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Abstract: For some professionals, the move from professional to partner is easy. But for others, it is a frustrating and confusing experience. Talented MBAs are becoming increasingly hard to find. Professional service firms can no longer afford to let natural selection take its course. They must actively mentor their young colleagues and help them forge a new identity. Aspiring partners are expected to act like partners before they have the competence to actually do so. Creating a partner persona involves three tasks: observing role models, experimenting with possible selves, and evaluating their results. Figuring out what to learn, whom to learn from, and how to act is not easy. Partners can help by: communicating explicitly what works for them and why; encouraging aspiring partners to develop a repertoire of role models; and providing emotional and practical support at the most difficult moments. Organizations can help by using the apprenticeship model and sponsoring classes in the more intangible capacities of a senior professional. [ABSTRACT FROM EBSCO]

MAKING PARTNER: A MENTOR'S GUIDE TO THE PSYCHOLOGICAL JOURNEY

In this era of talent wars, partners at professional firms can no longer afford to have a survival of the fittest mind-set toward the consultants, investment bankers, and junior accountants aspiring to join their ranks. Instead, they must understand - and guide - the complex emotional transformation that every partner hopeful must go through.

AT SOME POINT IN THEIR careers, every management consultant, investment banker, and accountant must attempt the leap from professional to partner. For some, it's an easy jump over the crevasse. They have learned what it takes to woo clients and keep them satisfied; they have learned to lead with confidence. But for most, it's a frustrating and confusing experience in which they arrive at the other side of the crevasse bruised and battered. Still others fail in the attempt and ultimately leave the firm broken.

For years, partners at professional service firms considered the leap a matter of natural selection an entirely acceptable test of survival of the fittest. They reasoned that they had made it over the crevasse themselves; those who couldn't-well, they didn't have the right stuff for the firm anyway. But the war for talent currently raging in these booming economic times has changed that

kind of thinking at many firms. Talented MBAs, once willing to log as many as ten years of hard labor in hopes of being made partner, are now getting increasingly hard to find let alone keep. They're leaving in hordes for hot new Internet companies. Now, even prestigious firms like McKinsey & Company and Goldman Sachs find themselves buying talent in a seller's market.

The bottom line is that professional service firms can no longer afford to let natural selection take its course. To keep their senior ranks full, they must help the professionals whom they have cultivated and led to the brink cross over it. But how? The answer is not to lower the standards for making partner. Rather, partners must actively mentor their young colleagues, tutoring them on how to make-and survive-the leap. To do so, they must acknowledge and become involved in a transformation process they understand in their bones but rarely discuss out loud: helping aspiring partners forge a new identity.

Unfortunately, aspiring partners are in a catch22: They are expected to act like partners before they have the competencies and client relationships-in short, the credibility-to actually do so. They are also in the difficult position of having to change their view of themselves-where they fit in with the firm and how they can contribute. They must speak and act with confidence as representatives of their firms and as peer advisers to more senior, experienced managers. In short, they must assume a new and different professional identity, a change that can be a wrenching, self-questioning experience.

It is an experience made worse by the fact that most junior professionals take the leap to senior roles without much formal guidance from their organization. They fly solo. They improvise. For most, therefore, the transition process feels random and erratic, and the criteria by which they are judged, amorphous. Unguided, some take wild stabs at what they think acting like a partner entails. Others take an inordinately long time to discover what it takes to become truly effective. Frustrated, they may eventually assume they are just not right for the job and seek other employment opportunities. Many firms have lost precious talent in just this way.

Of course, some professionals stick with it, and most of them ultimately develop a new but genuine identity as a partner. But even for those individuals, the journey is still trying, for in the midst of it, most individuals question their authenticity. They struggle with the "fake it till you make it" approach they feel obliged to adopt as a stopgap measure. They struggle with issues of integrity. Indeed,

there are few professional transformations quite as psychologically complex as the transformation to partner.

In recent years, I have studied 35 aspiring partners at several large professional services firms (assisted by research assistants Jennifer Suesse and Naomi Atkins of *Harvard Business* School). I discovered that those individuals who successfully advanced used a distinct approach to observing role models, experimenting with new behaviors, and evaluating their progress. Those who advanced less quickly and effectively used a different approach—one with markedly less flexibility and risk. To be successful mentors, partners need to be aware of both approaches and know how to guide and support aspiring partners toward the more effective one.

