



Thoughts On Mentorship

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I recently wrote about my first year as a CEO. Those reflections led me to think about all the people who helped me get here. The deeper I thought about it, the clearer it became how fortunate I was to have a progression of the right mentors at the right time - all of whom taught me, pushed me, and advocated for me in different ways. None of us experiences success alone, and everyone is worthy of the kind of investment these leaders made in me.

The Bet Taker

My first job in the healthcare industry was with Ventana Medical Systems. I was just out of the military with a degree from the United States Military Academy at West Point where I majored in English and minored in

Systems Engineering. I didn't know what I wanted to do or be next. I remember my first discussion with a recruiter who asked me about sales. I told him I never saw myself as a salesperson - he asked if I'd feel differently if I was selling something that truly helped people. He knew I was driven by purpose, and without me realizing it, he gave me my first lesson in sales.

Enter Brian Mays, looking for an Account Executive for Ventana. I had studied the company and learned they were developing tools to improve cancer diagnostics globally – it was a mission that inspired me. I didn't "check all the boxes," but he hired me anyway. It took me about six months to get up the courage to ask him why. He seemed astounded at the question. I told him I was clearly the outlier in my training class – no science degree and no sales experience. He told me he couldn't imagine what more I could have done or proven by that age as a Military Academy grad and a Division I athlete and that I came across as humble, inquisitive, and tough, with an unmatched work ethic and resiliency. In other words, he assessed my attributes and my potential, not my current qualifications.

Here are a couple things I know to be true. First, we all need someone to bet on us. If this was a game of perfect qualifications, we'd all lose. Second, the person you bet on will work twice as hard for you to prove themselves worthy of that bet. I would have run through a wall for Brian.

The One Who Teaches You to Fly

Have you ever met someone who makes you feel capable of anything? For me that was Mike Sullivan. He was leading Marketing at the time for Ventana and he hired me into my first people leader role. Working for him shortly after having my first sons (twins) was such a blessing. Mike is one of the most capable, hard-charging leaders I know. He's also a true family man. He showed me through example that I could aspire to have enormous influence and impact without sacrificing my priorities.

I made so many mistakes in the transition from individual contributor, producing deliverables to others' expectations and my own standards - to leading, where the ability to multiply impact comes from a deep focus on inspiring, coaching, and developing others. I'm so thankful to that first team, who taught me as much as I led them. And I'm so thankful to Mike, who coached me through this, while never letting his foot off the gas of what we needed to deliver.

He loaded my plate and gave me a ton of autonomy in areas of large significance to the business, but I could attack them all with confidence because of one important thing - I knew when things went well, he would shine the spotlight on me, and when they didn't, he would have my back.

The best leaders share praise and take blame; Mike embodied this. As a result, he taught me to fly.

The Advocate

When I was 7 months pregnant with my third son, Roche Diagnostics made the decision to integrate the Ventana Commercial Organization (who it had acquired 5 years earlier) into its North American Commercial Operations headquartered in Indianapolis, IN.

During the integration meetings I met Jennifer Zinn, then Vice President of Strategic Affairs for Roche. It was clear during our first discussion how passionate and focused she was on developing other female leaders. I did something I had never done at that point in my career – I asked directly if she'd be willing to mentor me if I made the decision to take the job in Indianapolis. She graciously agreed. I knew that going to the broader Roche organization would test me and teach me in new ways.

From that point forward I met with her monthly, gaining valuable insights along the way, mostly in how to coach others and navigate my own career development. At some point it turned from mentoring to advocacy. She had the courage to speak up for me, even when it was the unpopular view. There was a role I wanted to pursue but was missing one specific experience for. Many believed I needed to follow the prescribed path; she disagreed. During a debate around this she said, “if you were going to push one person out in traffic and see if they could figure it out, wouldn’t it be Megan?” She challenged the status quo and advocated for the belief that talent isn’t created equal, so not all career paths needed to be.

When I was selected for the role, I wanted to prove that I had been worth fighting for. And through her advocacy for me, she taught me that sometimes leadership is about having the courage to stand alone.

The Coach

As you become more senior, there’s arguably nothing more important than your mental preparation. The ability to think productively through all the haze and grey that can accompany the toughest decisions, to coach productively, and to navigate challenging circumstances with the right balance of empathy and toughness takes a well-prepared mind.

One of the first people I called when I was asked to take over as CEO of PGDx was Sanyin Siang. She is remarkably gifted at quickly seeing you for the leader you are and the one you aspire to be. She builds confidence, while reminding you of your potential blind spots. She sees through words, connects dots, and cuts through to the heart of the matter better than anyone I’ve ever met. She is motivated to her core by helping people maximize their potential and the positive impact they have on their organizations, and, in turn, the world. She is a coach in the purest sense of the word.

Sanyin helped me carve through so many questions and so much uncertainty in my first month to keep the important things front of mind. She reminded me that no matter how urgent the problems of the day seem, you can’t accomplish anything meaningful before building trust and communicating effectively. She reminded me to be authentic to the leader I was, because no circumstance is bigger than or worthy of changing that.

I needed that grounding then more than ever, and like all good coaches, she instinctually knew it.

The Challenger

About 4 months before being appointed CEO, I had breakfast with Luke Cooper, a successful tech Founder, Entrepreneur, and CEO. Midway through the discussion he told me I was meant to be a CEO and asked what I was doing to prepare. I was taken aback, as I didn’t yet see that in myself. I asked what made him say that; his response centered mostly around the kinds of questions I asked, a good reminder that intellectual curiosity and a hunger to learn remain important leadership attributes at all levels.

While he was quick to show belief in me, he also became quick to challenge me. The speed at which he plays mental chess around product and growth strategy, the velocity with which he pursues an idea or a problem to solve, and the height of his expectations can be intimidating. I made a conscious decision to embrace that; I knew I had just signed up for something that required it.

I remember one phone call vividly. I had just come out of a Board call early in my tenure as CEO and felt frustrated by the way a specific conversation unfolded. I asked for his advice. He waited approximately three seconds before saying, “Are you frustrated with the Board or are you frustrated with yourself? You know you could’ve handled that better.” He was right and I knew it. He went on to describe with great clarity the alternative approaches I could have considered. I didn’t want to hear it in the moment, but it forced me to

reflect, to remain accountable always, to maintain humility around how much I had to learn in understanding the role of a CEO, and to prepare differently for subsequent discussions.

You know the saying in athletics – coaches are hardest on the players who have the most potential. My advice when you find this mentor? Lean in.

A Journey Best Shared

The best mentors know what you need and when you need it. They know what motivates you and what limits you. They know how best to communicate with you. The best mentors approach the opportunity of helping develop you as a privilege, never a burden.

For the mentee, I believe humility, honesty, intellectual curiosity, and the courage to be uncomfortable are some of the most important characteristics to maximize growth.

In thinking about the value of mentorship, I'm reminded of a book called "The Other Side of the Card" - a short read that uses the business card as a symbol of personal identity, encouraging readers to find their true leadership mantra or goal. Imagine the potential we could unlock in this world if the other side of our cards said "Mentor."

Who helped carve your path?

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[Megan Bailey](#)

Chief Executive Officer at Personal Genome Diagnostics