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at Predominantly White Colleges
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BUILDING "MENTORING" FRAMEWORKS FOR BLACKS (AND OTHER PEOPLE)
AS PART OF AN EFFECTIVE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY ECOLOGY

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Educational institutions need mentoring structures and everyone in them needs mentoring. This paper will discuss five major points in building institutional devices which help minorities find the multiple helping resources, which many people think of as "mentoring," and which are now seen by many people to be indispensable for career success.*

Each of these points may be seen as necessary, but not sufficient by itself to establish the supportive ecology in which excellent mentoring is available to blacks (and other people). My own view is that the barriers to adequate mentoring for blacks are sufficiently high that a successful framework--a successful mentoring ecology--requires many energy sources: the creative support of top management networks, receptive individuals seeking out helping resources, and specific programs tailored to each kind of worker in each kind of organization. Each of these "energy sources" has its own role to play; all are needed** for an effective equal opportunity ecology.

1. Legitimation as well as leadership

First, whatever the institution, the top administration must announce and then exemplify commitment to equal opportunity. In formal and informal situations top management must be seen to have a coherent, consistent policy. This policy should appear frequently: for example, in Policies and Procedures, in recruitment manuals, in after-dinner speeches and in hallway conversations. The policy should explicitly include discussions of providing multiple helping resources for blacks as a matter of organizational policy.

This frequently announced commitment from the top is important for several reasons. Obviously all important organizational policies will be enunciated from the top in every significant organization--and equal opportunity must be seen to be important if it is to work. Equal opportunity work must be seen to be legitimate, work-time work.

Responsible, effective leadership in encouraging senior people to be mentors of course requires that a top administration encourage mentoring for all junior people, minority and non-minority. I do not recommend a separate special guidance program for minorities only. Special programs of this kind are of questionable legality and morality and often lack long-term credibility and influence. What minorities do need is an explicit legitimation of their equal right to guidance and sponsors. They also frequently need the extra supports provided by their own networks, and a specific attention to blacks within general programs.

*In this paper I use "mentor" in its widest possible meaning to refer to coaching, guidance, sponsorship, etc., in the context set forth by Garrison and Davis--then (black) administrators at MIT and Bell Labs respectively-- (MIT Sloan School Masters thesis, 1979), and by Shapiro, Haseltine and Rowe (Sloan Management Review, Spring, 1978).

**Elsewhere I have written of two other institutional structures which I consider indispensable to establishing an effective equal opportunity ecology: non-union grievance procedures and a 1:1 recruitment system.

2. Fostering Responsible Networks of Blacks

As part of the organizational policy on equal opportunity, and as an integral part of grass-building mentoring frameworks, responsible black networks should be encouraged. Grass-roots networks of this kind have been repeatedly shown to be indispensable to sustained progress for "non-traditional" people like blacks and women. Intra- and inter-organizational networks share information, provide mutual support, teach skills, and function very powerfully as informal channels for inquiries and grievances. Such networks may provide the only reliable information on equal opportunity concerns which gets to top administrators. They will let top management know quickly which helping resources are most needed and where. Networks tend also to "cool out" socially irresponsible members, while providing leverage to those with responsible concerns and complaints. Finally, these groups can provide role models as well as sponsors for their members on a highly efficient basis, even in organizations where there are only a very few senior blacks.

3. Maintaining Close Relations Between Black Networks and Top Administrators

Networks of blacks do grow, whether or not they are encouraged. Where they are fostered and respected and consulted they are a powerful force for non-polarized and steady progress. Covert, defensive groups on the other hand, tend to polarize issues because they can see no alternatives. Then mentoring, coaching and role modelling can become quite negative as polarization increases. And polarization often leads to backlash and damage from backlash of a kind many people would prefer to avoid.

Moreover, covert networks cannot function efficiently to prevent trouble by an orderly presentation of concerns and grievances. Individuals who have serious complaints need clear channels for presenting their concerns if they are not to turn to the courts and to other ways of "taking things in their own hands."

Maintaining close communications between the top and the minority groups permits each to learn from the other. White managers learn what blacks want and need and what their special concerns are. Blacks learn what is realistically available to them, about budget constraints; they learn how to focus and balance their own issues in a general perspective, and how "the system works."

4. Explicit Training of Minorities to Take Responsibility for Finding Their Own Multiple Helping Resources

Civil rights advocates have long discussed the importance for blacks of their taking responsibility and having some control over their own careers. In practice this is also the only effective way of finding adequate "mentoring" for black people.

I believe the best framework for blacks to learn what they need to know about productive and successful careers requires that all young blacks be specifically taught and encouraged to seek their own guides and sponsors. Junior people will be able to find adequate mentoring much more easily if it is legitimated and fostered by top administrators and by their own black networks. But it is also critical that they themselves be receptive; that they seek out the guides, sponsors and coaches they need and want to reach their goals. Junior people can be taught to do this by guidelines in writing, in workshops, by senior people, by their supervisors, by each other. (See Appendix: "Go Find Yourself A Mentor," for an example.)

