A case for mentoring of New Generation Pacific leaders

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Introductions

I have been asked to talk about mentoring as a strategy for developing Pacific leaders. Within this general brief, I offer a simple three-part take-home message. First, as a leader, if you have been mentoring others, particularly younger Pacific Islanders so that they themselves might become better leaders, I say this to you: You are performing an honourable role. Therefore, I encourage you to continue with your mentoring of other leaders. Second, if you are a leader but have not been mentoring other leaders, I urge you consider being a mentor. There is much you can do to support the purposeful development of leaders as people. Third, if you are a leader, however experienced, but are not being mentored, I urge you to seek to be mentored, today. There is much to learn, even if it is from your own life experiences. But unless you are open to being taught, you are not likely to learn from your life experiences or those of others.

It is obvious from my take-home message that I consider mentoring to be very important. Personally, I see mentoring as absolutely essential for leadership. All of us, as leaders, need to be mentored. We must be teachable. We must seek to overflow with passion, otherwise we become stagnant. We must search to sharpen our competencies or we lose our usefulness and become ineffective. We must look for ways of strengthening our moral credibility or we succumb to relativity and consequential ethical muteness. Young leaders in particular must be mentored, if they are to avoid going around in circles. Many younger Pacific leaders desire to be mentored. Many want to learn. The reality however is that there are few mentors available or able. There are few Pacific position leaders who are actually mentoring our emerging Pacific leaders.

Hence I ask: How will our emerging Pacific leaders learn from the lessons of yesterday’s leaders if younger ones are not being mentored? How will our emerging leaders avoid the mistakes of their predecessors? How might our emerging leaders have a head-start if they are not purposely mentored? Many more such prompting questions can be asked.

In making a case for mentoring as a strategy for developing a new generation of Pacific leaders, I have organized my presentation into four parts. In the first part, I explain the concept of mentoring as I am using this term[ology]. Mine is not a text-book definition of mentoring. My intention is therefore to explain the concept in a way which Pacific Islanders can all easily relate to and understand. With clearer understanding, it might be easier for us to assume ownership for mentoring as a key leadership role of our time and in our Pacific contexts.

The concept of mentoring

On the off chance that any of you might think that you do not know anything about mentoring, permit me to respectfully disagree with you! In my view, I believe all Pacific Islanders know what mentoring is about. More so, those who are familiar with village communal living do know and do practise mentoring regularly.
It is common in any village communal setting for an older sibling or cousin to demonstrate a particular skill, to play a particular role or impart certain knowledge to a younger one. Similarly, in any day of the week, an aunt or uncle might demonstrate a particular behaviour, manifest or affirm a particular positive value to a younger relative. Such actions of intentionally helping another person to learn are examples of mentoring. In such instances, we might say, a mentor is helping a protégé or mentee to learn.

Further, it is common within Pacific villages to see people behave or live as mentors 24-7. An uncle, a buddy or an elderly lady does not just teach and encourage during “teaching hours”. There are no teaching hours! Instead, all hours are available to educate. Moreover, the village mentor is not just a mentor of a single protégé at any one time. Rather, buddies and elders assume an education responsibility for all younger family, clan and tribal members. They use processes that are appropriate and found to work for their contexts and settings. With such examples, we can speak of mentoring relationships within which people facilitate and receive guidance, support and growth experiences from each other. In the more socially stratified Pacific societies, framing mentoring in this way is positively instructive.

Having now demystified and clarified the concept of mentoring, I will move on to the second part of my presentation. In this part, I share examples of New Generation Pacific leaders who are actively helping to develop other leaders through mentoring. Time does not permit me to share the many encouraging stories of mentoring by younger Pacific Islands leaders. I shall limit myself to two stories— one each of a formal and informal mentoring initiative.

**Stories of mentoring**

My first story is about Ema, a New Generation leader who is a member of the *Leadership Pacific* Wellington Cluster. Through heritage, nationality and marriage, Ema identifies with multiple Pacific-European ethnics. Ema is doing her post-graduate studies at university. She is passionate about leadership. This is because she sees herself as a leader. A year or so ago, Ema saw the needs of youth in her Wellington community, for guidance and support. Without formal training or prior experience in establishing mentoring programs, Ema went into action. She mobilized friends, obtained needed support and ideas and started a mentoring program for her neighbourhood community.

Today, a year or so on, Ema manages a successful mentoring program in her community. A number of young people have signed up as protégés. She has also recruited the support of a dedicated group of mentors, most of whom are first-timers. She has established and is supported by an Advisory Board. Together, this team of people have developed the necessary policy guidelines for the mentoring program. Ema has also been organizing and facilitating training sessions for mentors and protégés alike. She has made presentations to interested audiences, passing on insights and teaching others about how to establish and manage a mentoring program.

As one of her mentors, I have often enjoyed my mentoring conversations with Ema. During such occasions, she would share with me about her experiences, respond reflectively to my questions and seek advice as necessary. Over the past year, I have seen Ema matured as a leader. I have also appreciated her passion for the young people in her mentoring program, her dedication and respect for her group of mentors and her admirable courage as a leader.

Ema’s story is an example of a formal mentoring program. But more so, it is a story of a younger Pacific leader who, even without an initial relevant training in mentoring, was willing to learn quickly
and to act out what she has learnt. In doing so, she has demonstrated courageous leadership in responding to a need and mobilizing other people to be mentors and protégés.

