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MENTORING

David B. Hutchins, SPHR

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Introduction

Do successful people attract mentors or does mentoring create successful people? This dilemma continues to be unanswered. Through its ups and downs in public image, philosophies and outcomes, mentoring remains a viable approach to career and leadership development. The mentor/mentee relationship can be very complex and yet very critical to career development. It can provide important career guidance through coaching and feedback. A mentor can compensate for an individual's lack of experience, organizational connections and influence during initial, mid and later career years. Such relationships have had direct impacts on rejuvenating the workplace environment. Mentoring can be a catalyst to a learning organization.

Purpose

The mentoring relationship has as its core purpose the professional development of the mentee through the counsel and guidance of the mentor. A successful mentoring relationship provides positive outcomes for both the mentee and mentor through the expansion of knowledge, skill, energy and creativity. The mentor provides career advancing skills to guide the mentee in positioning and presenting themselves in a manner which results in professional development.

There are several potential outcomes for mentoring to enhance:

- Mentee performance excellence.
- Mentee self confidence.
- Organizational performance.
- Organizational communication.
- Creativity and idea exposure.
- Development of a cooperative, productive and service oriented environment.

By providing feedback in such areas as job performance, relationships, technical information and role expectations, the mentor passes on lessons learned throughout his or her career. As a result, mentors come to feel that they have had an opportunity to "make a difference" and have made a real contribution to their profession, their organization and their own life.



The Mentor

Definitions of "mentor" are quite varied, yet include strong consistencies. Generally, a mentor is described as a teacher, guide, counselor, sponsor or facilitator.

A mentor is removed from the mentee's immediate work environment. If the mentor is located within the same organization, he or she is generally high-middle to a top-level manager. Mentors located outside the organization are either those identified as successful in their profession or through professional association with the mentee.

Certain qualities have been identified in successful mentors. Some of those qualities include:

- Genuine interest.
- Sensitivity to another's needs and development.
- Excellent listening skills.
- Time availability.
- Commitment.
- Confidentiality.
- Avoids dominance, control or over-protection.
- Excellent coaching and feedback skills.

The role of the mentor includes the following:

- Help the mentee feel closely identified with his or her professional environment.
- Help the mentee through difficult situations.
- Build the mentee's self-confidence.
- Establish clear, open, two-way communication.
- Compensate for mentee's lack of experience and skills.
- Be a source of information and encouragement.
- Provide career guidance.
- Help develop creative and independent thinking.

The Mentee

The mentee may be at various stages in his or her career development, from entry level to highly experienced. The mentee's challenge is to identify a mentor who has sufficiently and successfully advanced beyond the mentee's career point. Generally, mentors may be at least 5-10 or more years further advanced in their careers than the mentees. It is critical for the mentee to identify his or her desired outcomes from such a relationship prior to pursuing a potential mentor. This will provide the opportunity to establish mentor selection criteria to enhance the selection and potential outcomes expected of the mentor.

Certain qualities have been identified in successful mentees. Some of those qualities include:



- Genuine interest in professional and personal growth.
- Developing a sense of self, a personal vision.
- Open and receptive to feedback, coaching.
- Commitment to learning.
- Willing to take risks.
- Self-management skills.
- Desire for self-fulfillment.

The role of mentee includes the following:

- Open and sincere communication.
- Effective utilization of mentor time and counsel.
- Drive the development of relationship expectations.
- Establish mutually clear developmental goals.
- Utilize active listening.
- Be sensitive to the needs of the mentor.

The Relationship

The process of establishing a mentor/mentee relationship should be based upon naturalness, choice and a sense of partnership. A core value should be the mutual desire to participate, define expectations and show respect. Through mutual respect and liking, the pair will develop a dynamic, reciprocal relationship, reflecting giving and receiving for both mentor and mentee. It should be viewed as a partnership, where both parties exchange ideas and opinions openly and freely.

Once the relationship is established, it must be nurtured. It is important to set goals and expectations at the beginning. The mentor drives vision and mission down to the mentee. The mentee drives reality up. Both parties should be selective as to what projects, problems or demands will be included within the relationship. To not become over-dependent upon the mentor, the mentee must show he or she is capable of independent thinking and is accountable for taking action. There should be a system for reporting results and planning future activities.

Summary

Most of the mentor/mentee relationship outcomes rest in the hands of the mentee. As the mentee searches for a mentor, the mentee must first look within to identify his or her needs and desires from this important relationship. The mentor can provide a sense of vision and mission, while the mentee is responsible for developing a career plan based in the reality of his or her own expectations.

Mentoring has the potential to support individual and organizational leadership development. Through the continuing growth of the complexity of organizational performance and the demands on individual contributors, mentoring provides a resource and outlet for continuous development and learning.



Mentors and mentees must be open, committed and ready for a dynamic, challenging and intimate relationship based upon trust, mutuality and dedication to professionalism.

Thanks to David B. Hutchins, SPHR of the SHRM Training & Development Committee for contributing this paper.



THE VALUE OF MENTORING

Mentoring Series Part I

By Nancy R. Lockwood, SPHR, GPHR, HR Content Expert

Definition

Mentor—a wise and trusted teacher or counselor.

Source: Webster's II New College Dictionary, 2001, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.

The Purpose of Mentoring

In the business world, mentoring has become a common practice to nurture the talents of upcoming employees. The primary purpose of mentoring is professional development. A successful and respected professional (referred to as the mentor) works with another professional (referred to as the mentee) who seeks to grow and advance in the organization. Beyond individual training and development, mentoring serves additional purposes in an organization. In the big picture, effective mentoring provides organizations with a number of advantages:

- 1) projection of a strong and positive employer brand;
- 2) greater employee loyalty;
- 3) increased retention;
- 4) promotion of underrepresented candidates; and 5) advancement of talented individuals.

