

Linda Dulye, Leadership Expert and Entrepreneur Talks Mentorship and Career Development

By: Patricia Trutescu

Most professionals have received a piece of advice that has not changed over the last 30-40 years when it comes to career development – find a mentor. Can you ask someone to be your mentor, and how? Linda Dulye, a '77 Syracuse University Alumna, President and Founder of Dulye & Co., an award-winning workplace communication consultancy that specializes in the groundbreaking Spectator-Free Workplace™ methodology, and the Dulye Leadership Experience at S.U., would say “yes” and she offers some advice on how to soundly and effectively do so.

“The first steps before asking someone to be a mentor include understanding yourself. What is my passion, what are my strong skills, which skills do I believe are not so strong?” Linda advises to young professionals. She remembers her years as a professional in her 30's, a former reporter with a degree in English who received two golden opportunities at General Electric in the Aerospace Division.

“When I interviewed for a job at GE, I was asked “what is the next job you are interested in, your career aspirations?” [Ask yourself] I am here today, but in five years from now, three years, where do I want to see myself? I have to look at the skills I have, the skills I think I need, the ones I don't and where I would like them to take me. Given my passion and skill set, I should [perhaps] look for a mentor that maybe started a business.” Following these examples she lists, Linda nicely concludes with this one piece of advice, “I've got to do the homework on myself.”

There is certainly so much advice available about finding a mentor that we sometimes don't know how to choose. I suggest to search for someone who can produce results. Aside from positive results in her career, Linda helps other students achieve results in theirs.

In 2008, Linda started the Dulye Leadership Experience Program (DLE), a skills-centric, professional development program for creating globally competitive, career-ready students. Through building a network and engaging in hands-on direct learning, students stand out from the pack and grab the attention of hiring managers. Further, they learn how to excel in communications and quickly integrate in the workplace (dulye.com 2014).

The DLE has helped nearly 90% of program graduates land a job or internship which transformed into a job within three months of program completion (dulye.com 2014). Linda says, “Having the opportunity through GE – that was so transformative for me from a career standpoint – of constantly learning to define myself through a way beyond my degree of English or just a communicator. I became someone who is a business person, with a business mindset who happened to have the skill that were transferrable beyond communication.

“Then, I realized that this is something I did not graduate from college with; I was very defined by my major. I also thought I’m not the only person who graduated from college who defined themselves by their major and could not see the broad spectrum of opportunity and careers which are open. I was thinking of skill perspective vs. a major-degree perspective.

“So, I thought about the leadership development. I’ve seen college students graduating and leaving with enormous debt and plenty of uncertainty on what to do. An English major, or Economics major asks, “What do I do?” At the time, nothing at Syracuse offered this type of transformative experience that would bring out the best in people by helping them see what they could do beyond their degree, nor make a very smooth and quick transition into the realities of what the workplace today expects of you. That’s what gets students noticed, gets them jobs, and helps them pay off their debt.”

Through a marketing-oriented perspective, Linda has hit a unique-selling point with the Dulye Leadership Experience. If you are currently a junior or senior at S.U. thinking about applying to the DLE, I encourage it, especially if you love to communicate. While I listened to a lecture by Linda at Lubin House, the S.U. Alumni quarters located in New York City, I learned that one of the students from the DLE program put what he learned into practice, which helped him become a networking superstar at his new company. A young student wanted to quickly learn the company and the business, and grow his career. So he set out to meet as many people as he could by asking them to join me for a cup of coffee. In the Power Point slide titled “Practice the Art of Inquiry,” Linda listed three key points to remember in an interview with an executive or manager (Dulye & Co. Proprietary 2014):

- Questions should help you learn about that industry and that person
- Make your communication a learning experience; spend at least 50% of your time asking questions
- Ask about Office Politics

Given what I do on the side, you are probably not surprised I mentioned this information. On a broader basis, to also help you, the reader, ask someone questions where you are truly going to learn something new. Doing so can help you learn about the company you see yourself working in one day.

My next piece of advice is, if you look to join the DLE program, or you are looking to improve your job hunting skills, you will need to break down some old ways of thinking about your desired job development, myths if you will. Here are some of the ones Linda has broken down throughout hers, and ones that I also came across in my experience.

