

The 10 Biggest Mistakes to Avoid in Mentoring

I just returned from a two-week trip to Singapore, where I preached in eight different churches. I enjoyed every opportunity to speak to crowds, but the most fulfilling part of the journey was not the public meetings. What brought the most satisfaction was mentoring the five guys who accompanied me on the trip—Alberto, Hani, Sireesh, Billy and Peter.

The most satisfying moment of the trip occurred last Sunday night, when I watched Alberto pray for a group of people at the conclusion of a service. I've been mentoring Alberto for two years, so I was thrilled to see him stepping out to invest in others. This is the power of mentoring: When you spend quality time with a disciple, they will grow spiritually and eventually become mentors themselves.

Mentoring is a fundamental biblical concept, but it has become a lost art in today's megachurch scene. Moses mentored Joshua, Naomi mentored Ruth, Elijah mentored Elisha and Paul poured his life into Timothy. But today we prefer an impersonal, assembly-line approach to training rather than the more time-consuming, one-on-one strategy.

I've made mentoring my priority because I believe God prefers quality over quantity. Even though Jesus did lots of crowd ministry, He devoted most of His time to training His core group. And He did such a good job of preparing His small band of disciples that He told them they would do "greater works" than He did (see John 14:12). An effective mentor allows his disciple to stand on his shoulders and surpass him.

This week, my disciple Alberto was inspired to mentor some of the new converts we prayed for in last weekend's meeting. Then he begged me for some coaching. He specifically asked if I

could create a list of mistakes to avoid in mentoring. Here they are:

1. Don't ignore communication from your disciple. Discipleship requires your time. Answer calls or texts and make sure your disciple knows you are accessible.

2. Don't act disgusted if they confess serious sin. True emotional healing requires transparency and repentance. But you must show mercy and sensitivity when your disciple decides to bare his or her soul.

3. Don't ever break confidence. I've met Christians who closed their hearts and even stopped going to church because a pastor or a mentor blabbed about confessions they shared privately. If the person you are mentoring trusts you enough to admit their deepest struggles, be a faithful steward with that information. It is not yours to share with anyone else.

4. Don't baby your disciples. You must treat your disciples as adults. Don't coddle them or spoil them. The apostle Paul said: "When I became a man I put away childish things" (1 Cor. 13:11b). You'll never lead people to spiritual health if you treat them like kids. Expect growth and maturity.

5. Don't avoid confrontation. In this era of "hyper-grace" theology, some Christians have backed away of any form of tough love because they're afraid of appearing narrow-minded or legalistic. You must get over this fear. If you truly love your disciples, you will lovingly but firmly correct them when necessary.

6. Don't control or manipulate. You are not running your disciples' lives. Your job is to help them hear from God for themselves—not to hear from God for them.

7. Don't be possessive. Your goal as a mentor is to serve your disciple and to help him or her grow. But you are not the only person they need in their lives. Leave room for friends and

other mentors, and don't be jealous if they go to someone else for help.

8. Don't allow the relationship to become codependent. You must always point your disciples to Jesus. Don't allow them to develop an unhealthy reliance upon you. And never try to get your emotional needs met in a discipleship relationship.

9. Don't ever exploit your disciples financially. Over the years I've met pastors or mentors who asked their mentees to join their "downline" in a network marketing business or to invest in buying clubs or foreign currency schemes. This is a huge mistake. Using a mentoring relationship to enrich yourself contradicts everything Jesus said about purity of heart.

10. Don't ever give up on your disciple. Can you imagine Jesus kicking Peter to the curb after he denied Him? No, Jesus didn't disqualify Peter for his sin—He restored him. Stick with your disciples during good times and bad, and even if they have serious moral failures. Love them, forgive them and never stop praying for them. Be a mentor for a lifetime.