

# Mentoring Through the Stage 5 Lens: A Whole-Person Framework for Leadership and Wellbeing

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This paper explores a whole-person approach to mentoring through the Stage 5 Framework. The model integrates emotional intelligence, adult development theory, and identity formation to promote transformational growth across four domains: mental clarity, emotional intelligence, physical grounding, and relational maturity. A case example features an executive-level leader who uses the “Four Realities” framework to align professional success with personal fulfillment. The paper highlights how mentoring that centers self-awareness, emotional regulation, and intentional development support sustained leadership effectiveness and wellbeing. The model extends beyond traditional mentoring by emphasizing values alignment, resilience, and human-centered growth. Organizations benefit from stronger relational capacity, improved morale, and deeper engagement when mentoring supports the whole person. The Stage 5 approach positions mentoring as a catalyst for not only professional development but also systemic and cultural transformation within institutions. Through reflective exercises, emotional processing, and intentional practice, mentors and mentees co-create conditions for long-term success.

*Keywords:* Mentoring, emotional intelligence, adult development, wellbeing, leadership

## Introduction

In today’s complex and high-pressure work environments, traditional models of mentoring often fall short in fostering the personal and professional development required for sustained leadership. Mentoring relationships that prioritize only career progression and tactical skills ignore the emotional, psychological, and relational dynamics that underpin effective leadership. The Stage 5 Framework reimagines mentoring as a transformational process grounded in whole-person development. This paper explores how mentoring based on the Stage 5 model can support individual and organizational growth, offering a human-centered approach that promotes wellbeing, leadership, and sustainable impact.

Emotional intelligence (EI) theory, as developed by Goleman (1995), outlines five essential components: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. These attributes are central to the Stage 5 Framework and have been linked to improved leadership effectiveness and lower burnout (Cherniss, 2010).

Kegan’s (1982) constructive-developmental theory proposes that adults evolve through stages of meaning-making. Stage 5 reflects a capacity for complexity, systemic thinking, and holding multiple perspectives. This developmental maturity supports ethical and adaptive leadership. Identity formation theory provides a third pillar, particularly relevant for leaders navigating the intersection of personal and professional roles.

Identity coherence supports clarity, confidence, and purpose (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Mentoring that incorporates identity work can enhance psychological wellbeing and performance.

## Program

The Stage 5 Framework emphasizes four domains of growth: mental clarity, emotional intelligence, physical grounding, and relational maturity. Mentoring is structured to address each domain through customized one-on-one sessions. Mental clarity is fostered through reflective tools like journaling and visioning. Emotional intelligence is developed via conversations and real-time regulation techniques. Physical grounding includes practices like breathwork and energy check-ins.

Relational maturity is cultivated through values-based communication, deep listening, constructive feedback, and the capacity to navigate power dynamics, vulnerability, and trust. At its core, relational maturity requires an integration of emotional intelligence and identity development—recognizing the self as both distinct and connected to others. This enables mentees to engage in meaningful, complex interpersonal relationships without defaulting to defensiveness, avoidance, or over-identification with roles. Mentees grow to understand relational patterns, anticipate the emotional needs of others, and communicate with clarity, empathy, and courage.

The mentor guides the mentee through real-world relational challenges, helping them establish

healthy boundaries, take accountability, and model relational integrity within their teams.

The “Four Realities” exercise is a key intervention that helps mentees identify their present, perceived, desired, and feared states. This enables holistic self-assessment and goal-setting across personal and professional domains.

## Results

One mentee—a Vice President at a community college, appointed at 29 years old—entered mentoring to reconcile professional achievements with evolving life priorities. Now a husband and father, he sought alignment between leadership, identity, and wellbeing. The mentor guided him through the Four Realities framework, fostering deep insight and revealing how his rapid rise had left little space for self-reflection or personal integration. Through focused mentoring sessions, he learned to pause, regulate his internal state, and manage emotionally charged moments with calm and clarity. In high-stakes meetings and personnel conversations, he began showing up with greater emotional neutrality and presence. Staff noted his ability to remain calm under pressure, address conflict with clarity and compassion, and ground tense situations through empathetic leadership.

Relational maturity became a key area of transformation. The mentee began identifying and reworking long-standing relational patterns that included people-pleasing, over-functioning, and conflict avoidance. He learned to deliver difficult feedback without aggression or retreat, and to hold space for others’ emotions while staying anchored in his own. This evolution enabled him to reestablish trust with a team member who had previously felt marginalized and disengaged, resulting in renewed collaboration and shared accountability.

This emotional and relational stability had a ripple effect. As he became more confident and grounded, his team followed suit. Meetings became more productive, and trust deepened across the division. With increased mental clarity and emotional bandwidth, he began mentoring mid-level managers on his team, applying the same Stage 5 principles. He created space for them to reflect on their own professional and personal development, deepening the culture of mentorship across the college.

He also reported enhanced presence at home, able to fully engage with his spouse and children without the mental clutter of unresolved work stress. The sense of integration—between leadership, identity, and family—marked a profound shift in how he experienced his role.

## Discussion

The Stage 5 Framework aligns with existing research highlighting the importance of emotional intelligence and developmental maturity in leadership. Unlike surface-level mentoring models, this framework addresses the whole person. The case demonstrates how intentional reflection and

emotionally intelligent practices lead to long-lasting transformation.

Relational maturity, in particular, plays a critical role in leadership effectiveness and organizational health. Leaders who are relationally mature model trust, vulnerability, and accountability, which fosters psychological safety and collaboration. The mentee’s ability to rework conflict patterns, strengthen team communication, and become a mentor himself illustrates the powerful impact of addressing this developmental domain.

The ability to remain calm and grounded in conflict is increasingly critical in organizational leadership, especially in environments marked by uncertainty, change, or trauma. The mentee’s experience validates the theoretical foundations of Stage 5 mentoring and suggests the model’s utility for cultivating relationally mature, emotionally resilient leaders.

Moreover, by creating the internal conditions for clarity and calm, the mentee expanded his capacity to mentor others. This underscores the reciprocal nature of mentoring and suggests a multiplying effect: empowered mentees become effective mentors, furthering wellbeing across organizational networks.

Limitations of the model include the time required for deep reflection and the need for mentors to possess advanced interpersonal skills. Future research could explore the application of Stage 5 mentoring in team-based settings or with emerging leaders.

## Conclusion

Stage 5 mentoring is most effective for mid- to senior-level professionals navigating identity evolution, life transitions, and leadership complexity. It supports mentees in building internal alignment, emotional intelligence, and relational leadership. The model works best when implemented in trust-based, one-on-one relationships and can serve as a foundation for broader organizational culture change. By addressing the full spectrum of a leader’s experience—mental, emotional, physical, and relational—Stage 5 mentoring enables transformation that lasts. It helps individuals reconnect with their purpose, show up more fully in every domain of life, and create cultures of authenticity and trust. In today’s volatile world, this type of mentoring is not a luxury—it is a necessity.

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