



A DOZEN MORGANISMS FOR MENTORS AND MENTEES

National Mentoring Month takes place every January. President Biden noted in his 2023 National Mentoring Month declaration, “As families and friends, teachers and counselors, coaches and co-workers, faith and community leaders, good citizens and neighbors, we can each play a role in helping the next generation of Americans achieve their dreams.”

People often ask me about mentors. I didn’t have one mentor and I believe it’s not practical to attach yourself to one role model or manager. I tried to learn from everybody I worked for. When you sincerely want to learn, not just get ahead, successful people are happy to help you. I don’t view the notion of a mentor as being someone who advances your career. That may happen, but I think it’s more important to realize that the most valuable thing successful people have is their time and they will only invest it in someone who really wants to learn and grow. Nobody is sitting around waiting for someone who needs help to appear.

I’ve pulled together a dozen Morganisms that I and my Applied Wisdom team have selected that we believe can help both mentors and mentees as they help to grow their staff within nonprofits, and beyond. Keep in mind also the role of boards as mentors to a nonprofit’s executive team.

As Oprah Winfrey has said, “A mentor is someone who allows you to see the hope inside yourself.”

Please share this document with friends, family and colleagues.

And please visit my website, [Applied Wisdom for the Nonprofit Sector](https://www.appliedwisdomforthenonprofitsector.com), for more insights into fundraising and the nonprofit sector.

To your success,
Jim Morgan

1. Communicate the Value of Training

Leaders should communicate and reinforce the value of ongoing education and training opportunities to their staff so that employees take all learning programs seriously. The more employees develop and have the opportunity to contribute to your nonprofit in new ways, the more likely they are to be happy and loyal while working on behalf of your mission. To compensate for the interruption of their work processes, employees must perceive the value of the training they are asked to participate in, or it is counterproductive.

2. Develop Your Own Management Toolkit

I have always encouraged people to develop their own management toolkit or set of guiding principles. For many years I collected articles, lists, notes, and ideas I picked up reading, listening to speakers, or just talking with people. I urge everyone to do that as a habit that serves as a constant reminder that we evolve over our lifetime as managers, and there are always new ideas that can be helpful—or old ideas that suddenly apply to a situation in which we find ourselves.

3. Don't Be Afraid to Have a Plan B

Time is wasted and opportunities are lost when people become fixated on having perfect information, rather than appreciating that there will never be enough information, nor will there be perfect decisions. You've got to make a decision and manage the consequences.

Don't be afraid to have a Plan B at the ready. Always stay on top of whether your original assumptions and execution are panning out.

4. Ensure Your Partner's Success

Building positive relations between your people – staff and board – also helps develop your team's ability to work together better. I encourage people to approach all teamwork with a collaborative mindset, where you treat your partner's success as equal to your own. That applies to internal relationships, external partnerships, and donors. If you approach all your business relationships and collaborations with the attitude that your partner needs to be successful for you to be successful... you will be successful.

5. First Assistant To

It's useful to think of yourself as "first assistant to" your direct reports. You want people at every level to understand the organization's goals and objectives and make decisions that align with those goals. This will never happen if you adopt an authoritarian posture or overturn decisions in a very public way to let everybody know who's boss.

6. Hire Excellent People

A culture of respect and trust begins with a commitment to hiring excellent people. People who own their work, both its successes and failures, know that there is plenty of capacity to adjust to an honest mistake. Treating people fairly and not punishing employees when a decision doesn't turn out perfectly, does not mean giving poor performers leeway to make mistakes over and over. Doing that, in fact, is disrespectful to your good performers who deserve to be surrounded and supported by competence and, ideally, excellence.

7. Make Decisions at Meetings

Make sure no one leaves a meeting without making decisions on every recommendation. If there's concern or confusion, schedule an early breakfast (or Zoom call) the next day and hash over the problems until everyone feels sufficiently clear on the issues to vote. Don't allow the project to get swamped in dithering or internal politics, insist on a yes or a no.

8. Managers Must Address Their Shortcomings

It is sometimes human nature to emphasize what we do well and ignore or put off working on what does not come as naturally. A good manager must fight that instinct, understand what key leadership or management attributes he or she may lack, and either develop those skills or hire them onto the team.

9. Talented, Motivated People

Talented, motivated people will always overcome technical challenges, language differences, distance, or time pressure. And nothing attracts more talented, motivated people like a critical mass of talented, motivated people. This is the foundation of an excellent organization.

10. Start With Your Conclusions

When you're trying to communicate something important to a group, begin by stating your conclusions and recommendations. Then get into the whys and the supporting data. People will focus better if you help them connect your ideas and data to your conclusion from the very beginning.

This is true also for presentations. Start the first slide with conclusions and recommendations. Particularly with technical or complicated subject matter, a long presentation where listeners don't know where you're going often becomes tedious and confusing.

11. Teams

You don't balance a team with "strong" and "weak" players; you insist on overall high competence, then look for complementary strengths of personality, strategic thinking, attention to detail, and other more subjective but important qualities. Beyond intelligence, education, and training, what makes a good employee in a setting that requires teamwork is how that person's personality tends to mesh with the personalities of others on the team.

12. Treat People With Respect

Respect and trust your people. Without those values, you will never be a successful manager. A key element of respect is modeling every behavior you expect in your organization. As a manager you are constantly being evaluated by your team on whether you treat people with respect and whether you walk your talk. These are crucial behaviors to becoming a successful and trusted leader. If you are disrespectful of your employees' intelligence or you disregard their humanity or dignity, they will not trust you and you will limit your potential for success.