Although some may argue that mentoring and supervising are the same, the mentoring relationship is distinct from the supervisory relationship in several ways. First, in most instances, the mentor is not the mentee's supervisor and therefore does not have the responsibility to evaluate the mentee's work performance. Second, the relationship between the mentor and the mentee is confidential and requires significant trust to be effective. And third, the mentoring relationship may be for a defined period of time (e.g., a year in a formal mentoring program) or may last for a number of years (e.g., informal mentoring).

Evolution of a Mentoring Relationship

Mentoring can be effective at all stages of one's career (entry, mid and senior levels). Although the typical mentor is more senior and often older than the mentee, that scenario is not always true in today's fast-paced marketplace.



The formal mentoring program (discussed more fully in Part II of Briefly Stated Mentoring Series) falls under the domain of human resources and is a more structured process than the informal mentoring relationship.

Formal mentoring programs include selection processes for mentors and mentees, pairing of mentors and mentees, orientation, periodic reviews, completion and evaluation. Informal mentoring relationships evolve over time and are decided upon between two professionals who know each other in the workplace are introduced by mutual colleagues or meet through professional associations.

Successful formal and informal mentoring programs are grounded in trust, respect and mutually agreed-upon goals.

The organizational environment also plays a significant role in the development and nurturance of mentoring relationships. Whether the organization is small or large, for profit or nonprofit, there are the key characteristics that create a favorable organizational environment for mentoring: organizational focus (having a positive culture with a shared understanding of the firm's purpose and objectives); skill development (emphasizing training and development within the organization); organizational design (dealing with conflicting work schedules, time demands and physical proximity); and gender issues (effectiveness of the mentoring relationship can be impacted by the level of intimacy and closeness between mentor and mentee.)

Finally, professional associations provide another avenue to locate formal mentoring programs. Some professional associations offer formal mentoring programs as a benefit to their members and these programs may be available at the national, state or chapter level.

Mentors—Selection, Characteristics, Outcomes

The first key to being a mentor is the willingness to help others learn, achieve and advance. Although a senior manager may be an excellent role model, not everyone possesses the necessary skills to be a strong mentor. In addition to having a genuine interest in helping others (including willingness to make the necessary time commitment), a master mentor exhibits characteristics listed below.

- Strong interpersonal skills.
- Organizational knowledge.
- Extensive network of resources inside and outside the organization.
- Exemplary supervisory skills.
- Technical competence.
- Personal power and charisma.
- Patience and risk taking.
- Status and prestige.
- Knowledge about the profession.
- Ability to share credit.
- Emotional maturity.



- Willingness to be responsible for someone else's growth and advancement.

Recruiting Strategies for Mentors

While many mentors hold senior positions in the organization, good mentors can be found at all levels of the company. The process of locating appropriate potential mentors is not complicated but requires time, persistence and planning. Three recruiting strategies to locate mentors are to use volunteers, use nominations by executives or use nominations suggested by mentees. Whatever strategies are used in recruitment, a successful mentor should have the following qualifications: 1) willingness to assume and visibly demonstrate leadership; 2) demonstrated people-oriented behavior; 3) being regarded as successful in the organization; 4) knowledge of the company's vision, mission, goals, culture, policies and programs; 5) commitment to developing staff; 6) willingness to share personal experiences relevant to the goals of the mentee; and 7) willingness to develop goals, to coach and to give feedback.

Management Skills Necessary for Mentoring

The basic competencies listed below encompass listening, giving feedback, planning and coaching as some of the essential management skills for mentoring relationships. These skills are critical for mentors in order to provide quality mentoring.

- Planning performance: Assist mentee in setting objectives, creating action plans, scheduling time and determining resource requirements.
- Appraising performance: Observe and evaluate performance and provide appropriate feedback.
- Giving coaching and feedback: Provide feedback that reinforces quality performance or coaching to improve performance. (The function of coach—a tutor or a private instructor—is one aspect of mentoring.)
- Modeling: Demonstrate desirable task performance.
- Delegating: Determine appropriate tasks to be assigned and negotiate agreements on the tasks (e.g., time for completion, experts to be consulted and/or resources).

Outcomes of Effective Mentoring for the Mentor

While not immediately apparent (nor often discussed), a successful mentoring relationship is often a positive experience for the mentor as well as the mentee. To encourage and reward mentors, some organizations include mentoring in performance appraisal programs. As a result, mentors can justify the time spent with the mentee and be acknowledged for their work, commitment and results. Potential outcomes of being a mentor are:

- Fulfillment and satisfaction of helping others.
- Making a difference to the profession and organization.
- "Payback" for the support received from others in the past.
- Help in developing creative and independent thinking.



- Friendship.

The Mentee—Selection, Characteristics, Outcomes

Employees seeking a mentoring relationship may be at different stages of their career—from entry level to senior professionals. The process of matching mentees with mentors may be structured, as in a formal mentoring program administered by the human resource department, or informal and evolving naturally and over time. One of the considerations of a formal mentoring program is the selection of the participants or mentees (see Figure 1). The nominee process for mentees may involve self-nomination, supervisor nomination and/or sponsor nomination (someone other than the employee’s supervisor who views that individual as having potential). To locate a mentor for an informal mentoring relationship, employees connect with senior professionals whom they have met previously, for whom they have respect and with whom they feel they could work and grow.

Figure 1: Eight Key Populations of Potential Mentees

Underrepresented demographic groups: Promote diversity

New recruits: Acclimate new employees to the job and company culture

Recent grads: Assist in the transition to workplace and life after college.

Promising employees: Reward talented individuals at all levels with mentors to retain them.

Satellite employees: Help off-site employees feel more in touch socially and professionally.

Interoffice transferees: Assist employees who may not yet know the culture of the office.

Interdepartmental transferees: Provide assistance and orientation for the first few months.

8. Expatriates: Assist employees working abroad who may need mentoring to adapt to the language, culture and different working relationships. Employees from headquarters may also mentor local nationals to help them understand the company’s corporate culture.