My second story is about Cherie. Again, Cherie is a member of the Leadership Pacific Wellington Cluster. Cherie is a real life example of a leader who lives out mentoring in her daily interactions with people. Somehow, she has been able to habitually create, sustain and advocate for purposeful mentoring relationships. At the university, she convenes regular mentoring meetings at which emerging leaders can listen to, support and challenge each other as leaders. Additionally, Cherie creates and facilitates numerous networks of mentoring relationships among students, community youth in Wellington and throughout New Zealand. Over the past few years, Cherie has consistently brought together a core group of students that she mentors and who in turn, are mentoring other younger people within their own community contexts.

As one of Cherie’s mentor, I have enjoyed many mentoring conversations with her. During such occasions, I have enjoyed her youthful passion for people-development. I have equally learnt from her insights about people, the New Zealand context and leadership.

Cherie’s story is about informal mentoring through mentoring relationships. She is not nurturing other younger Pacific Islanders out of a sense of duty. In fact, her employer does not require her to be a mentor. She is not paid to be one. Not, at all. Cherie has been merely responding to the needs that troubled her heart. She was troubled by the sight of younger Pacific Islanders appearing unsupported, without vision and life purpose. In responding to the needs she saw, Cherie has carved out for herself a particular societal contribution of value. The wider community, the organizations and neighbourhoods of which Cherie is a member are benefiting from the efforts of a courageous mentor. Cherie’s story shows how much leadership impact can be achieved by a single individual who is passionate about and committed to a cause, in this case, mentoring.

I encourage you now to reflect on Ema’s and Cherie’s stories. These are ordinary, younger and emerging Pacific islands leaders. They have, however, shown us that as leaders, we can both be mentored and be mentors. Their single efforts have made considerable and transformative difference in the lives of numerous people and in multiple communities. For one moment, would you imagine how much collective positive difference we might make at all levels and in all corners of our beloved Pacific region if we were more purposeful about mentoring our younger leaders?

In the third part of my presentation, I shall briefly share about an ongoing story – the collective story of Leadership Pacific, a Movement which is aimed at mentoring New Generation Pacific leaders.

**Leadership Pacific as collective mentoring**

Leadership Pacific is a “Cause Movement”. The cause is a vision. The website [www.Leadershippapcific.org](http://www.Leadershippapcific.org) shows the details of what this visionary movement is about. Briefly, the mission of Leadership Pacific is to enhance leadership capacities in Pacific communities through the study, teaching and the practice of leadership. Its strategic 5-year vision is to develop 1,000 New Generation Pacific leaders by 2015. We hope to achieve this particular vision in a number of ways, including our use of mentoring.

As a collective mentoring strategy, Leadership Pacific is based on a particular philosophy of leadership as reflected in its espoused values of purposeful privilege, ownership, appreciation and integrity and shared across countries, generations and at multiple levels of Pacific communities.
Both mentor-protégé as well as mentoring relationships frameworks are used within Leadership Cluster groups, across leadership networks and within leadership internships.

The collective strategy does not prescribe the mentoring outcomes for people. Instead, outcomes are responsive to the needs and priorities of the leaders involved. In scrutinizing the mentoring experiences that are taking place within Leadership Pacific, we note that the expected outcomes are wide-ranging. These have included responding to personal development goals, meeting role performance or achievement aspirations, targeting career development needs or academic development as well as merely to obtain more out of life.

As one of the mentors of the Leadership Pacific collective, I have appreciated the appropriateness and effectiveness of this strategy for mentoring younger Pacific Islands leaders. This is a strongly relational and caring approach. Further, this strategy appreciates, rather than being problem-focused. This is a longer-term strategy; requiring assumptions of ownership of the purpose, scope, magnitude and forms of mentoring culture which fits Pacific leaders’ needs and contexts.

The Leadership Pacific movement is open to all who are interested in, concerned and care about leadership for Pacific communities. You too can be a part of this vision. You too can participate in this collective mentoring strategy as a mentor or a protégé. Collectively, all Pacific mentors are likely to be more effective in growing a new generation of Pacific leaders if we combine our efforts together. I therefore invite your participation in and ownership of the Leadership Pacific collective mentoring vision and strategy.

Finally, in the fourth and concluding part of my presentation, I shall end with two points of encouragement.

**Words of encouragement**

First, I encourage each one of you and all Pacific leaders to be mentors. I urge you as leaders to be purposeful in your guidance, support and creation of growth experiences for others, particularly for younger and emerging Pacific Islands leaders. Where you might need some training, I urge you to obtain the professional development training that will enhance your mentoring skills.

Second, I encourage you to trust in mentoring as a strategy for leadership development. In other words, we can depend on mentoring as a strategy that surely grows leaders. In view of our needs and the urgency of our time, we are more likely to grow a cohort of New Generation Pacific leaders faster and in more cost effective means through mentoring. Moreover, mentoring is a natural, organic and fit-for-purpose strategy for growing Pacific leaders. All Pacific leaders have a head-start with mentoring as a strategy. We are familiar with the strategy. In my view, mentoring offers the most credible choice for enhancing leadership capacity in Pacific communities. Will you stand with me and be the mentors of our emerging Pacific leaders, today?

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for your attention.

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