Myth 1: A Higher Paying Position is More Important than a Mentor

When Linda was a professional in her 30’s, she received two job offers from General Electric. She chose the one with a lower salary, a Site Communicator at one of the company’s plants in Camden, NJ. Linda specifically recalls how Human Resources told her she had made a career-ending mistake. The transitioning career woman though thought differently.

“I knew it was not the end for me. I saw the relationship I would have with the hiring manager, the opportunity I would get to learn something beyond communication, the business. His name was Tom, and he was tough, demanding and fair.

“When I left my interview with this boss, I knew just from the exchange he would not only be a great boss but somebody I could ask to be a mentor. I did, and we worked closely and he moved very quickly

through GE. He opened doors and taught me the business-side of the aerospace division. For me, that was priceless. The value of the learning experience, of having someone with that level of mutual trust, and the opportunity of learning to read change. You couldn't put a price on it. It was not all about the money. It was about getting better as a person and a professional.

"Tom became one of GE's fast-tracking leaders in the span of six months to a year when Jack Helm was at GE. I knew he would challenge me and, based on my time working with him and for him; he would be an amazing change leader."

Myth 2: My Mentor has to be in the field I am interested in pursuing

According to Linda, mentors do not have to be in the same field in which you currently work or study. The DLE has a strong connection with the Smith School of Engineering. Since she came out of a communications role within the engineering space, Linda describes the difference between a technical mentor and a business mentor.

"There is a technical mentor. That's good. But then, 80% of someone's success as a manager, maybe 90% is through motivating people. You might bring 10% of the technical experience to the table, but the people you hire in the future should already have that experience. The 90% of your job involves bringing together people who will do the work, collaborate incredibly well, and achieve great success through their productivity, innovation and energy.

"We have had students from Smith attend the DLE, and I am very passionate about helping engineers learn the business side. They're going to get great jobs because engineers are in high demands. There is also people dynamics [at work] not just learning great engineering work. It's great engineering work in the context of a team, and eventually, being a manager than can motivate people. That is not in the technical skills."

Myth 3: My Major Says Everything about Me

Linda reveals how often we look at ourselves in a very contained way. One common mistake professionals make, especially when they are just starting out, is restricting their skill sets specifically to their degree. Linda explains another personal experience she had re-entering the world of job hunting.

"I had said, "I'm an English major," and I could teach, but what other jobs can an English major do?; I was a person who knew how to approach people and have them give me information. I had skill sets I somehow was not seeing because I focused so much on what my degree said about me."

When I graduated S.U., I entered the job world with a degree in Music History. Back then, I didn't know that I would later go to business school, and then integrate the skills I learned towards my start-up Music Historian. Further, I knew I had to look at other experiences I gathered between college and my breaks. When I came into the job-hunting world for the first time, I even looked back to fundraising experiences I obtained in high school and included that on my resume. Now, I remember another misconception Linda claims many students have about job development.

Myth 4: Anything I did in High School doesn't matter

"It's amazing," exclaims Linda. "I know many students whom, as teenagers, gathered some work experience. Somehow, this gets undermined in college, and that's the end of their previous experience."

“I know teenagers who started their businesses. When ask them, “What did you do when you were a teenager?” they don’t realize there is tremendous work experience which they have yet to think about as transferable skills.

“When I was a teenager, I was involved in the family business. At 13, I acted like a reporter. I had an amazing experience between 13-15 years of age because my father was the editor of a newspaper, and I got to work for the publication. I received tremendous experience, and it did not end when I started college, and the jobs I had in college.”

Linda then says, “Adding that introspection and being able to say “Let me expand my job hunt to the skill sets and PASSION.” What gets me excited, what enables me to bring out the best in people? That’s what my firm Dulye & Co. does too. We go into the workplace and bring out the best in people at all levels of the organization: utilizing communication, engagement and leadership development techniques.”

Myth 5: To be a leader, I have to come up with solutions all by myself

I deliberately include this at my volition. As I speak with successful business leaders who have created opportunities for starting-professionals and businesses, I learn that most of the time, you must dedicate yourself to listening to others in the workplace. Inquiring is important for collaborating with teams on solutions for business-facing issues. Linda spends her time now with her company, first listening to client needs.