A New Mentoring Landscape

Not every young professional is left to fend for himself on the road to becoming partner. Some enjoy rich apprenticeship experiences along the way, but that is rare, now more than ever. Today, most partners are out chasing *business* themselves; in this fiercely competitive and opportunity-laden economy, they have to. Thus, young professionals seeking to make the leap are often left with snippets of vague advice, the most common being: "If you want to be a partner, start acting like one." Worse, many professionals often receive two contradictory pieces of counsel: "Just act like I do" and "Just be yourself."



Making partner shouldn't be a solitary journey for junior professionals. Senior colleagues need to be there to help them forge a new identity.

Technically speaking, none of these shreds of counsel is wrong; they are all just maddeningly unhelpful. Certainly, partners know more, but usually their insights are the kind of tacit knowledge that can be hard to express in words. Perhaps that is why, when pressed for additional advice, they offer vague suggestions such as "Keep working on your confidence" or "Try to improve your presence." True, becoming a partner requires a professional to change not only her skills but also her communication style. But the transition requires a deeper, personal transformation, too. And it is here, in the creation of an identity, where aspiring partners flounder and need the most help.

Consider the case of a professional in my study who was known in his consulting firm as an excellent analyst. After five years of grueling assignments with clients around the world, it was time for him to "grow or go," as he was told. "To be really successful at this game, I need to let go of the image I have of myself as the one who knows all the facts. Instead, I have to think of myself as, and be perceived as, the adviser to the client," he said at the time. "But it's just such a different role for me. It's like my whole basis for existence is cut away if I can't rely on the data."

This consultant felt panicked, but he ultimately continued to advance quite well along the road to partner. Like others in my study who made their way up the ranks, he used a strategy that initially seemed erratic, but upon closer examination proved to be a three-part iterative learning process of observing role models, experimenting with new behaviors, and evaluating the results of those experiments.

To illustrate this process, let's consider two other professionals: Robert Foreman, a 29-year-old consultant, and Liz Brenner, a 27-year-old investment banker. A look at their different approaches to the same basic strategy will highlight the more effective one. (Both Foreman and Brenner represent participants in my study; their names, like all others in this article, are fictitious.)

For six years, Robert Foreman was known as a stellar associate-great with numbers and capable of solid market analysis. But as the time for being named partner approached, he was told he needed to improve his presence with clients. Immediately, Foreman set about searching for role models. His first choice was his boss, a partner named Joe McDuffy, whose personality was diametrically opposed to Foreman's own laid-back style. As Foreman described McDuffy: "He is very direct about what he thinks needs to be done. He'll even tell clients bluntly that they're wrong."

Foreman tried to emulate McDuffy but quickly found out that he could not adopt that style. At one meeting, for instance, Foreman overcompensated by being arrogant with a client, which backfired. He decided to stick closer to his own style and search for other models. In doing so, he discovered that the partners' styles could be arrayed on a continuum from aggressive to exploratory. As he explained, "Both ends of the spectrum work, but the majority are on the aggressive end. McDuffy, Lewis, Roberts, Foxworth, and Richardson, for example, are all very directive and driving with clients. Madden defines the other end of the continuum. He's the exploratory, 'let me take you on a journey' type."

In meetings over the next few months, Foreman took every opportunity to try different behaviors, which he learned from closely watching a variety of people: "Richardson was useful on how to have the guts to confront senior people," he recalled, "and McDuffy gave me some pointers about focusing clients on the critical issues. I watched how Madden manages one-on-one client interactions." By mixing some of their behaviors with his own style and trying them in client meetings, Foreman started to feel better about expanding his repertoire. For example, he

combined McDuffy's direct approach with his own more laid-back style: he told clients when he thought they were wrong but softened his words so as not to offend them.

As he experimented with a variety of behaviors, Foreman noticed that his senior colleagues were giving him constructive tips more frequently. One partner even asked him to run a series of meetings in her absence. Foreman's clients also seemed to respond favorably; they asked his opinion more and more and often recalled particularly salient points he had made in previous meetings. Within six months, Foreman said, "Not only have I figured out how to be good at this, but I've figured out how to do it without really compromising who I am." He had created a new identity by being true to himself and by emulating others.

Liz Brenner also had a reputation as an excellent associate, with particularly strong skills in technical analysis and time management. But during her third-year *review*, Brenner was told that she should be taking a more active role in client meetings. The advice did not surprise her; she knew she tended to be shy in client situations. "With the people at my firm, I'm argumentative, rigorous, and demanding," she said. "But when I'm with clients, I become careful; I'm less inclined to give my own opinion. That's why I have trouble getting new clients to focus on the issues and establishing a presence right from the start."