*Source: Adapted from **Launching a Mentor Program, SHRM White Paper, by A. C. Poe, 2002, retrieved from www.shrm.org.***



Characteristics of a Mentee

Individuals who exhibit the characteristics listed below are excellent candidates for the mentee role. Employees who have a high degree of self-efficacy are more likely to have an effective mentoring relationship.

- Commitment to learning.
- Genuine interest in professional and personal growth.
- Active listening skills.
- Openness and receptiveness to receiving feedback and coaching.
- Self-management skills.
- Willingness to take risks.
- Desire for self-fulfillment.
- Willingness to develop a sense of self and personal vision.

Outcomes of Effective Mentoring for the Mentee

An effective mentoring relationship produces significant growth and positive outcomes for the mentee, including:

- Increased confidence.
- Greater awareness of organizational politics and culture.
- Appreciation and effective use of networking.
- Proactive approaches to tasks and projects.
- Improved organizational performance.
- Expanded effective communication skills.
- Movement toward “expert” status.
- Increased compensation, promotions, rewards.

The Manager as Mentor

Traditionally, the mentor is not the mentee’s manager but more often a senior professional who does not have supervisory responsibility for the mentee. However, the manager can also serve as a mentor (see Figure 2), with resulting managerial benefits from mentoring one’s own employees:

- Opportunity to communicate corporate values.
- Reduced turnover.
- Increased loyalty.
- Faster learning curves by talented staff.
- Greater sense of team within work group.
- Increased employee productivity.



- An innovative environment.
- Creation of allies for the future.

Figure 2: Advantages of a Managing Mentor

Role Model: Emulates the values of the organization.

Coach: Helps clarify the organization's culture, political structure and vision to encourage mentees to avoid political traps that could derail them from a fast track in the organization.

Broker: Provides contacts in the company that mentees may not have.

- Advocate: Is a cheerleader for mentees.

Source: Adapted from Coaching, Counseling, & Mentoring: How to Choose & Use the Right Technique to Boost Employee Performance, by F. M. Stone, 1999, New York: American Management Association.

Literature and Research

The Mentoring of Employees: Is Your Organization Taking Advantage of This Professional Development Tool?¹ The term “mentor” first appeared in Homer’s Odyssey as the name of King Ulysses’ trusted friend, Mentor, whose task was to guide and educate Ulysses’ son. In today’s workplace, research across a wide range of professions demonstrates that employees who are involved in mentoring relationships have higher levels of job satisfaction and higher levels of commitment to their organizations.

A recent study reported that 35% of employees who do not receive regular mentoring planned to seek other employment within a year. In contrast, only 16% of employees with good mentors were planning to leave their companies.

Mentoring in Organizations: A Social Judgment Perspective for Developing Tomorrow’s Leaders:² A recent research article presents a theory of mentoring and proposes that effective mentorship depends on the ability of the mentor to assist the mentee in solving complex social problems in the mentee’s career.

According to this article, the social judgment capacities (e.g., moral and social reasoning, wisdom and social perceptiveness) are fundamental to excellent mentoring. As a form of social support, the quality and effectiveness of mentoring increases with more advanced experience and knowledge of the mentors when they are matched with mentees with the goal of advancing mentees’ development and career.

In addition, solutions implemented by mentors must be applied in a social context—



that is, revised and/or adapted to the mentee (e.g., interpersonal skills, attitudes) and the organization (e.g., culture, reward system) to ensure workability. Finally, the various components of the mentor's wisdom may influence how mentoring functions are applied.

An Examination of the Role of Age in Mentoring Relationships:³ With the change in workforce demographics, there is increasing focus on age in the workplace. However, little research has been conducted regarding the impact of age diversity on the nature and results of mentorships. In this article, the authors consider the role of mentoring relationships in successful career development and, more specifically, why mentoring may be affected by age.

This study, based on survey data from professional non-faculty employees of a large university, included a total of 88 employees from a possible 635 professionals. Earlier research shows that people judge others by their expectations of the "social clock"—that is, where they think others should be in life according to their age. However, in this economy and workplace, some mentors are younger than their mentees. The study discusses advantages and disadvantages of mentoring by someone of similar age or younger (reverse-age mentoring). For example, similar-age mentors and mentees may have shared experiences in common and similar interests and goals, making communication easier.

In contrast, disadvantages of similar-age mentoring include concerns about knowledge and experience, relationship boundary issues and competition for the same jobs. The study also documents advantages to younger mentors, including a positive atmosphere, greater respect and more networking opportunities. Disadvantages are specific skill deficiencies, concerns about knowledge and experience, and jealousy.

In Brief

Mentoring can be a complicated process. HR cannot simply leap toward mentoring programs and apply them as a solution to alleviate problems in the organization without seriously studying and understanding the various aspects of mentoring—whether a formal program or informal mentoring relationships. Because mentoring involves human relationships, the mentoring process has many elements that can result in success or failure. Trust, respect, commitment and confidentiality are key factors.

Not surprisingly, traditionally studies that measure mentorship effectiveness focus on factors such as pay increases, promotion rates, upward mobility and speed of career advancement. Other variables that influence effective mentoring relationships are the psychological factors of interpersonal relationships, such as sense of identity, intimacy, socialization and commitment. The workplace environment also plays a role in whether mentoring relationships are successful for both formal and informal mentorships. Yet despite possible complications, mentoring is a viable tool for HR if strategically applied and administered.



FORMAL AND INFORMAL MENTORING

Mentoring Series Part II

By Nancy R. Lockwood, SPHR, GPHR, HR Content Expert

Fast Fact

In a recent survey, 23% of HR professionals said their organization has a formal mentoring program, 73% do not and 4% plan on implementing one.

Source: SHRM 2004 Benefits Survey Report,
www.shrm.org/research/surveys

Definition

Mentoring relationships can take different forms—formal or informal. Formal mentoring programs are typically established within an organization, where a mentor is assigned to a mentee. Informal mentoring relationships more often develop through work relationships as potential mentors and mentees get to know each other either in the organization or through a professional group outside the workplace.

