

# How to Mentor Potential Safety Coaches Using the 3A Model

By Doug Gray

Safety leaders have tremendous scope and influence, but do not trust their influence.

**H**ave you ever wondered how to measure the impact of a lifetime? I recently attended a funeral where my cousin said, "One measure of Kathy's impact on others is that, by my count, four people have been named after her." Quite a legacy, huh? How many people have been named after you?

A *mentor* may be defined as an experienced, successful person who provides insight. You can ask to be mentored, and you can solicit mentees. A mentor has expertise doing a job. For instance, if I needed to be mentored on risk mitigation, I would seek at least six of the best mentors from that field. A heads-up: mentors do not need to have gray hair. *Reverse mentoring* is when older people intentionally seek younger mentors to help with a skill. For instance, if I needed a mentor on how to use my smartphone or new tablet for safety reviews, I would ask someone younger than myself.

This article illustrates the 3A model and proven mentoring tactics so that you can do your job better 10 minutes from now.

## A1: Assessment

The first A of the 3A model is assessment. Be honest with yourself here:

- 1) True or False? If you want something done right, you have to do it yourself.
- 2) How many people have mentored you in your career?
- 3) List their names.
- 4) How many people have you mentored?
- 5) How many people could you mentor?
- 6) How many people should you mentor?
- 7) List their names.

Effective mentors are clear about the true/false question. They say "false." They tell me that a leader's responsibility is to develop others so that they can do the work. Managers, by definition, maximize the productivity of others. They delegate. Surely you know the adage that we need to teach a village to fish so that all can be fed. The same is true with your project teams.

Effective mentors are also clear about their legacy or impact. One CSP said, "If I can't mentor at least one person every year, then I am not doing my job. After 26 years, I determined that I have mentored at least 37 safety leaders. My goal is to have everyone at this site describe himself as a safety professional. But, I'm not there yet." Another safety director told me, "We have more than 3,000 craft at this site. I look for those who take their jobs seriously, and ask their foreman about them. If they are deserving, I invite them onto our emergency response team. Then, I meet with them weekly and train them monthly. They wear their red hat with pride. And, I've attracted three people into our safety department."

When I hire executive coaches I regularly ask, "Who is your mentor or coach?" If the applicant stammers or admits that s/he does not have a mentor or coach, that applicant is not eligible for hiring. Professional development is not a choice; it is now a career requirement.

A coaching question is, What is preventing you from contacting your prospective mentees today?

## A2: Actions

The second A of the 3A model focuses on constructive actions. Mahatma Gandhi said, "Become the change you want to be." Margaret Mead said, "Never doubt the power of a small group of thoughtful, committed people to change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." I say, "Show me."

Safety leaders have tremendous scope and influence, but do not trust their influence. Here are four proven actions to ensure that you never short-change your impact on potential safety coaches.

**1) Embody the model that you want others to represent.** For instance, honor the radio codes; state your respect for senior management; walk over to the desk of an operations or sales colleague so that you can discuss a solution rather than shout about a problem; ensure that you always speak positively about the facts of a situation when gathering data. There is no substitute for ethical or honest behavior.

**2) Meet regularly.** Actions trump good intentions every day. I recall a safety leader who was tasked with 10:00 a.m. daily meetings, but he rarely showed up. Eventually his plant section team quit attending. Another CSP started every meeting with 5 minutes of good-natured quizzes on site-specific requirements to reinforce recently discussed standards and clear the air. He rewarded participants with chocolate and points. Each quarter the person with the most correct answers won a \$100 gift card. No one missed his meetings.

**3) Focus on mentoring the top 20% of your potential mentees.** The rest will follow. There is a myth among some managers that everyone is capable of being an effective coach. This is not necessarily true.

**4) If you do not have one, solicit two or more mentors today.** Contact your mentors monthly. Ask for specific insights on specific topics. Then reference your professional development in your safety talks. Try, "When I talked with my mentor yesterday . . ." or "I know that we can mentor potential safety coaches when we . . ."

## A3: Accountability

The third A of the 3A model focuses on individual and team accountability. Too many leaders ignore this step. I dislike comments such as "We tried that idea years ago" or "That's just Robert;



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you can't fix Robert." These comments endorse ignorance. Thankfully, humans evolve. We change when forced to do so. Here are some proven tactics for guaranteeing accountability.

**1) Connect mentoring with compensation.** Money talks. Developmental needs that are defined in a performance review can be tied to soliciting a mentor, being a mentor and actively engaging in new behaviors that lead to new results. Although this is a simple process, few companies do it.

**2) Develop mentoring groups.** These can be phone calls or direct meetings, regularly scheduled or ad hoc. The best ones include a guest speaker or executive who sponsors the group, comments periodically without dominating the discussion and offers insights. For example, one of my coaching clients set up a weekly Tuesday call from 12:30 to 1:00 p.m. so that all the safety leaders had an opportunity to join the call, review a best practice or raise questions. It started with four people and mushroomed to 30 within a few months. He

facilitated the call for more than 2 years. What is preventing you from creating such a mastermind or group call today?

**3) Share resources.** Safety leaders are unique at many project sites because they may have a library or warm, dry location where information can be stored. Create a bookshelf, library or reference area; exchange audio tapes; publish a weekly list of websites or professional journals that you recommend; attend conferences and share notes or report back to your safety team; print and distribute toolbox talk checklists; read books and share a review with your team. Mentoring need not be fancy, but it should be effective.

**4) Attend conferences.** Don't attend these just for CEU credits, but for your team of mentees to learn specific insights. Start with a list of topics that you need to learn. Select speakers who may address your questions. Ask questions until you get the answers you need. Then report back to your mentees so that all can learn from each other's investment of time and energy.

Recently, I was asked to work at a job site with 33 safety leaders. Imagine the potential conflicts among such a large group. In less than a year they defined roles, clarified procedures, assigned and reassigned people, and began a mentoring initiative with their colleagues in operations.

At a different engagement I worked with 20 leaders who were forced to do more with about 30% less resources. In less than 8 months, they confirmed their roles, dropped some services, used new technology, including tablets and mobile web apps, and adopted mentors in different divisions so that they could remain nimble.

A coaching question for you is, How are you mentoring potential safety coaches in your world? Contact me and share your answers.

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