Brenner knew instinctively that senior executives in the firm could show her what it took to become a partner. But the problem was that she just couldn't find an appealing role model. Since joining the firm, she had worked with Daniel Morris, a managing director, on almost every deal. But she didn't like his style, which she considered abrupt and arrogant. "Daniel is successful," she noted, "but I don't respect him as an individual."

Brenner had also worked closely with Brian Finn, another director, whom she admired a great deal for his friendly approach. But again, she felt she couldn't use him as a model. "Finn is extremely laid-back with clients, almost not asking for the *business*. But it wouldn't work for me. It only works for Finn because he already has the years of experience behind him," she explained.

Unable to find someone to emulate, Brenner decided to work with what she had. She knew that her strengths lay in her analytical skills and therefore focused on how best to display those skills with clients. Prior to meetings, she spent hours researching the client's industry from every possible angle. She walked into meetings with better-designed charts and more comprehensive

reports than usual. Unfortunately, in several cases, the client's questions were not the ones she had prepared for, so she remained in her usual supporting role.

For 12 months, Brenner struggled with how to present herself to clients. Before each new client meeting, she pored over data and analyses. She even took courses on how to make better presentations. Over time, Brenner found that most of her clients came to trust her knowledge and expertise. But in the meantime, as her formal evaluations pointed out, she was unable to grab clients' trust and attention from day one. Although she felt good about maintaining her integrity, she noticed that she wasn't receiving as many pointers from her senior colleagues as she had when she first started with the firm. And she didn't seem to be getting repeat *business* in the way that some of her more aggressive counterparts were. Brenner often felt that she just wasn't cut out to be an investment banker, since it required her to forgo her natural style. "I'm just not one of those people who loves talking about things they know nothing about," she said.

As time went on, Brenner continued to focus on the "substantive" style she had cultivated. But she gradually came to rely a little less strictly on data analysis. In preparation for client meetings, she started to spend more time with senior colleagues who understood the particular intricacies of the client's field. But she continued to feel uncomfortable in client situations. By the end of my study, Brenner was still in the running for partner, but she was progressing much more slowly and was certainly enjoying the process less than Foreman.

Observing Different Styles

As I've said, creating a partner persona involves three tasks: observing role models, experimenting with possible selves, and evaluating their results. Foreman and Brenner do all three, but they are a study in contrasts. Take their approaches to observing and selecting role models. Foreman discerned the wide variety of behaviors available for emulation, especially after his first attempts to imitate McDuffy failed. In watching his seniors, he was asking himself, "Is there only one right way to do this? What are my options for being effective? For signaling my professionalism?" Through unrelenting observation, he came up with a medley of effective behaviors, including being directive, driving, and soft-spoken.

Similarly, Brenner noticed that both arrogant and friendly styles could be effective in dealing with clients. She, too, observed that there was more than one way to act like a partner. But understanding the spectrum of possibilities is just part of the observation process. Professionals

must also decide which behaviors to actually emulate from the choices before them. They must hold each effective behavior up to themselves and evaluate it, asking, "Does this resonate with who I am? Will it work for me? Do I want to be like this person?"

Foreman compared the styles he observed to his sense of self: "I can be like this, but I don't like it," and "He's the exploratory type This is where I see myself." I call this process identity matching. There are two dynamics at work here: the feasibility of the behavior-"Will it work for me?"-and its appeal-"Do I want to do this?" Ultimately, Foreman located a role model whose quieter approach he found effective and appealing. He later found several examples of other behaviors that were also feasible, such as focusing clients on critical issues and pushing back when he knew a client was wrong.

While Brenner observed a similar panoply of behaviors, she wasn't as successful as Foreman in finding an identity match. She knew she could be arrogant like her first model, but she did not find the style appealing. And while she found the friendly style of her second senior partner more appealing, she thought it less effective for her because of her age and inexperience.

It's easy to attribute Brenner's subpar results to her selection of poor role models and to her pickiness. But there's more to it. Foreman observed several role models simultaneously; Brenner focused her attention on one senior colleague at a time. Foreman learned from each of his models: he saw senior partners in terms of their specific strengths and traits. Then he was able to customize those behaviors to his needs and preferences. Even though he didn't identify entirely with the "aggressive" Richardson, for example, he observed a particular style of his-a willingness to confront clients when he believed them to be wrong-that he wanted to model. Brenner, by contrast, viewed role models more monolithically. She saw everything the partners represented-their personal style and professional values-as a package deal and made a value judgment based on that package. Her approach was all or nothing.