Formal Mentoring Programs

In the business world, formal mentoring programs are increasingly gaining attention as a vehicle to improve turnover, foster employee loyalty and provide training and development to talented employees. As discussed below in the Literature and Research section, research has documented how formal mentoring programs can be advantageous, yet also challenging to administer effectively.

Within a corporate setting, human resources is often the department charged with the task of developing formal mentoring programs to address staffing, employee relations and training and development. Prior to setting up a formal mentoring program, it is appropriate to consider the goals of such a program within the organization. If strategically and effectively administered, formal mentoring programs can be a successful tool to combat high turnover and reward key employees.



Getting the Program in Place

Facilitating the mentoring process involves a number of critical steps before the formal mentoring program can be put in place. Before beginning the investigation process, it is recommended that HR create a team to coordinate the formal mentoring program. The HR mentoring team would be comprised of individuals who care about the growth and development of others.

To best support mentors and mentees in the mentoring program, it is recommended that the HR mentoring team be skilled in coaching, counseling, communicating with appropriate assertiveness, negotiating and giving feedback.

The first step is to assess the organization's goals and needs, and, consequently, the opportunities that a mentoring program could strategically offer. Determining if there is a gap and whether a formal mentoring program is the best intervention is best accomplished through an environmental scan to gather information.

The next step is to determine if the organization would be committed to a formal mentoring program. (It may be appropriate to conduct interviews with executive management and/or administrators.) At this point, the results sought from a formal mentoring program would be documented. An action plan and timeline would be created to guide the team in charge of the mentoring process.

Next, the HR mentoring team would identify the groups of people who would benefit most from the mentoring process (e.g., targeting women to move into managerial roles or candidates for senior executive positions). Individual mentees may be nominated by their supervisors, may volunteer or may formally apply for acceptance into the mentoring program.

Before matching mentees with mentors, the appropriate mentors must be identified after considering their ability to provide guidance. Personality and compatibility are also important factors in the selection process.

Prior to the start of the mentoring sessions, it is prudent to orient both the mentor and the mentee regarding their respective roles. Topics to be covered include time commitments, types of activities, time and budget support, relationship with the mentee's manager and reporting requirements. The orientation may also include skill practice for mentors regarding feedback and coaching; for mentees, training on career planning and goals for the mentoring relationship.

Before the mentor begins to work with a mentee, it would be wise to have a written drafted plan that the mentor and mentee discuss and agree upon. Once the agreed plan is in place, the mentoring relationship can formally begin. Communication may take place through face-to-face meetings, e-mail, phone calls or other means. The time frame for this relationship may



be weeks or months, depending upon the goals of the formal program itself and/or the individual mentoring relationship.

The final stage of a formal mentoring program is three-fold:

- Review the ongoing mentoring process;
- Conclude the mentoring relationship; and 3) evaluate the mentoring program overall. The review process is important because it assists the HR mentoring team in determining if the experience has been successful (e.g., by discussing performance planning, coaching and feedback sessions). The conclusion stage of the formal mentoring relationship is equally important. When a member of the pair believes the process is no longer productive or the goal has been achieved, either party can agree to end it (referred to as a no-fault conclusion or termination).
- The third and last stage of a formal mentoring program is the evaluation. The HR mentoring team reviews all angles of the program and determines if the goals were accomplished and how to improve the overall program.

Advantages

Formal mentoring programs have the following advantages:

- Project a positive employer brand.
- Reduce turnover.
- Provide individualized training.
- Promote diversity with greater opportunities for women, minorities and other underrepresented group.
- Facilitate opportunities to formally communicate the organization's vision, mission and values.
- Open doors for mentees by mentors offering coaching, contacts and guidance regarding the company's cultural, political and strategic goals, thus assisting talented employees in advancing within the company.
- Provide a vehicle for succession planning to nurture talented individuals who would be considered as upwardly mobile.

Challenges

As listed below, there are many challenges in developing a successful formal mentoring program.

- Potential lack of support from the senior management.
- Unsuccessful mentoring match as set up by HR (e.g., the mentoring relationship may not work out due to personality conflicts).
- Difficulty finding the time for mentoring sessions due to daily work load.
- Jealousy from colleagues who may perceive mentees as having additional



advantages.

- Unwillingness by the mentor to provide the necessary time for mentoring sessions.
- Short duration of formal mentoring relationships (less than a year), primarily focusing on the mentee's short-term goals.
- Lack of trust and confidentiality between the mentor and mentee.
- Perception that certain mentees are viewed as “needing a mentor.”

Informal Mentoring Relationships

The informal mentoring relationship differs significantly from a formal mentoring program in two ways: 1) the mentor and the mentee are not matched by the third party but rather select each other informally; and 2) the informal mentoring relationship is not structured, as compared with a formal mentoring program.

The nature of an informal mentoring relationship creates the groundwork for the relationship because it is formed differently than a formal mentoring relationship. For example, the degree of trust, commitment and level of coaching often exceeds that of a formal mentoring relationship. An informal mentoring relationship may continue much longer than a formal mentoring relationship and often results in a lasting friendship, with benefits to both the mentor and the mentee. Consequently, these informal mentoring relationships tend to be more successful overall than formal mentoring relationships, resulting in increased confidence, greater visibility, higher compensation and achievement of promotions.

Advantages

Examples of advantages of informal mentoring relationships are:

- Develops as a “natural” match, not assigned by the third party: the decision to become mentor and mentee develops naturally over time or can be facilitated by introductions from mutual professional colleagues.
- Provides different types of networking opportunities (e.g. social contacts and events in addition to professional contacts).
- Not limited by time agreements, as in a formal mentoring program.
- Provides higher level of coaching due to mentor having a greater commitment to the mentee (compared with a mentor in a formal mentoring relationship where the match was created by HR).
- Helps with the management of change by strengthening the new culture through direct and one-to-one interactions across the organization.
- Often results in a lasting friendship.