“I have to tell you; I did not start the firm with “Spectator-Free Workplace™” as our tagline. I listened a lot during the first four years of my business, to what clients want. I even listened to how they called my company. It used to have a name, L.M. Dulye & Co. We took away the L.M. when we realized it did not mean anything. People preferred to call the firm Dulye & Co.

“When I kept learning about what our clients looked for, a world of an engaged workforce. People don’t want people [they work with] to just show up and go through the motions on the job. When you start thinking about it, someone who does this is a spectator. A spectator shows up, tends to criticize from the sideline, feel calm and at the end of the day, feels no emotional or mental connection with others at all.

“Our clients wanted very involved and highly engaged [workers], they wanted employees to care. Helping our clients establish a Spectator-Free Workplace™ became very much what we were hearing, even though they were not using those words. When we did create our theme-line and introduced it to our clients, they thought “That’s cool. That’s what I want.” It resonated instantly.”

Myth 6: I don’t have the personality to be a leader

I've heard this phrase from many naysayers while I was in my early 20's. Sure, it was not that long ago for me, but it certainly stuck for some time. Unfortunately, we all come across people like this as we work towards developing our professional goals. Rest assured that the qualities of a real leader reside in genuine intent and placing importance in other people in your workplace. Linda explains:

“I think the very first thing you need is genuine intent. For example, when helping to facilitate employee surveys, I advise my clients that the intent should not be to use the information employees give in a way

that only benefits me [the client]. But that I'm genuinely interested in you [the employees] and what's going on with you, and what we perhaps can make better."

"To make employees respond to a survey, is to say "we're so interested in making the best workplace experience for our employees." We can't do it, if we don't ask them how they feel or what they think every year. We can't do it without their insights."

In addition, young professionals who aspire to be managers one day must realize that becoming a motivator takes time.

"We're in a very impatient world," remarks Linda. "You can't motivate people by sending emails or shouting orders. Having conversations takes more time than texting. The benefits and return of the conversation are far greater. Motivate and convey "I am interested in you." You can't motivate people unless they believe you are truly interested in them.

Carry the debunking of these myths in your job hunt!

Even today, nothing replaces conversations. Talking face-to-face helps build the human connections we need. While LinkedIn gives us the opportunity to expand our networks by quickly connecting with professionals in any given industry, social media is not enough.

Linda claims, "What's changed today is the speed and the ease that you can network. I can go on LinkedIn and say, "I'm interested in X, Y, Z company, let me see if there are any S.U. Alumni that went to X, Y, Z company with whom I can connect. Prior to the internet, when I looked for a job, I knew someone who knew someone, I couldn't instantly connect."

She then adds, "What has not changed is the human connection. You need to have a conversation, a human personal touch and reach out in order to make that network grow. If you plan to grow it by casual email, that will not do it. A phone call, to let someone hear your voice so you can strike up a relationship. That's an old school de-facto that has not changed in networking. It still comes down to forming a relationship, and the best way to form it is through your voice or presence.

"The rules have changed in terms of getting my access. How do I maximize that access? That has not changed."

Connecting people with others to help make their dreams come true excites Linda. Last Friday, she had breakfast with a friend who happens to be an engineer in aerodynamics and has always dreamed of being a Navy pilot. Linda also grew up with someone who became a Vice Admiral and is now head of Navy personnel. She said to her engineer friend, "You know what, you're so passionate about this, and I want to connect you with my friend. Who knows?!"

Linda's friend will resign from General Dynamics and start attending Officer Candidate School in late November to become a Navy pilot.

"I am so thrilled about that. Did it matter because I am a career woman? Yes, because I am a risk taker, and I knew he was also a risk-taker. If I could inspire him with that then... that's what's most important to me. That's what matters."

Linda also expresses her expertise in leadership as a columnist for Fox Business. Coming back to the beginning of my entire conversation with Linda, I can now understand that the most important quality

of a mentor is someone who can inspire. Professionals at all career levels need a leader who is passionate about helping others improve within their job, expand their skills or transition into a new opportunity. Networking face-to-face and building a network will help you get there. That is what the Dulye Leadership Experience sets out to teach S.U. students. If you are interested in learning more about this program, visit their website, www.dle.dulye.com. Don't stop researching and never stop learning.

Works Cited

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