Foreman and Brenner exemplify, respectively, what I term collage and holistic approaches to observation.[1] Like Foreman and Brenner, most young professionals start out with a holistic approach, because in their early careers they are assigned to and work closely with only one person. As they encounter a greater number of senior colleagues, many, like Foreman, begin to take a collage approach. But others do not. That's too bad, because the collage approach is clearly more effective. The reason is simple: by observing a broad range of personalities and picking out

specific behaviors, collage observers can accumulate a larger repertoire of possible styles to choose from-and do so more quickly-than the holistic observers.

Psychologist Hazel Markus coined the phrase "possible selves" to illustrate the range of identities a person can have.[2] Because they see more possible selves, collage observers are more likely to find behaviors that fit who they are, who they want to be, and what they can do. That becomes especially helpful as professionals begin to move from observation to experimentation.

Testing, and Testing Again

As one participant in my study summarized, "Forty percent is watching what the partners do. Sixty percent is mustering the courage to try it yourself." Eventually, every aspiring partner must act-and that means experimenting. Once again, Foreman and Brenner illustrate contrasting approaches.

Understanding that his new role as client adviser required different behavior, Foreman actively sought to find a model whose style was the antithesis of his own. He was, in fact, so eager to depart from his comfort zone of natural behaviors that he actually overcompensated and annoyed the client. When this experimental aggressive self failed, he took every available opportunity to try out other behaviors he had gathered in his collection. Foreman's approach is what I call the chameleon strategy.

Brenner, by contrast, didn't want to change herself to fit the situation and therefore refused to experiment with behaviors that felt unnatural to her. She used what I call the true-to-self strategy. Indeed, even though she knew that the situation required a more aggressive persona, she remained faithful to the behaviors that had worked for her in the past. Unlike Foreman, she practiced her own substantive style over and over again.

Brenner was reluctant to experiment with vastly different behaviors in part because she doubted her ability to add value to the conversation. But she was reluctant also because she viewed herself as more authentic than senior partners like Morris, whom she saw as insincere and manipulative. Each experiment was therefore guided not by what she had observed in more experienced senior partners but by her sense of self. Unfortunately, her substantive style was inappropriate for her new role, so as she sought to perfect it, all she did was spin her wheels. Her attempt to protect her authenticity thwarted her learning process.

Evaluating from All Sides

For chameleons and true-to-selves alike, the experimentation stage of the learning process is emotional and difficult. But their struggles in this endeavor would be in vain without some means of evaluating the behaviors they'd tried. Aspiring partners must analyze what worked and what didn't and view each new experiment as bringing them one step closer to reaching their goal. Over time, most juniors refine and perfect their approach, honing in on a style that is both effective and authentic-but this takes time. The speed and outcome of this process depend on the quality of self-reflection and the quality of feedback that junior people receive from their more experienced colleagues.

Most young professionals in my study said they evaluated their behavior experiments by performing a sort of internal litmus test. They compared their actions to their sense of self, essentially asking "Was I true to myself? Did I behave in ways that are congruent with who I am and who I want to be?" Brenner couldn't bring herself to imitate others because it just didn't feel right. Foreman felt his experiment with an aggressive style failed because he found it to be "depressing" and at odds with his concept of an "ideal self." Without a sense of self-congruence, new behaviors are less likely to be retained and practiced. The discomfort Foreman felt from his experiment taught him a great deal about how he might gradually adapt his behaviors to accomplish the same goals. He went back to the drawing board to design a new experimental behavior, this time based on his natural style. As he continued his experiments, he honed behaviors that were increasingly congruent with his sense of an ideal self and sought role models whom he felt were better matches.

As Foreman's actions show, the chameleon's propensity for trying out different behaviors generates more variety in his experiments. This leads to greater self-discovery and a greater chance that he will figure out what works for him. The true-to-self person will refuse to try a different behavior on the grounds that it might not feel right. Chameleons know for certain whether or not a behavior departs too much from who they are and want to be because they have tried it. After trying behaviors different from their own, the chameleons in my study reported that they often caught themselves thinking, "That wasn't so bad!" and "I can do this!" Their reactions were experience-based rather than imagined or hypothesized.