Challenges

As with other types of training and development initiatives, informal mentoring relationships may have disadvantages for both the mentor and the mentee, as outlined below.



- The mentoring relationship may be viewed by others as an inappropriate relationship.
- The mentor may not be well trained in the responsibilities of mentors.
- The mentee may not understand the purpose and/or parameters of the mentoring relationship.
- There may be difficulty getting permission for mentoring sessions outside daily work responsibilities.
- There are fewer senior women available to provide mentoring to women.

Literature and Research

Formal Mentoring: Is There a Strategic Fit?¹ In the last few years, many organizations have begun to establish formal mentoring programs. Some have been successful while others have not. According to this research, the missing link is a corporate-level mentoring strategy. The lack of such strategy inhibits the mentoring process from becoming an integral part of the organization's culture. Consequently, the maximum benefit is not gained from an effective formal mentoring program. A corporate mentoring strategy provides a business case for formal mentoring, thus justifying the need for and benefits of the mentoring process and programs in an organization. When the business case is established, management can allocate the appropriate resources to support a formal mentoring program.

It is the alignment of the corporate mentoring strategy that drives the support for, and effectiveness of, a formal mentoring program in the organization. To formulate a comprehensive corporate mentoring strategy, process and programs, an in-depth understanding of organizational dynamics (i.e., strategic initiatives, culture, structure, financial position, etc.) is necessary. For the mentoring strategist to have a sound understanding of the company culture and overall strategic positioning, it is recommended to conduct an internal assessment to gain in-depth familiarity with the organization's values, mission, vision, strategies and long- and short-term initiatives. In addition, it is equally important to understand the advantages and disadvantages of formal mentoring relationships.

- A typical formal mentoring program includes the following steps:
- Identify target audiences that mentoring programs would serve.
- Identify the criteria for selecting mentors and mentees.
- Recruit qualified mentors and mentees.
- Interview and select mentors and mentees.
- Match mentors and mentees.
- Train mentors and mentees to gain the maximum benefit from the mentoring relationship.
- Evaluate the mentor and mentee experience.

Expected outcomes:

- Enhanced organizational skills and competencies.



- Improved employee recruitment, engagement and retention.
- Cultivation of an inclusive, team-based corporate culture.

Comparing Formal and Informal Mentors: Does Type Make a Difference?²

Mentoring relationships benefit the organization as well as the mentee by creating stronger connections among organizational members or facilitating the development of talented employees. In a comprehensive study, researchers compared the results of formal and informal mentoring. They surveyed 1,162 men and women mentees from three professions—engineering, social work and journalism—and found that informal mentoring relationships provide greater results than do formal mentoring programs. This research revealed that formal and informal mentoring programs provide different types of psychological support and career guidance. The study indicates that informal mentors provide more career development mentoring (e.g. coaching, increasing mentees' exposure of visibility and providing challenging assignments). In contrast to formal mentors, informal mentors are also more likely to offer psychological activities (e.g., facilitating social interactions, counseling, role modeling, and friendship).

The researchers suggest that the differences between formal and informal mentoring relationships may be due to the differences in their structures. For example, formal mentoring programs typically last less than a year and tend to focus on short-term goals. In informal mentoring relationships, the mentor may recognize his or her own qualities in the mentee, and the mentee may see qualities in the mentor that he or she may wish to have. Mentors may select mentees based on whom they see as having potential, and mentees may select mentors who have senior connections in the organization. However, assigned mentoring relationships in a formal program may not easily duplicate these characteristics. One of the key findings of the study noted that individuals with formal mentors did not gain career development advantage over those with informal mentoring relationships. Rather, individuals with informal mentors received more promotions and higher compensation than did formally mentored employees.

Finally, the study also examined differences between formal and informal mentoring for female employees. The findings indicate that female mentees may not experience the same quality of benefits from formal mentoring programs as do male employees in the areas of coaching, role modeling, social interactions and friendships. The researchers noted that formal mentoring programs do not appear to benefit women as much as men, and as a result are not recommended as a substitute for informal mentoring for women.

Global Mentoring Programs: Business Relationships Beyond Traditional Borders³ As recruitment increasingly pulls from different national borders, global mentoring programs may be an option for companies to develop their employees for competitive advantage. Mentoring can be a useful tool for individual growth and leadership development for both the mentor and the mentee. There are advantages and disadvantages to global mentoring programs. The primary advantage is that global mentoring programs can help foster global learning and knowledge exchange. For



example, global mentoring programs may result in human resource professionals gaining increased sensitivity and awareness of potential candidates as well as understanding the competencies necessary to foster appropriate placement to support corporate objectives. However, there are significant challenges to administering global mentoring programs: time dimensions, language barriers, cultural biases, travel costs and administration.

Global mentoring relationships are more likely to succeed with training for both the mentor and the mentee regarding the do's and don'ts related to legal and cultural issues. Mentoring coaches from diverse backgrounds can help ensure the success of global mentoring programs. Research also shows that successful global initiatives require goodwill and trust of people who come from different cultural paradigms. Global mentoring programs will have a better likelihood of success when the mentors and mentees are interested in global mentoring. Successful candidates for global mentoring must be inquisitive, enjoy learning, be open to making mistakes and want to connect with others different than themselves, as well as be part of the bigger picture.

There are, of course, limitations. One of the greatest challenges is that there will be resistance in the beginning to such programs, often due to lack of perceived benefits, rewards and workload issues. If the outcomes are not seen as measurable and compelling, it will be difficult to convey the benefits.

In Brief

Mentoring at its best—whether formal or informal—strengthens the skills and competencies of an organization's workforce, thus adding a competitive advantage in today's marketplace. Further, mentoring is one of the critical components in HR's set of tools that can strategically support the company's goals. As a profession, HR continues to seek effective avenues to bring value and visibility to its role and at the same time increase the value of the organization's human capital. By utilizing training and development options such as effective mentoring programs, HR can better focus on elements that positively impact the bottom line—staffing, retention, employee relations, diversity and corporate visibility/branding.