5. Building Specific Mentoring Programs

Specific programs to encourage sponsorship, guidance and coaching are vital for employees everywhere, and for faculty and students as well, in educational institutions. In my opinion mentoring programs should be designed

(a) for everyone, male and female, minority and non-minority, good performers and poor performers, faculty, staff, students and employees. There should be specific safeguards to be sure such programs work at least equally well for women and minorities;

(b) around a performance evaluation program;

(c) with a component to be sure someone is teaching women and minorities to seek and be

receptive to mentorship, so that mentors and mentees are seeking each other simultaneously;

(d) uniquely for the needs of each different institution, each different pay classification, each type of student.

A good mentoring program should be for everyone. For example, in a university the concept of mentoring needs to be developed for employees, especially support staff, as well as for faculty and students. Mentoring must be a part of the local ecology, an attitude toward everyone, a part of a systematic framework of support for career development and lifetime growth for everyone, or it will not be effective for minorities and women who are usually located in inferior positions. Eroding occupational segregation requires that powerful levers for change, like mentoring programs, extend across pay classification lines.

Programs need to be for white males as well as for blacks and women. Most people find general programs more acceptable, more likely to be considered legal and more easily understood. General programs are also necessary to create a systematic framework for emphasis on career development. Also, in my opinion, the most effective mentors for anyone, in a given environment, are likely to be people who are traditionally indigenous to that environment. White males are probably the most influential mentors in a research university, black females may be the best mentors in an inner-city day care center, and so on. Thus the enthusiastic support of white males for the mentoring program in a university will be very important for everyone. Equal effectiveness for minorities and women can be fostered by having programs designed and monitored by minority and female staff as well as others, but the programs need to be general.

Programs should be for poorer performers as well as good ones. For example, it is vital to provide guidance for junior faculty who are good enough to be promoted and tenured. It is even more important to provide excellent mentoring for junior faculty who will not be kept. Every such person should leave the college or university to a good job, having been helped by mentors to plan realistically and successfully for the future. Such support means that those who leave will continue to speak well of the original institution, which is important for recruiting. Peaceful severance means lower costs for the original institution. And, most important, going to something, rather than being rejected, enhances the life of the individual who must leave, instead of causing pain and damage.

A good mentoring program should begin with a twice-yearly discussion for every junior person with his or her supervisor (faculty advisor, department head, etc.). Corporations usually have some kind of regular performance appraisal system upon which one can build; universities often do not have even this much feedback and support to junior people.

An adequate performance appraisal/mentoring discussion should include at least the following points:

- 1) Where has the junior person been doing well?
- 2) How could he or she do better?
- 3) Where does the supervisor or department head think the job is going? (What will the needs of the department be?)
- 4) What does the junior person want from the future? What skills are being used? How would this person like to grow on the job and in future jobs?

For faculty members these discussions should include frank appraisals of the possibilities for promotion and tenure, sources of grant funds, identification of possible mentors around the country or around the world, and so on. For administrative and research and support staff these discussions should be specific and detailed as to strengths and weaknesses, possible other helping resources, potential career ladders.

Supervisory feedback should thus form the backbone of mentoring programs in every institution. Most corporations require performance appraisals. However few institutions and especially few universities have made sure that career development for junior people is a major and mandatory component of performance evaluation discussions.

Institutions should identify people who can work with junior members of the community, to teach them how to seek adequate advice and mentoring. Women and minorities particularly need to have someone who will legitimate and foster their search for adequate guidance. This person can be a Dean, an Assistant to the President, a Vice President for Personnel or any other senior person.

The purpose of this function is to create an atmosphere in which the institution requires senior people to give guidance and encourages junior people to seek guidance. It is only in such circumstances that cross-sex, cross-race diffidence on both sides will be transcended, and that minorities and women will get adequate sponsorship.

Some institutions simply assign mentors on a first-year or permanent basis. Temporary assignments can be very helpful. But I believe long-term mentorships work best, at least in universities, if they develop naturally in a context where both sides are supposed to be looking for each other. So I recommend that instead of assigning mentors, that an institution assign a few people to teach the acquisition of mentorship to juniors while monitoring performance evaluation by seniors.

Good mentoring programs should be built around the specific needs and customs of each organization and specifically for different kinds of employees and students. For example, guidance and support to post-docs must occur within the customs of each different discipline and tailored to a specific university's expectations of principal investigators. Mentoring for administrators in a small college may require someone with considerable knowledge of the regional labor market. A person who is teaching junior faculty to develop their own mentors must be finely tuned to different disciplinary practices. Custom-tailoring in this way is not particularly difficult; in fact it is easier than trying to graft a mentoring program from one institution onto another. And usually there are very successful people in each field who are glad to be able to help advise on how programs should develop in their own laboratory or department.

Institutions which show leadership in this new area have everything to gain. Increasing the available pool of skills and abilities is vital to the success of most organizations; after all, by 1990, probably only about 1/3 of the college-age population will be white and male! In addition most institutions employ and serve blacks. They can do so more profitably and efficiently by understanding better their black employees and clients. If they do so ahead of their competitors they can gain an enviable reputation that lasts for generations, and which in turn helps to continue attracting the ablest faculty and employees, students and clients. Finally, as we plan for coming years, the practice of true equal opportunity is patently less costly, in terms of litigation, emotional damage and other problems. Since mentoring frameworks appear as important for blacks as they always have been for white men, institutions stand only to gain by building such frameworks in an orderly, responsible fashion.