

4 Types of Toxic Mentors

Mary began baking cookies for her family and friends about 15 years ago and found great joy in it. Her cookies were so good that many people encouraged her to start her own cookie business. After just five years, her business is getting requests for shipments of cookies to areas all around the United States.

Baking cookies for family and friends was easy, but cookies for people in distant places? *Could I do this? Is there anyone who can help?* she wondered. *How do I get my business to the next level? Is there someone to advise me?*

Lisa feels she has a call of God on her life. She remembers an encounter with the Lord when she was a teenager. Although that happened years ago, Lisa never forgot the commitment she made to God. She promised Him that she would preach His Word. Now, many years later, she senses it is time to act on her promise. *How should I begin?* she asks herself. *I wish there was someone who could help me get started.*

Mary and Lisa are like thousands of other women. They want to obey God and fulfill their God-given destinies, but they know they cannot do it alone. They need a mentor.

Many women find themselves in situations similar to what happened when I was just starting out in ministry. I needed help, but I didn't have anyone to turn to. Instead, I read every book I could find that I thought would help me. I attended any seminar or conference that seemed relevant. I devoured the Bible and any Bible study book I could find. I spent long periods of time in fasting and prayer.

There's a more effective way called "mentoring" or "coaching," which is the process of developing not only skills, but also character. A quality mentor is a respected and trusted counselor or guide. There's something in the mentor that the

protégé wants for herself. The mentoree knows she is inexperienced and is confident that she will receive excellent benefits and empowerment from the mentoring relationship.

Throughout the Bible, we can find examples of mentoring relationships. Elisha was willing to forsake everything in order to follow Elijah, the powerful prophet of his time. Even when Elijah encouraged Elisha to remain behind while he was traveling to various cities, Elisha refused. He knew what he was after! He wanted God's resources found in Elijah.

As a result of Elisha's faithfulness to Elijah, Elisha received a double portion of the anointing. Elisha performed twice as many miracles in his life as Elijah did during his ministry.

The apostle Paul mentored young Timothy; the New Testament is full of the wisdom of Paul in his letters to Timothy. Where would we be in the church today without those writings? As a result of Paul mentoring Timothy, this rich inheritance has helped shape church history. (See 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy.)

Good mentors can affect future generations. Their lives are good role models for up-and-coming leaders.

Beware of Toxic Mentors

Finding the right mentor is not always easy. There are many instances where mentors have caused serious problems and brought pain to the ones they were mentoring. These mentors are what I call "toxic mentors" and can be like poison to the protégé. Following are some of the different types of toxic mentors.

The busy bee. This type of mentor reminds you that you are one in a multitude of people needing her help. She will fit you in only when it is convenient to her schedule. The mentoree fights feelings of "taking a number." Surely all the other people in the life of the Busy Bee are more important than she is!

Busy schedules are easy to understand. When possible, schedule phone calls and visits. This will help both parties.

However, emergencies do happen. What I have told the people I have mentored through the years is, "If you can't get help when you really need it, what good is the mentor?"

The slave master. The Bible speaks of leaders having the heart of a servant. The Slave Master interprets this as permission to use the mentoree as her personal slave. The mentoree ends up as a glorified "gopher" of sorts—running errands, babysitting, doing chores and other such tasks. Learning the Word of God and prayer can get lost in the many everyday jobs that the mentoree is expected to do. This dysfunction causes abusive "master/slave" relationships.

The controller. The mentor wants to know about every decision and the location of the mentoree at all times. Permission must be granted for all decisions in life. Should the mentoree make a decision without permission, the mentor usually responds in a couple of different ways. Sometimes the mentor will lash out in anger. Anger is a powerful tool that keeps the protégé fearful and insecure. If anger doesn't work, the mentor will use guilt, condemnation and whatever else it takes to keep the mentoree under her control.

The critic. This mentor finds fault with every leader and mentor she has known both past and present. All other mentors fall short of your mentor. Her gifts are the only perfect ones. Your gifts are very insignificant and could never measure up to hers. For your own protection, you need to stay under her mentoring and hope to someday arrive at the level where she is. Your calling and destiny in God's plan seem unobtainable.