ESTABLISH POSITIVE, MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

*Pick the pair, clarify expectations, then
stand back and let the partnership develop.*

By Andrea C. Poe

I

wanted to help a young woman get ahead,” recalls Nicole Hayden, general manager for a commercial real estate company in Dallas. “What I did was create a gigantic mess that’s really turned me—and my company—off mentoring.”

Hayden reached out to a young receptionist, a move her company sanctioned. “I saw she had potential but also a lot of problems,” she explains. “I knew she needed a break and I thought I could help.” Hayden wanted to teach the young woman duties beyond the narrow scope of her job description. “I was grooming her to move up in the organization,” she notes.

Then the mentee, a single woman, became pregnant. “Everything changed suddenly. She began to feel like the world owed her a living. She came in late, missed work, mouthed off to me,” Hayden says, attributing the trainee’s bad attitude to stress. “She completely took advantage of the relationship we’d built.”

Other employees began to take notice and started asking why Hayden, who had no support from HR, was putting up with the insubordination. Finally, she had no choice but to fire the young woman, she says. The experience left a bitter taste. “I have to say I really don’t know if I’d be a mentor again,” Hayden adds.

“A bad mentoring relationship is worse than no mentoring at all,” says Larry Ambrose, managing partner of Perrone-Ambrose Associates, a Chicago-based consulting firm that specializes in mentoring relationships.

If a company sets up a formal mentoring program, HR needs to monitor participants’ progress without overstepping any confidentiality boundaries. It’s a tough but essential balance to strike because unsuccessful formal programs can drive out your rising stars. A negative experience in formal mentoring relationships can affect turnover rates and stress levels, concludes a recently published study led by Lillian Eby, Ph.D., an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Georgia. It also could lower morale, Eby speculates.

When they work, mentoring relationships can be good for the company, the mentor and mentee. “Research indicates that mentored individuals perform better on the job, advance more rapidly within the organization, report more job and career satisfaction and express lower turnover intentions than their nonmentored counterparts,” according to Eby’s study.

There are key HR elements to a successful mentoring program. The HR department needs to set the goals of the program and design it based on those goals. HR also has to take great care



in pairing the mentors and mentees, set realistic expectations for both parties and follow up with the pairs to make sure everyone is happy with the arrangement.

There also has to be strong buy-in from top management. “This can’t just be something coming out of the HR or training department, or it won’t be taken as seriously,” Ambrose says.

Bridging the Gap

Mentoring pairs seasoned members of the organization with less-experienced individuals. Mentors show trainees the ropes and serve as sounding boards, cheerleaders, gurus and even confidantes. Perhaps most importantly, mentors open doors into the network that helps people get ahead.

Some organizations design mentoring programs with a specific goal in mind, such as increasing diversity. For example, at Fannie Mae, the company’s Corporate Mentor Program is designed to encourage the advancement of high-potential employees, especially women and minorities. The program seems to be working: Women make up 44 percent of Fannie Mae’s management workforce, up from 36 percent in 1992; and minorities make up 25 percent of that group, up from 15 percent in 1992.

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“For women and people of color, mentoring provides them access to leadership and power that they’d normally be shut out of,” says Belle Rose Ragins, professor of human resource management at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, who studies mentoring.

“Mentoring relationships can help get people who have been excluded into the pipeline,” agrees Rosina Racioppi, chief operating officer of Women United, a Hillsboro, N.J., organization that provides development programs for women in Fortune 1,000 companies.

Other organizations order mentoring programs around different goals, such as grooming high-potential employees or newcomers. “Once an organization has a successful track record with mentoring relationships, there’s no reason they can’t have multiple tracks of mentoring going at once,” says Ambrose. “But I recommend they start with one to get the hang of it.”

When considering what type of mentoring program advances the goals of your organization, ask the following questions: Are you looking to groom a trainee for management? Do you want to acquaint new hires with the company? Are you looking to cross-train the sales and IT departments?



Goals are imperative. “The company needs to have a clear understanding of what the mentoring program is intended to do and communicate that to employees,” says David A. Thomas, Naylor Fitzhugh Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School.

Role Play

One of the most common problems with mentoring programs is incompatible pairings; it’s the fit that’s off, not the program. Allow as much choice as possible for the participants.

“It’s terribly important that they connect,” says Ambrose. That’s why he recommends asking trainees to choose three to five people in the organization they would like as mentors and then have the program coordinator select the one who fits the company’s goals.

Pairings at Fannie Mae have been successful, according to Cecilia Blacutt, senior project manager. “There are currently 300 formal pairs as compared to 25 pairs when the program started in 1994. Only two pairs have decided not to continue.” The trick? Detailed screening and matching done by the company’s pairing committee based on applicants’ interests and responses to an in-depth questionnaire.

What makes a successful mentor? It’s not enough that someone is good at his or her job and is well connected. A mentor must be someone with a good track record at the company, someone who understands the politics of the organization, someone willing to make a commitment of time and someone who wants to help others, according to Linda Smith, the New York-based senior vice president of Manchester Consulting.

Taking on a role as mentor isn’t just an altruistic experience, the experts say. “When we asked mentors why they do it, the No. 1 reason was to gain a better understanding of the more junior people they oversee,” reports Racioppi.

People tapped for a mentoring program also need the right stuff. “Although I’d like to say that anyone can be mentored, it isn’t so,” Racioppi says. When choosing someone to be mentored, HR should look for four traits: a willingness to learn; openness to input; ambition for his or her career; and promise within the organization.

The mentee is in the driver’s seat, says Racioppi. “They have to know what they’re going for. They can’t just sit at the knee of the mentor and be anointed. They have to take charge of their own career development.”

