LEADERS

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BEYOND ADVICE

Why mentoring is a relationship of equals, not a lecture

FIVE GENERATIONS

Tatjana Kolenc on learning across the age divide

ECOSYSTEMS, NOT PROGRAMMES

What changes when mentoring becomes the culture

COVER STORY · P. 4

Walking Beside, Not Ahead

Tatjana Kolenc

Heart Mentoring

CO-FOUNDER

THE CURATED INTERVIEW MAGAZINE FOR INDUSTRY LEADERS

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EDITOR'S LETTER

A word *before we begin*

Mentoring is easy to praise and easy to misunderstand. Tatjana Kolenc, who has spent years helping people grow through mentoring, wants the difference understood.

In her Xraised interview, the co-founder of Heart Mentoring argued that mentoring is neither advice nor a one-way transfer from old to young, but a relationship of equals in which both people change. She carried the idea into organisations too: a programme is something a company runs, while an ecosystem is something it becomes.

We wanted to tell her story now because five generations are working side by side for the first time, and many organisations are asking what AI will leave for people to do. Kolenc's answer is that judgement, values and wisdom still travel from person to person, and that the future belongs to those who know how to learn together.

— The Xraised editors

Contents

2 EDITOR'S LETTER
Why mentoring matters more in the age of AI

3 COMPANY PROFILE
About Heart Mentoring

4 COVER STORY
Walking Beside, Not Ahead

6 THE FEATURE
Tatjana Kolenc: walking beside, not ahead

8 YOUR STORY
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ON THE COVER

Tatjana Kolenc

Co-Founder, Heart Mentoring

About *Heart Mentoring*

Heart Mentoring

WHAT THEY DO

Heart Mentoring (Srčno Mentorstvo) is a mentoring platform and community whose mission is to help people learn from one another across generations and backgrounds, with members both offering and receiving support.

Srčno Mentorstvo ALSO KNOWN AS	**Mentoring platform and community** FOCUS
All ages, from 0 to 100 OPEN TO	**srcnomentorstvo.com** ONLINE



TATJANA KOLENC · CO-FOUNDER, HEART MENTORING

COVER STORY

Walking Beside, Not Ahead

TATJANA KOLENC · CO-FOUNDER, HEART MENTORING

Tatjana Kolenc, co-founder of Heart Mentoring, believes mentoring is a relationship rather than a lecture — and that the future belongs to the organisations that learn how to learn together.

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>
> — TATJANA KOLENC

Walking Beside, Not Ahead

TATJANA KOLENC · CO-FOUNDER, HEART MENTORING

When Tatjana Kolenc looks back for the best moments of her professional life, she does not begin with a promotion or a title. “I first remember people who believed in me,” she says. They passed on their knowledge and quietly directed her career, and they were her mentors. “I was fortunate to have mentors who challenged me, encouraged me and often saw potential in me before I saw it myself.” Somewhere along that road, she became one of them.

What matters most in anyone’s working life, she believes, is not the career advancement itself but what happens on the way: gaining confidence, discovering abilities you did not know you had. Alongside that, she arrived at a professional realisation that has stayed with her ever since. “Every organization is full of knowledge. But knowledge itself is not enough.” It only brings value when people are willing to share it, and Kolenc came to see mentoring as one of the most powerful ways for knowledge, wisdom and experience to move from one person to another. She decided to do as much as she could to raise awareness of it, and today she is co-founder of the Heart Mentoring Platform and Heart Mentoring Community, Srčno Mentorstvo. “For me, mentoring isn’t a profession. It’s a way of creating a space where people develop together.”

Her first task is often to clear away a misunderstanding. If advice alone could change lives, she argues, books, manuals and AI assistants would be enough. Reducing mentoring to advice, or to a one-way transfer of knowledge from someone older to someone younger, misses what it is: a relationship built on trust, mutual respect, openness and curiosity, and above all on genuinely equal dialogue. “A mentor doesn’t walk ahead, pointing to the only correct direction. A mentor walks beside another person.” Sometimes that means asking a difficult question, sometimes sharing a personal experience, sometimes simply listening — and giving advice only when it truly serves the other person.

Nor is the aim to be needed. “The goal of mentoring is never to create dependence,” Kolenc says. For her, a mentor’s greatest success is the moment a mentee no longer needs them. “I often say that the best mentors don’t create followers. They create confident, independent, empowered people.” The traffic also runs both ways. Every meaningful mentoring conversation changes mentor and mentee alike, professionally and personally, which is why she describes it as two people supporting each other and growing together.

From there her thinking moves from the individual to the organisation, and to the distinction she is most often asked about. “A mentoring program is something an organization runs. A mentoring ecosystem is something an organization becomes.” A programme has a beginning and an end, and usually serves a defined goal, such as bringing a new employee into the working environment — which, she is quick to say, is entirely fine. But she prefers to talk about a mentoring mindset and a mentoring culture, because that is when mentoring becomes organic, part of everyday organisational life.

In that kind of culture, mentoring stops being seen as an HR initiative and becomes the natural way people learn, collaborate and grow. “It’s an environment where asking for help is seen as strength, not weakness.” Knowledge flows across teams, departments and

> *I believe the future will belong to those who know how to learn together.*
>
> — TATJANA KOLENC

generations instead of staying locked inside individuals, and managers become role models for constant learning. Organisations, she argues, do not grow stronger simply by hiring the best talent. “They become stronger when talented people help one another succeed.”

Generations are where Kolenc sees the largest opportunity. For the first time in history, five generations are working side by side. Many organisations see that as complexity to be managed; she sees one of the richest stores of knowledge, experience and fresh thinking the workplace has ever had, and would rather talk about intergenerational opportunities than generational differences. “I often say that experience without curiosity becomes routine. And curiosity without experience risks repeating old mistakes.”

That is also her answer to the question of AI. Technology can store information, she says, but only people transfer judgement and the ability to think critically, and only people pass on values, wisdom and silent, tribal knowledge — the understanding not only of what works but of why it works. “That’s why mentoring remains irreplaceable, even in the age of AI.”

The Heart Mentoring Community was created to put that philosophy into practice: a place where everyone can receive support and offer it. Roles change naturally over a lifetime. “At one moment we need a mentor. At another, we become one.” Kolenc is truly happy, she says, to see most members act in both roles, and the community is open to people of all ages, from 0 to 100.

Asked for the one idea she hopes people remember, she reaches past technology and talent. “The future won’t belong to organizations that have the smartest people or to those who have access to the most advanced technologies,” she says. “I believe the future will belong to those who know how to learn together.” Her ambition for what comes next is disarmingly simple: if a conversation inspires one person to find a mentor, or to become one, something meaningful has been achieved. As she puts it, “every meaningful journey begins with a single conversation.”

LEADERS

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