In the end, junior professionals need to ask themselves, "Was I credible? Was I competent? How did my clients, superiors, and colleagues judge my performance?" They need to look to clients and senior colleagues to discover whether their experimental styles are effective. Foreman, for instance, knew that some of his experimental behaviors were working because his clients began to rely on him and call him more. But while Foreman's earlier experiment failed by his own standards, Brenner's trial failed because it simply did not meet her client's standards.

Indeed, clients and senior colleagues react differently to chameleons than they do to true-to-self people. Because they tend to progress faster, chameleons are seen as "moving in the right direction." And because senior partners are often more willing to help out someone they see as a rising star, the chameleons will inevitably get more pointers from them. Many, like Foreman, also receive opportunities to lead meetings and so forth-opportunities they wouldn't have had otherwise. True-to-selves, by contrast, are perceived as "not getting it." Partners gradually spend less time giving them feedback, and they are essentially left to figure things out on their own, as Liz Brenner was.

No matter which experimentation approach juniors choose, their internal and external evaluations will help them make the necessary corrective adjustments to their strategies. An assessment of their experimental behaviors will lead them to a mature, experienced-based understanding of what the role entails. It will also help reduce the discrepancy between their view of themselves and the behaviors that are required to perform their job successfully.

As Brenner and Foreman's experiences show, the learning process that underlies forging a new identity is full of loops and discoveries. Figuring out what to learn, whom to learn from, and how to act is not easy. No one gets it right on the first try. Each step of the process may send the junior in a different direction-to different models or different behaviors. But as they cycle through the process, juniors will, like Foreman, figure out how to be good at what they do without compromising who they really are.

Throwing a Lifeline

Parents who understand-and empathize with- the traumas of adolescence are often in a better position to help their children through that stage in their lives. The same can be said for the partners in professional service firms who are sympathetic to junior colleagues trying to forge a new identity. Partners who understand that young professionals are in the process of observing,

experimenting with, and evaluating various personas can guide and support them throughout the transition. Here's how.

Communicate explicitly what works for you and why. Among the most striking findings in my study were the different conclusions professionals drew from watching the same senior people. Those who watched partners from a distance often interpreted their success with cynicism: "He only tells the clients what they want to hear," "His technical skills aren't great; he's just a great schmoozer." But professionals who watched partners up close, and heard those partners' own insights about their approach to *business*, formulated much more positive views: "She doesn't raise defensive feelings in clients yet is able to get her point across," "He may not be our most brilliant banker, but he's great with clients because he makes them feel valued."

In most cases, giving pointers did not constitute a significant drain on the senior person's time: a strategy conversation a few minutes before walking into a meeting (such as, "Watch how I sequence who I call on in the discussion"), or a quick debrief on the plane returning from an engagement. These are the moments that unveil the mysteries for the junior professional. They are also moments that allow the junior person to view the senior as someone they would like to emulate. In explaining themselves to junior colleagues, partners help expand the professional's repertoire of possible selves.

But senior people would do well to go beyond on-the-fly explanations of their behaviors and offer their junior colleagues a robust, comprehensive point of view on the craft of being a partner. This perspective might also include a partner's analysis of the *business* in general—its opportunities and challenges, its key players and its future. Indeed, at one firm I studied, the most successful junior professionals repeatedly mentioned how much they were helped by a partner who took the time to tell them stories about the *business* and how to succeed as a partner. His well-articulated philosophy contained the following advice, which is notable for its gritty explicitness:

As a junior team leader, when the client says "We want you to do X," you say, "Great." As you get more senior, you're more likely to say, "Let's talk about X." You try to identify where the real problem is. For example, a client might ask us to help them figure out if they should close a plant in France. Your job is to try to understand the *business*, their basis for making money. You might end up saying to them, "Your problem is not in manufacturing. What's going to be key to your success

is your brand image." It's about taking the big-picture perspective and understanding how things fit into the client's overall strategy.

Many professionals who worked with this partner referred to him as a great teacher who helped them make sense of the mysterious process in which they were immersed.

Encourage professionals to develop a repertoire of role models. Partners can also help their junior colleagues find the right mix of role models—a task that is more complicated than it sounds. As one person in my study recalled, "My boss stopped by my office and said it was time for me to get some role models. Then he threw out the names of three women in the industry. They were the usual suspects—high powered, successful. They all acted pretty much the same, and I knew I wasn't like that." In other words, partners need to take a junior professional's own style into account when suggesting role models. Partners must also recognize that suggesting a wide variety of "types" can be extraordinarily useful.