Mentoring programs only work if they’re voluntary. “You can’t force people into mentoring relationships,” warns Eby. Neglect is one of the biggest culprits in failed mentoring relationships, Eby’s research found.

Expectations



Training can go a long way toward preparing participants and warding off unrealistic expectations. Along with explaining the nuts and bolts of the program, let participants know that, as with any relationship, there may be snags along the way. Stumbling blocks could include miscommunication, neediness, interfering responsibilities, and productivity peaks and valleys.

“It helps if people go in knowing about the bad things that can happen,” says Eby. “If they’re aware of them, they’ll recognize the warning signs and be more apt to know what to do.”

Then lay out what’s expected of mentors and mentees, says Racioppi.

For instance, mentees may expect too much of mentors, wanting them to work solely on their careers. “Some mentees have inflated expectations of these mentoring programs,” notes Eby.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, some may be afraid to approach their mentors. “I’ve seen mentoring relationships fail only because no one knew who was supposed to pick up the phone and call first, so no one did,” says Thomas.

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The good news is that most problems surface in the early stages of the relationship, giving both parties a chance to either address the issues or get out, Eby notes.

The program should allow a no-fault termination in the first three months. “You have to take the stigma away from breaking these pairings because often people are afraid to break it off, afraid of hurting someone’s feelings,” says Thomas.

Fannie Mae provides guidelines for participants about what is expected of the relationship. The company also holds orientation sessions so mentors and mentees become acquainted with each other and with the program. Both parties sign a confidentiality agreement, an important element of trust building.

Confidentiality

A mentoring relationship will not deliver results if there isn’t trust. The best way to dissolve trust is for HR and other managers to breach confidentiality and become involved in the details of the relationship.

“Don’t get your nose way up in there,” warns Thomas. “Let the mentor and mentee know you’re there if they need you, but step back and let it happen.” That’s not to say there isn’t a role for HR. After all, the organization is responsible for the pairing.



“The coordinator should send out surveys periodically to check in on how it’s going. Don’t ask specifics about the relationship, but find out how often they’re meeting and what kinds of activities they’re doing,” Thomas recommends. “If a pair isn’t meeting often enough, ask them to come in and find out what’s going on, and give them a gentle nudge.”

Fannie Mae does formal and informal evaluations. Participants periodically fill out surveys to help the company better understand the strengths and weaknesses of the program. The company’s office of diversity, health and work/life initiatives reviews the responses.

HR should be there to step in if the mentors or mentees need help. “This usually gets them back on track,” says Ambrose. “When the pair feels the relationship loosening, that’s the time to sit down and exchange feedback.”

Time is another key component of successful mentoring. Rushing the process won’t help. HR should set it up, then stand back and be patient. It takes about a year for a mentoring relationship to solidify, experts say.

“The mentor and mentee need time to form a close bond, where trust is formed,” maintains Smith. “That’s something that takes time.” But not too much time. “The relationship needs to go long enough to have value, but not so long that it loses focus,” cautions Racioppi.

If a partnership works well, it may continue informally. Participants may find they like working together and wish to continue the relationship after the formal program has ended. “It’s not all that uncommon that long-term, intense relationships develop,” notes Eby.

Let it happen, the experts say. When formal mentoring partnerships transform into informal relationships, everyone wins. “HR should foster the development of informal mentoring relationships,” says Ragins



Creating a Mentoring Culture
by Dr. Linda Phillips-Jones



If we could observe an organization or community in which mentoring is highly valued, what would we see?

I thought it would be fun to poll several mentoring experts with this question. Their responses were enthusiastic and visionary. Here are some of the features they named.

Indicators of a Mentoring Culture

Being a mentor is highly prized and pervasive.

- The cultural “norm” is to mentor. Instead of its being an exceptional step, people expect themselves and others to mentor. (Judy Strother Taylor, youth development consultant for EMT Inc. and others)
- People go out of their way to help others be successful. Being seen as a mentor is a sign of status and influence. Helping others succeed is a key measurement of performance, even in individual contributor roles. (Tracy Weber, mentoring consultant/trainer for Microsoft Corporation and others)
- Volunteering is a family value. (Lynne West, Director, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Ventura Co., CA)
- Individuals look back to people in their lives who made a difference and want to give back. They look to organizations that offer mentoring as a volunteering opportunity. (West)

Learning is a priority.

Learning and development are highly valued. (Kathleen Barton, author, **Connecting for Success: How to Build a Mentoring Network to Fast-Forward your Career**, and senior consultant, The Mentoring Group)

- People are empowered to seek out ways to improve not only their job skills but also their holistic personal development. As a result, they regularly seek out informal mentoring relationships as both mentors and mentees. (Young Entrepreneurs Organization [YEO])
- The organization clearly values education and training and puts the resources—time and money—behind them. (Bunny Huller, Veterans Health Administration)
- Numerous learning experiences are available. For example, there are places for the newer members to hear the stories of the seasoned ones in informal but planned settings. Those in more responsible positions take younger ones on trips and to meetings. An intern program and intentional formal leadership development program is in place. There are regular Q&A lunches and a resource place that has technology, books, and tapes for all learning styles. (Sybil Towner, Mentoring Director, Women’s Ministries, Willow Creek Community Church)

Risk taking is the norm; failure is frequent. People receive feedback and reflect



E-mail Tips

by Dr. Linda Phillips-Jones



As much as we all complain about e-mail, it's a tremendous and inexpensive, night and day tool for distance mentoring.

Another advantage is that it lets you observe how your mentee writes in general and uses e-mail in particular. Your observations could be very helpful to him/her in the development process.

Just in case you're not as e-mail savvy as your eager mentee, here are some best practices to help you take the plunge.

Pay attention to confidentiality.

As you know, mentoring relationships must respect confidentiality in order to succeed. Who will read your e-mail? What will you do with any printed copies? As a general rule of thumb, don't write anything you wouldn't want showing up on the front page of tomorrow's newspaper.

