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Mentoring skills: How do young people deal with management roles? by Becky

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Many of us are used to senior staff and managers to be older than us; the older you are, the more experience you have and therefore you bring wisdom to the role. However, more and more young people are being pushed into management and leadership roles, and this creates a challenging dynamic for new younger managers and those that they need to manage.

One example of this was Sean Purcell, who is Head of Learning and Development at Striding Out. He was promoted from lecturer to Curriculum Manager at only 22. He was then promoted again at just 24 to Acting Area Head.

To give us an understanding of his experience and how he dealt with things, we have asked him to tell us himself.

â€œI became Acting Area Head in 2007 and then a year later I went to head up a department of around 70 staff, with a turnover of over Â£1.5 million and hundreds of students.

The biggest change for me was that although there was a reduction in time spent in the classroom, that free time didnâ€™t get anywhere close to being enough for my additional responsibilities. I now had responsibilities for target setting, team meetings, observing my past peers and their performance, and dealing with discipline of students who, to be honest, werenâ€™t that much younger than me. And not to forget - all the extra paperwork!

However, this is part of becoming a manager and you just focus and do it.

Where my problems began were with long term staff members, some of whom had been there for a very long time, who took almost any change to college policy as a personal slight, and my fault. A â€˜them and usâ€™ situation started to develop and questions about my age, which had never come up before started to emerge and it began to get personal.

From my point of view it felt like a cheap shot, but it had the opposite of the desired effect as it made me acknowledge the divide and work even harder to fulfil my vision. Eventually in each environment I demonstrated my value and broke down initial barriers and negativity through being consistent, action centred and operating with integrity.â€•

The success you have as a young leader will depend on the buy-in of your staff and whether they feel threatened by your position, then age can become an easy target. Ways to combat this include:

â€¢ Take advantage of leadership training. This helps you to grow a network of peers who were young leaders, and can all support each other.

â€¢ Request a mentor, preferably someone who has been there. Mentors, who have been through the hassle of handling difficult staff, can provide valuable advice. It also provides you with a place to admit your own mistakes and discuss what you can do about them.

For those of you at the other end and find yourself with a manager who is younger than you, what can you do to create a more effective relationship? MD of Striding Out, Simon Ireland-Davies ACC, CPCC gives us his tips and advice.

1.   Question your own prejudices. Think about when you were younger and being judged on your

age. Have you fallen into the same trap?

2.   Consider the cultural references you use. Cultural references can strengthen relationships but if youâ€™re talking about films and TV programmes theyâ€™ve never seen then you are effectively talking different language.

3.   Avoid the temptation to change the way you speak to sound like them. Youâ€™ll end up sounding like an idiot.

4.   Think about the values you share. Most of us build connections through shared values. Those connections have nothing to do with what age you are; rather they are more about you as people.

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