Mentors can also play a critical role in the transition by helping their proteges devise explicit criteria on which to judge potential role models. As I've already noted, juniors should ask themselves three questions at the observation stage: "Is the role model successful?" (effectiveness); "Would her behavior work for me?" (feasibility); "Is her persona appealing to me, and do I want to be like her?" (attractiveness). Keeping those questions in mind, mentors can suggest people who might round out the junior's portfolio of role models. To do this, they should pay attention not just to the skills the junior needs to develop but also to what kinds of issues they might struggle with while trying to define who they want to become. Partners can suggest how juniors might combine a favorite role model's demeanor with the skill set of another mentor. They can also help the junior person see beyond the surface elements of style; perhaps they cannot adopt the same style their favorite model uses to make a first impression, but they may be able to learn a great deal from the strategy behind those tactics.

Provide emotional and practical support to professionals at the most difficult moments. At some point, every aspiring partner needs to be nudged to stop observing and start experimenting. A senior executive can help by bringing this point out into the open, essentially telling junior professionals, "You cannot avoid experiential learning." Informed of the emotional tenure of the learning process, seniors can also frame experimentation as a series of "small probes" to help

aspiring partners discover the mature professional they will become rather than exercises in being an impostor.

Partners can also help professionals find low-risk ways to learn about possible selves. For example, they can encourage a junior person to practice new behaviors in internal meetings before trying them with clients. Partners can also help junior colleagues secure new clients with whom they have a better chance of establishing a peer relationship. It is often difficult to negotiate a new role or identity in a long-standing relationship. Old clients are accustomed to the junior professional's old persona. Therefore, if partners set their junior colleagues up with new relationships, they create an environment more conducive to active experimentation.

Finally, for those juniors who really resist taking the leap, seniors can help them recognize that the just-be-yourself strategy may slow their progress. In many cases, this true-to-self approach may simply be a defense mechanism for avoiding possible failure. Indeed, the best advice a partner can give is, "Stop being yourself-but don't worry, everyone must go through this phase. It's called learning."

The Organizational Challenge

Partners can play an active role in mentoring their young colleagues, but they should not go it alone. Organizations-in the form of the HR department or senior leadership team-can also play a role in helping aspiring partners take the leap successfully.

The first frontier is the assignments process. Traditionally, professional service firms have used the assignments process to expand the technical skills and industry expertise of their junior people. In some firms, individuals are encouraged to stick with the same partner for many years, especially when the chemistry is good. The argument for this apprenticeship model is that it allows the professional to learn in-depth from one master. But even if a partner and professional "click" on this level, there is still much to be gained by using the assignments process to expand a professional's exposure to other role models. In other words, professional service firms need to think creatively about whom professionals should learn from and not just what they should learn.

The assignments process is also critical in helping slow starters initiate the leap. The reason? Young professionals often play to expectations. Their partners and peers expect them to act a certain way, and so they are reluctant to take on a new persona publicly. But a new assignment

can get an aspiring partner in front of new people-people without expectations. That's why there are so many stories of juniors who begin a new assignment with a new set of coworkers-and suddenly, they blossom. They haven't magically acquired new skills or chutzpah; they've simply found a new audience.

Organizations can also help professionals get ready for the image-forging aspect of the leap by offering classes, either in-house or out, that develop the more intangible capacities of a senior professional. For example, some firms offer training in self-awareness and professional development. These sessions can make explicit the stages and challenges of forging a new identity.

Training Mentors

Mentoring has always been one of the executive's most challenging responsibilities. Even in the days when the apprenticeship model was firmly in place, many managers struggled with the complicated roles of coaching and teaching, pushing and pulling, holding close and letting go. Today's economic landscape makes it even tougher. In view of the economic opportunities available, partners must be out of the office making rain. The need for mentoring hasn't disappeared-far from it-but the time available to do it has certainly dried up.

Also making it hard for executives to mentor today is the fact that many have simply never been told how to do it. The exact responsibilities and boundaries of the job confuse and sometimes even scare them.

