

## **Episode #41: Should You Try Reverse Mentoring in 2021?**

Welcome to THE CAREER ACCELERATOR, the podcast where corporate managers will find tips and tools to deliver results through others.

Hello. Today I will provide tips on how you can benefit from reverse mentoring.

I'm your host, coach Percy Cannon.

In our last episode I shared two suggestions on how to answer the question of whether you should choose culture over talent as you assess your team members' performance in 2021.

I invited you to make sure you and your team were 100% intellectually aligned on the top 3-4 core values you agree to display.

I also invited you to look at both the cultural fit of every employee on your team and their specific performance assessment. Culture and talent work in tandem. The absence of either one should trigger a quick and decisive intervention on your end.

Let's now switch to today's topic: reverse mentoring. In the research I did on this concept, the famous ex-CEO of General Electric, Jack Welch, is credited with inventing this concept in the 1990s.

Reverse mentoring is a derivative of the mentoring practice, where a senior manager guides a junior employee. They form a learning and career development partnership.

In reverse mentoring, the roles are turned around, and it is the junior employee who guides the senior manager, typically on leading-edge topics such as digital technology, social media and other subjects in which the senior member may not be proficient.

You have probably heard or even experienced situations first-hand where junior employees, for whom digital technology and social media seem to be second nature, have reverse-mentored senior managers on areas such as how to maximize their productivity through mobile devices or how to expand their professional networks through platforms such as LinkedIn.

But reverse mentoring is not only applicable to digital technology and social media. Today I will share three personal examples of how reverse mentoring has been equally beneficial to me in other domains, first as a corporate insider and more recently as an external coach. Yes, junior employees can also add value to senior managers in other, more conventional areas where there is a knowledge gap.

In one case, as a newly promoted general manager, I was exposed to several new domains in which I needed to quickly get up to speed to fulfill my job responsibilities. The company I was leading was a joint venture in Latin America. The equity owners were from different countries, and each one needed to view our financial statements in the context of their respective country requirements. Fortunately for me, a junior employee in the Finance & Accounting department helped me understand how to translate our local financial statements into each owner's respective reporting needs. Every time I had to make an important financial decision, I had to

understand how it affected the financial statements of both sets of owners. This junior employee clarified the potential implications of such decisions and was a great help.

More than two decades have passed since our reverse mentoring relationship, and we still remain in touch.

In another case, two decades ago I switched jobs to a new industry, where I was fortunate to find more than one junior employee who was open to helping me understand the commercial aspects of this new sector. I was coming from the consumer industry and had to expand my knowledge of business-to-business practices, both from the marketing and sales angles.

I still remember one junior employee whom I brought on to my team. He was responsible for analyzing our customer database. He knew of my interest in learning more about how to grow our business by identifying those customers that would be more likely to buy our products. He regularly trained me on different aspects and uses of our database.

But he didn't stop there. One day he surprised me with a new sales program that he had adapted from another region within our company. The program, which was conducted through our tele sales organization, was a success and helped me, and him, earn broad recognition from senior management.

I recently reconnected with him, and one more time expressed my gratitude for his reverse mentorship. Incidentally, he's now grown into a senior role in another company.

A third instance of reverse mentoring happened during my current coaching practice a few years ago. My client was a large company in an industry where I had not worked before. One of the projects I worked with this company on was to improve an internal process that required the alignment from different departments. I quickly realized that learning more about this industry would allow me to add much more value to this client. I found a junior manager who was part of this project and who volunteered to help me learn both the key aspects of the industry and the internal dynamics and culture of this client.

In this particular case, it was a two-way mentorship situation. He "reverse-mentored" me, and I also became an informal mentor for his career growth. In fact, although I'm no longer working with this client or with him, I continue to give him career advice whenever he asks for it.

In the three cases shared on reverse mentoring I, being the more senior person, benefitted greatly from the knowledge of younger employees who were much better prepared than me in specific domains.

You don't need to set up a formal reverse-mentoring program in your organization, nor request Human Resources to set one up. Find junior experts in digital technology, social media or any other area where you have a knowledge gap. They are easy to spot. Ask for their help. Be thankful to them and show your gratitude by returning the favor in a way that adds value to them.

And if you are a junior employee who holds an expertise in a particular area, look for an opportunity to reverse-mentor a senior manager in your company. You will be helping this manager improve his or her capability to deliver better business results. You may also place

yourself in a much more visible position with this and other managers, which can increase the odds of accelerating your career growth.

I hope you enjoyed today's episode. In the next one, I will share the professional and personal insights I gathered from the book *Range: Why Generalists Triumph in a Specialized World*, by David Epstein.

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Also, you can request a free coaching call with me by visiting my website at [www.cannon.consulting](http://www.cannon.consulting), or if available in this platform, using the links provided in the notes section.

This is coach Percy Cannon, working to help you *make the rest of your life...the best of your life*®.

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### Percy's BIO

Percy has been helping hundreds of corporate executives and their teams boost their leadership and teamwork capabilities over the past ten years.

Before this, Percy spent close to three decades working for three multinational corporations, Procter & Gamble, IBM & Microsoft, in the United States and across several countries in Latin America.

Percy is a Certified Professional Coach from Wainwright Global, Authorized Partner for "The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team" and "Everything DiSC", a Certified Go-Giver Speaker & Coach, and a practitioner of several methodologies from best-seller author Patrick Lencioni (e.g., "The Ideal Team Player", "The 6 Types of Working Genius", "Organizational Health" and others).

He published his first book in 2012-13 in English (*The Business Apostolate: Insights to Define and Achieve Your Mission in Life*) and in Spanish (*El Negocio Más Grande de su Vida*).

Percy is a Consulting Partner with Grupo Azimuth and the Chapter Director for the COO Forum in Southeast Florida.

He has lived in 9 different cities and 5 countries, and speaks English, Spanish and Portuguese fluently.

Percy is married, has 3 children and 6 grandchildren, and is a passionate runner & reader.

**He can be reached at [percy@cannon.consulting](mailto:percy@cannon.consulting).**