



The Keys to Success? Attitude, Effort, and Results

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John Hartman, former President of International for Equifax, Inc., and a mentor and coach at The ExCo Group, shared his approach to effective mentoring with Adam Bryant. Key themes include the power of rapport and direct feedback in coaching relationships, how leaders can unlock team potential by embracing different learning styles, and why attitude, effort, and results must all come together for lasting success.

Bryant: What do you believe is the secret sauce of effective mentoring?

Hartman: The rapport has to be there, and rapport comes from having mutual respect and an ability to truly listen, with an openness on both sides to thinking differently about how the client might get better, be better, and do better.

The mentoring and coaching relationship is a place for direct conversations. There is a lot of conflict avoidance at work and in other aspects of our lives, and coaching is not a good place for conflict avoidance. If you've got that rapport and mutual respect, then you can be direct with feedback, which makes it so much more effective than just glossing over things and having a nice conversation.

Mentoring is also about the power of listening and not jumping in with the solution right away. If you listen and ask questions to get more context, you learn more about the role that the client plays in the challenge

they're facing or the opportunity they might be missing.

I find a lot of people, particularly those who are new to the C-suite, are very smart. They've got lots of talents, but they often get in their own way and have fears and insecurities. It's about removing the blockages that they put in their own way.

Bryant: Is there a story you can share about a tough conversation you had to have with somebody that ultimately ended in a good place?

Hartman: I've had a couple of clients who lamented the fact that their jobs were hard because they were the smartest person in the room. They'll say, in effect, "In almost every meeting, I just see around corners that nobody else sees, and I get to conclusions much quicker than other people do. So when I'm working with my team, whether it's my peers or my subordinates, it's hard for me, because I feel like I'm wasting time. I know the answer, and these people just don't get it. Waiting for others to catch up can be really frustrating, because I'm a get-it-done kind of person."

In those cases, I try to get them to see that there is power in bringing people with you. I'll point out that they had a long time to think about an idea and refine it before putting it on the table at a meeting, and that they should give people time to process the idea, as well.

I also tell them that I've never seen an idea that couldn't be made better. So I will encourage them to give their team processing time, and to recognize that they think differently from you. If you give them space to look at the problem or concept through their lenses, the ideas will get better. It requires patience, listening, and involving people. But if you don't, you're going to alienate them, and they're going to become just minions who only execute and don't help you to make your ideas better.

I realized, perhaps later than I should have, that people do learn differently. At times, people can ascribe intelligence to those who learn the same way they learn. So I will often encourage my clients to put themselves in the shoes of someone on their team to better understand how they are receiving what my client is trying to communicate. How are you trying to understand their intelligence and figure out how they can be helpful to the particular challenge you're working through?

You get so much more out of people that way. Plus, if you believe that someone on your team is not that smart, the person will sense that, and that will shut them down. If they sense that you're intellectually curious about their thinking, it opens them up and leads to a better relationship.

Bryant: What's the best lesson you learned from one of your mentors?

Hartman: I had a boss who demonstrated the power of establishing strong relationships. And that was a particularly valuable lesson for all the work I did outside the United States. Do you have to do it? No, but it does make the work harder if you don't.

I've seen people throughout my career whose approach to building relationships felt more like a checklist, and it seemed unnatural. You have to do it in a way that's authentic for you. If you make the effort, it will make the conversations and results much more powerful.

Bryant: What is the wisest thing you've read, heard, or said in the context of leadership?

Hartman: I am big on the combination of attitude, effort, and results. I talk about them with people all the time, because I sometimes see people lauding themselves for their great attitude. Or they will talk about their incredible effort. Or they will boast about blowing their numbers out of the water and not realize that they left a trail of destruction behind them to achieve those results.

Those three things are important for workers at any level, but executives in particular need all three for real success. That should be your goal. You've got to work with a good attitude, you've got to put forth meaningful and appropriate effort, and you've got to achieve the results.

When they come together, it's magical. That's the ideal worker. It's simple, easy to understand, and it's effective for cutting through some of the fluff.