Consider what happened recently when I conducted a workshop on mentoring for an international professional service firm. The workshop was part of the kickoff of a new formal mentoring program. I asked the inaugural group of mentors and proteges to comment on what they hoped to get out of their new relationships and what they feared about the program. The proteges spoke first, enumerating the long list of characteristics their ideal mentor would possess. This person would be wise, successful, wield power in the firm, have extraordinary technical prowess, care about and have time for them, be a nice person, and manage their own life such that work wasn't everything. As the list unfolded, the faces of the assigned mentors showed increasing alarm. When the mentors first spoke, their words were candid: "That is precisely our fear-that you have expectations we could never possibly meet. We don't know how to do this job."

Such confusion hasn't stopped many firms from launching ambitious formal mentoring programs that link virtually every professional in the firm with a more-experienced guide. These initiatives usually fail for one simple reason: chemistry. Chemistry is the key ingredient in true mentoring relationships, but it is most frequently an outcome of working together on real tasks. It can't be mandated by the HR department or a leadership team.

Does that mean throw out the formal programs? No, but firms should reconsider their purpose. The assigned mentor should certainly be a coach, friend, and supporter-the traditional models. But new mentors should also be able to steer the protege to a broad set of people and experiences until he or she finds a more natural adviser. Programs can also be structured such that the switching costs are low for both protege and mentor if they choose to find a new match. As a number of prominent professional service firms have discovered, they stand to benefit from providing training to mentors on the basics of their job: helping smart people to learn.

Taking Flight

Nowadays, when people talk about the old economy, it is frequently with a bit of derision. The new economy offers so much more flexibility and opportunity, it is thought. But when the old economy left, it took with it some useful practices, among them, the apprenticeship of young consultants, investment bankers, and accountants during the long journey to partner. That apprenticeship did not guarantee, of course, that every professional made the leap to partner with ease. And in fact some were guaranteed to fail because of tradition and sheer economics. But still, some young professionals were shown the way to the other side of the crevasse.

Today, more than ever, firms need to get their scarce professional talent to the other side, and yet they are hamstrung by partners' lack of time and their knowledge about mentoring itself. Making more time is probably not possible. But it is possible for partners to come to understand the complex and delicate transformation process-the identity forging-that professionals go through as they try to take the leap. And with that understanding, they can help their proteges make the leap and take flight.

1. These concepts were discussed in Donald E. Gibson's, "Inspiration and Imagination: The Role of Composite Role Models in Organizations," Yale School of Management Working Paper, A91 (1999). 2. See Hazel Markus and Paula Nurius, "Possible Selves," *American Psychologist*,

September 1986.

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Ibarra, H.: 2000, "Making Partner: A Mentor's Guide to the Psychological Journey", *Harvard Business Review* (March-April), 146-155. Kilduff, M. and D. V. Day: 1994, "Do Chameleons Get Ahead? The Effects of Self-Monitoring on Managerial Careers", *Academy of Management Journal* 37(4), 1047-1060. Google Scholar. Maddock, S. and D. Parkin: 1993, "Gender Cultures: Women's Choices and Strategies at Work", *Women in Management Review* 8(2), 3-9. Google Scholar. Oakley, J. G.: 2000, "Gender-based Barriers to Senior Management Positions: Understanding the Scarcity of Female CEOs", *Journal of Business Ethics* 27(4), 321-334. Google Scholar. Rosener, J. B.: 1990, "Ways Women Lead", *Harvard Business Review* 68, 119-125.

To be successful mentors, partners need to be aware of both approaches and know how to guide and support aspiring partners toward the more effective one. A New Mentoring Landscape. Not every young professional is left to fend for himself on the road to becoming partner. Making partner shouldn't be a solitary journey for junior professionals. Senior colleagues need to be there to help them forge a new identity. Communicate explicitly what works for you and why. Making partner: A mentor's guide to the psychological journey. *Harvard Business Review*, 78 (2): 147-159. Google Scholar. Johnson, W. B., and Nelson, N. 1999. Thiel, Chase E. Connelly, Shane and Griffith, Jennifer A. 2011. The Influence of Anger on Ethical Decision Making: Comparison of a Primary and Secondary Appraisal. *Ethics & Behavior*, Vol. 21, Issue. 5, p. 380. Request PDF | Making Partner: A Mentor's Guide to the Psychological Journey | For years, partners at professional service firms considered the leap from professional to partner a function of "natural selection"-a test of | Find, read and cite all the research you need on ResearchGate. Abstract Understanding the Power Of Mentorship: An Analysis of Mentor Psychological Characteristics, Page 1 of 9 Understanding the Power of Mentorship: An Analysis of Mentor Psychological Characteristics Abstract. View. Show abstract.