Healthy Mentors

There are other types of toxic mentors, but the above list gives you an idea of what I am talking about. Not all mentors

fall into those categories. Some mentors are exactly what each of us need in our lives. Following are some of the characteristics of good mentors.

Same spiritual DNA. Medical experts have been using DNA testing for a number of years. They do this to determine who a person is and who their offspring are. Children have the same DNA as their parents and exhibit some of the same physical and emotional characteristics. A mentoree will usually have the same “spiritual DNA” as her mentor. They have the same vision, purpose in life, character and spiritual giftings.

Sees your potential. The mentor sees beyond where you are today. She sees things in you that you may not see in yourself. She sees things that your family, teachers and friends may not see.

The mentor does not limit you to your past. She sees not just where you have been, but where you are going. She is able to see the great potential in you and refuses to give up until that potential is released!

Jane came from a background of abuse, neglect and rejection. After giving her heart to Jesus, she sensed the Lord had a plan for her life, but the emotions and inner turmoil from the past haunted her. Jane loved to sing, but felt her voice was not as good as others. Besides that, she could never imagine herself being used by the Lord.

She attended many of the meetings where I was speaking and was so hungry for the Lord. I encouraged Jane simply to stand next to me while I ministered one-on-one at the end of my services.

Soon, she was ministering with me, giving individuals prophetic words. This began to build a confidence in Jane and after a period of time, I asked her to sing prophetically over the people I ministered to. How surprised she was when she discovered she could do that!

Today, Jane is used by the Lord to sing and prophesy. She releases a powerful, healing anointing as she ministers. Jane had a wonderful prophetic potential on the inside. She merely needed someone to pull on that potential until it was released!

Role model. Do not look for perfection in a mentor; no one is perfect other than Jesus. However, there must be respect for the mentor. A mentor is a role model.

A mentoree should respect not only the gifts in the mentor, but also the character. How does the mentor handle times of difficulty, family life, finances? Answers to these questions will help you decide if a certain individual is the right mentor, the right role model for you.

Agreement. Both mentor and mentoree must agree on the mentoring process. Agree on the length of time for the mentoring. Agree that if the mentoring is not working for either party, freedom is to be released.

God has times and seasons on His calendar. We need to be willing to shift into a new season when the time for the last season has ended.

Many advantages are available in having a mentor. Usually the mentoree gets to do things faster than the mentor did. I want those I mentor to run faster in the Lord than I did and to accomplish more and do it with a higher level of excellence.

Finishing Strong

A good mentor will help you develop skills and character that will affect you for the rest of your life. A good mentor also will help you stay focused. It is so easy to want to do many things, but these distractions can keep us from fulfilling the plan of God for our lives.

Kim is a very creative person. She loves to spend time cooking, writing, composing music and decorating. The problem

is that she often gets frustrated because she cannot get any one task completely done. Her mentor helped Kim learn how to prioritize and set goals.

With her goals identified and set in front of her, Kim learned how to prioritize her daily activities. Within just a few weeks, Kim ran into her mentor's office, ecstatic that she had accomplished more in the last month than she had in almost a year.

Oftentimes a mentor can help us see through the fog around us. They can see what we often cannot. Breaking some old lifestyles can propel us toward our destinies. It takes focus to stay on the path and to go where God is taking us.

Through the years, I have either heard about or witnessed many powerful ministry leaders who failed to finish their course well. The apostle Paul gave a strong admonition when he said, "Remember that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize. You also must run in such a way that you will win" (1 Cor. 9:24, NLT). Mentors will help a person to complete the journey the Lord has prepared and to finish strong.

My prayer is that you and I will be remembered for finishing strong. May someone say of us at the end of life that we fulfilled the purposes of God in our generation! (See Acts 13:36.)

Pray and ask the Lord to lead you to the right mentor. Set your heart on desiring to be a vessel of honor for Him.

Ask God to free you from the effects of any toxic mentors you may have had and to give you greater discernment. Thank Him for sending into your life someone who can help you finish your course. With God's help and the right kind of mentoring, you will successfully finish your race and receive all that He has for your life.

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