

## SESSION 13 • SHORTER READING • ABOUT 4 MINUTES

## WHYZMEN • SESSION 13

# The Three Big Myths of Mentoring

Adam Grant on why the giver gains as much as the receiver

**Credit:** Adam Grant, “The Three Big Myths of Mentoring,” *WorkLife with Adam Grant*, a TED podcast. Transcript at [ted.com/podcasts/worklife](https://ted.com/podcasts/worklife). Grant is an organizational psychologist at Wharton.

**Why it is here:** Grant’s case that mentoring runs both ways is the research behind your triad project’s first rule, co-mentoring: older men have something to give and something still to receive. It also explains what you may have noticed in the younger-man conversation from the Session 11 Field Tests.

## Framing

Grant examines why mentoring so often disappoints despite its popularity. About 90% of Fortune 500 companies run mentoring programs, and having a mentor predicts higher job performance, career success and satisfaction. Yet formal, poorly designed programs regularly underperform informal relationships. The gap, he argues, comes from three myths we carry into mentoring.

## The three myths

| Myth                                                             | The truth                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
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| <b>1 • For mentees: seek out the biggest superstar.</b>          | The best performers are often poor teachers — their knowledge is tacit, and they struggle to explain what they do naturally. The ideal mentor is a <i>dedicated teacher</i> , someone committed to helping others grow. Grant: “Knowledge and experience do not a mentor make.” What to look for instead: “magnanimity and patience and grace.”          |
| <b>2 • For mentors: your job is to always provide direction.</b> | Great mentors ask questions rather than hand out answers. They help mentees crystallize lessons from the mentee’s own experience and find the mentee’s own path — not walk them down the mentor’s. Belle Ragins (University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee), a leading mentoring researcher, names empathy and perspective-taking as the critical mentor skills. |

| Myth                                                                    | The truth                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
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| <b>3 • For both: mentoring is one-way and benefits only the mentee.</b> | Mentoring is mutual. Mentors gain fulfillment, fresh perspective and growth; teaching builds the mentor's own competence, and giving guidance builds confidence. Grant highlights <i>reverse mentoring</i> : Patrice Gordon pioneered it at Virgin Atlantic, pairing junior employees with senior leaders, including the CEO, so learning flowed upward too. |

### The anchor story

Sophia Chang — the first Asian-American woman in hip-hop management, who worked with Wu-Tang Clan and A Tribe Called Quest — describes her decades-long relationship with music executive Michael Ostin, who offered both belief and blunt correction (“You can’t boil the ocean... you can be like a bull in a china shop”). The relationship models the mix Grant prescribes: encouragement plus honest challenge, sustained over many years.

### Grant’s closing counsel

Build mentoring on vulnerability, trust and mutual growth. Choose mentors motivated by genuine commitment to others rather than status; seek multiple mentors for diverse perspectives; and let the relationship run both directions — the strongest ones are two people openly learning together.

### Where it shows up in WhyzMen

- **Myth 2 is the Clearness Room rule and the triad champion role**, stated by a Wharton professor: questions over answers, drawing a man’s own story out rather than prescribing. The skill you practice on your brothers is the skill you will use on the young man.
- **Myth 3 is the strongest tie-in.** Retirement-age men fear becoming “the guy with nothing left to offer.” Grant’s research says the giver gains as much as the receiver — which dovetails with Moynes’ Phase 4 (service to others), the significance arc, and the Session 11 Field Test conversation with a younger man: afterward, *who learned more?*
- Pairs with Stanier, *The Coaching Habit* and *The Advice Trap*, as the practical toolkit for Myth 2 — the seven questions are on the optional card E3 • Seven Questions.

“Knowledge and experience do not a mentor make.” — Adam Grant

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