

Perspectives

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Why Mentorship Is Now a Succession Imperative for DFW Real Estate Firms

Leadership isn't just about production—it's about stewardship and how we lead beyond our tenure in this business. The DFW commercial real estate market is one of the top three markets in the country. It is sophisticated, smart, creative, aggressive, and competitive. Now, we can add "generationally diverse" to describe our industry.

With four distinct generations currently working side by side and a significant portion of the senior talent preparing for, or approaching, retirement, cross-generational mentorship has never been more critical in our industry.

As Baby Boomers exit and a new wave of leaders evolve, I believe firms that formalize their mentorship and stewardship programs for the future will gain a cultural, strategic, and financial edge. If we do it right, we'll run the race together until it makes sense to pass the baton. That is the power of a great, mutually focused, and mutually beneficial mentorship relationship.

Mentors and mentees alike can benefit from collaborative and committed business engagement. Here's what I'm seeing.

Modern Mentorship: A Critical Push

Forward-thinking real estate firms recognize mentorship as a business advantage—they realize that it's not just throwing junior team members into the deep end to see who sinks or swims.

Mentorship ensures continuity as leadership transitions occur. Meaningful mutual engagement improves retention and enhances corporate culture built on shared values and respect. Ultimately, this results in improved financial performance, which increases productivity and long-term readiness and continuity.

I have learned over the years that we all process information differently. Younger professionals need context, coaching, and feedback. Mentors must deliver guidance in ways that resonate while listening actively and adapting to communication styles. This is not a feel-good initiative—it's a form of succession planning for those of us who own companies, as well as a way to impact and improve our industry's ethics, behaviors, tactics, and collegial environment.

The Value of Mentorship

COVID-19 introduced a generational disruption. Many Gen Z professionals began their careers fully remote, missing out on foundational exposure to workplace norms, professional behavior, office etiquette, and informal mentorship. Think about those who entered the workforce in 2020, starting their careers muted on Zoom and remotely working in their apartments. This group is at a distinct disadvantage, and I believe mentorship is how we can turn the volume back up on culture, communication, and connections.

On the other hand, ageism is a subtle but prevailing dynamic in today's workplace. In a fast-moving, tech-driven business environment, it can be easy to undervalue the experience and wisdom developed from mistakes. In commercial real estate, relationships, negotiation skills, market knowledge, and long-term perspective are irreplaceable assets. Having an older mentor is not a liability—it's an advantage.

The mentor's accumulated knowledge, war stories, and seasoned judgment represent a tremendous opportunity for those younger professionals willing to listen, learn, and grow. Mentorship is not about looking backward; it's about looking ahead, and how both the mentor and mentee can accelerate one another's professional development together.

In an industry built on relationships, trust, and timing, mentorship is an essential part of long-term success. While much of real estate is learned through experience, having a mentor can significantly shorten the learning curve, open doors, and build confidence. I realized this in my late 30s—and I was 15 years too late.

Meanwhile, mentees benefit from gaining a faster understanding of the business and local market dynamics; access to meaningful connections and business opportunities; and guidance on navigating client relationships, internal politics, assignment opportunities, and various transaction structures.

The Ideal Model

There are a few things mentors should keep in mind: First, the mentee is not your assistant. They're not there to fetch your dry cleaning or grab you a cup of coffee. They also aren't there to simply do grunt work on small assignments. The mentee is a partner in your business.

While it is hard work, there is something beyond the money at play for mentors. It is a sense of legacy and impact beyond personal production. It is the ability to say you took a small part in someone's professional development. For me personally, it's about the opportunity to help shape company culture and elevate new leaders.

Remember: you are also getting exposure to new perspectives on emerging trends, technologies, and thought processes. Mentorship is not about recounting old war stories and conforming to the past. It's about looking forward, adapting technologies, behaviors, and advantages that the new business climate offers.

Both mentors and mentees must have intellectual curiosity to learn from one another. They must listen and avoid tuning one another out. The most effective relationships combine the skills from both sides.

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