while we rightly think of Paul as the strategic spokesman for Christ in the New Testament, we must never forget that behind Paul was a Barnabas. In fact, Paul seemed to be echoing Barnabas when he wrote Timothy, "The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be qualified to teach others" (2 Timothy 2:2)

Just as Barnabas had an influential mentoring relationship with Paul, so Paul had an influential mentoring relationship with Timothy, Silvanus, and Titus (2 Corinthians 1:1, 1 Thessalonians 1:1, and Galatians 3:1). It appears from the Bible that Paul never conducted ministry alone. As one who was graciously mentored by Barnabas, he returned the gracious act by mentoring others in the same manner. A further reading of Paul's epistles demonstrates his fondness for maintaining contact through correspondence. He maintained contact by letter with Crispus (Acts 18:8), Stephanas (1 Corinthians. 16:15), Fortunatus (1 Corinthians. 16:17), Achaicus (1 Corinthians. 16:17), Erastus (Romans. 16:23), Gaius (1 Corinthians. 1:14), Tertius (Romans. 16:22), Quartus (Romans. 16:23), Sosthenes (1 Corinthians.1:1), Chloe (1 Corinthians. 1:11) and Phoebe (Romans 16:1). Like Jesus and Barnabas before him it appears that Paul adopted mentoring as a life-style as well.

Conclusion: mentoring principles

The five elements of mentoring discussed in this chapter provide current organizational leaders with principles they can apply in their own mentoring relationships – formal or informal. First, like Barnabas, leaders should be willing to take a risk and sponsor emerging leaders in the workplace. Second, leaders should take the initiative to actively search for promising candidates to mentor, just as Barnabas went to Tarsus to recruit Paul to work with the church at Antioch. Third, leaders should cultivate the leadership capabilities of their mentees by exposing them to diverse and challenging frontline work while still under the direction of their mentors, similar to Barnabas giving Paul leadership opportunities on their first missionary journey. Fourth, individuals in the mentoring relationship should anticipate a time when the mentoring will end to avoid the clash of competing desires and positions illustrated by Barnabas' dispute with Paul over the role of Mark. Lastly, both individuals in the mentoring relationship should recognize the change when the mentoring relationship is finally over, but still find way to support each other on their mutual missions. Although Barnabas and Paul went to different locations, both could accept and support each others apostolic call.

Questions for personal reflection

1. Can you identify a positive mentoring relationship in your life? What made it good?
2. Have you had a negative mentoring relationship in your life? What made it bad?
3. Who have you invited into a mentoring relationship?

4. Do you know what stage you are in with any current mentees in your life? How will you prepare to move the relationship to the next stage?
5. If you are a mentee, how can the insights gleaned from the stages of mentorship presented in this chapter make you a better mentee?

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