Discuss response time expectations.

Talk with your mentee about expectations about an e-mail response from each other. As a general courtesy, it's best to reply within 24-48 hours, even if you say, "Just want you to know I received this and will try to get back to you by ____." What about instant messaging? Are you interested, or is this too intrusive?

Send short, newsy e-mails.

Rather than saving up your thoughts, news, and stories for long letters (or the next formal meeting), try to send short, two- or three-paragraph e-mails. If your telephone mentoring meetings are twice a month for 30 minutes each, you might send at least one e-mail during the weeks you don't have meetings.

Keeping this frequency of contact will help you stay up to date with your mentee on urgent, important, and even lightweight and humorous things. Since you won't be bumping into your mentee in the hall and having quick on-the-spot exchanges, you want to find ways to pick up on some



of these current occurrences.

Carefully consider your e-mail attachments and the items you forward. Because you're the mentor (a position of respect and power), your mentee will think he/she has to read everything and respond. Talk about expectations.

Always, always put your contact information below your name.

Never assume that your mentee has your phone number, preferred e-mail address, and even mailing address handy at all times. This rule also applies to **voicemails**: always, always leave the phone number at which you want to be called plus a couple of time options. Teach your mentee to do this, also.

Decide together if you want to "enhance" your e-mail.

Spend a little time thinking about how your e-mail looks and reads. Some individuals really enjoy using their software tools (bold, italics, underline, colors, different fonts, stationery changes). They say that readability is improved because replies stand out. Others see this as pretentious or at least a sign the person has too much time on his/her hands! Here are a couple of our biases.

Nix all small letters and all caps.

At first we thought the small-letter look was a kids-only practice, but we're amazed at how many adults have hopped onto this fad. As one critic put it, "Don't do this unless you're e e cummings." Using all small letters says, "I'm so busy I can't take time to press the shift key...even for you." Similarly, writing in all capitals seems like shouting and looks lazy. Enough said.

It's your call on "emoticons."

These are those little symbols that e-mailers use to help convey the tone (and show the emotions behind) a sentence. In case you haven't seen these, they're variations on ;-) (smiley face) or :- (sad face) using colons, hyphens, parentheses, and other symbols on the keyboard. Unfortunately, they can quickly look a little too cute. Think about what you like and what you're saying about yourself as you use them.



Stop Looking for the Ideal Mentor
by Dr. Linda Phillips-Jones



One of the most common questions we get from people is, “How can I find the right mentor?” When we talk further, we learn they’re hesitating about entering mentoring relationships because they haven’t yet found the right one.

Similarly if linked in a formal program with a mentor they don’t know, some mentees express disappointment because their mentor “doesn’t seem like a good fit” or “wasn’t what I expected.”

Somewhere along the way, these individuals were advised to choose a mentor who has a “compatible style” with theirs plus a number of other assets (e.g., is a good listener, has a high sense of integrity, “genuinely cares about me as a person,” and has plenty of time available).

As terrific as it would be to find a willing mentor with all of these qualities, it’s smart and a lot more efficient to find and start working with a mentor who may initially not seem like the perfect match. Remember, this is a temporary mentoring partnership, not a lifelong commitment.

Since you should have multiple mentors, anyway, see if you can look at your mentor pool in new ways. Gently pull mentoring from a variety of helpers, including at least one who may seem less than ideal. Here are some ideas:

Get mentoring from someone who has a very **different interpersonal or cognitive style** from yours.

If you’re sensitive and cautious, purposely link up with someone who’s blunt and not particularly good at reading or being careful about your feelings. Use this chance to thicken your skin a little and practice managing your feelings and reactions (a key part of Emotional Intelligence). If you’re a logical, very linear thinker, find someone who approaches challenges in nonlinear, right-brained ways.

Instead of seeking the mentor with generous amounts of time available for you, work with a **very busy mentor** who can only spare minutes at a time.

As a mentee, you’re responsible for learning quickly. Provided this mentor has something you’d like to gain and at least some time available for you, see what you can gain from this new kind of experience. Learn to prioritize, seize the most important help in those moments, and run with a few gems of wisdom. (Perhaps have a friend or second mentor help you sort out your learning and process the experience.)



Instead of seeking a mentor in your same location, consider finding a **distant mentor**, someone who lives or works in another organization, city, state/province, or country.

Remember that you're seeking help with your development from someone who has expertise, experience, confidence, or contacts you don't have. Yes, it's great to have face-to-face contact, but good mentoring doesn't require it. If you possibly can, arrange to get together in person once or twice, but enjoy what you can learn long distance.

Be willing to receive your mentoring by e-mail, phone, letters, and faxes. This is a great chance to get feedback on how you're perceived in these modes and also to learn the pros and cons of another geographic location. (Check our Archive for the article on [Distance Mentoring](#).)

Purposely choose a mentor who **differs from you in gender, culture, ethnic group, or work specialty**.

Similar to the "stretch" that distance mentoring can provide, take the opportunity to learn from and get along with a person who sees the world differently from the way you do. Ask this "non-soulmate" for honest feedback on your approach to situations and how you come across. Have this mentor teach you his/her equally effective (or better) ways of doing things. Withhold any temptation to discount those strategies, as you may be tempted to do. Commit to respect and laugh together about each other's similarities, differences, and stereotypes about each other.

Should you choose a very busy mentor 2,000 miles away who's blunt, short on praise, the opposite gender, and quick to tell you what you're doing wrong? Maybe. Maybe not. But at least consider him/her for one of your mentoring experiences provided the potential for your learning is great. Gain what you can, practice your confronting and negotiating skills as needed, and move on to other mentors when you sense the time is right.



MENTORING PREP FORM

Please fill out the form below in advance of your next session with your mentor, and e-mail or fax to them.

Date of call	
Goals Identified from Prior Session	
Accomplished/Learned	
Challenges or Concerns	
Obstacles	
Other Questions	