

Mentoring: An old methodology becomes a new approach for business

Mentoring 1-2-3

"If I have seen a little further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants."

Sir Isaac Newton

On the Shoulders of Giants

Mentoring is not a new idea. In fact, the origins of mentoring can be traced back to ancient Greece when Socrates assumed the role of mentor for the likes of Plato, Aristotle and Alexander the Great. In fact, history and pop culture are rife with examples of people who credit mentors for providing the guidance and encouragement they needed to be successful – whatever their endeavor. Mozart had Bach, Lance Armstrong had Eddie Merckx, Richard Branson (billionaire entrepreneur) had Freddie Laker. Would these individuals have reached such heights without the careful tutelage of their mentors? We cannot say for sure, but one hardly need look to the realms of scientific investigation into the role of mentoring in job satisfaction and career advancement to recognize the common sense appeal of learning from the experience of others.

Based on the proliferation of journal articles, and mentoring programs in every sector and in every industry from Airlines to Waste Management, it is safe to say the society has jumped on the mentoring bandwagon - and rightly so. For individuals, community groups and companies alike, participating in a mentoring program seems to be the progressive course of action. Still, how can a person or a business be certain that their investment will pay off? In this paper, we will take as our example the challenges of the corporate world and discuss how the application of three key principles to a formal mentoring program can help to overcome those challenges. We will also briefly discuss the difference between coaching and mentoring and why mentoring is our solution of choice.

The Brain Drain

Today's businesses are facing a situation never before encountered in history. Over the next two decades, the baby boomer population of approximately 76 million

will begin leaving the workforce for retirement taking a wealth of vital and irreplaceable corporate knowledge and experience with them. To compound the issue, it is predicted that there will be a dearth of younger, qualified workers to step in and fill this gap. To overcome these formidable hurdles, businesses will need to act now to formulate knowledge continuity plans and retention strategies to staunch this knowledge drain, keep young workers from defecting, and attract talent to their organization over competitors. Wise businesses will include a well thought out mentoring program as part of their strategy.

Companies that offer mentoring programs enjoy the following benefits:

- Mentored individuals have more career mobility/opportunity, recognition, higher reported job satisfaction and a higher promotion rate than non-mentored individuals
- Mentors report benefiting from learning, developing a personal relationship, personal gratification, and enhanced managerial skills
- Mentoring helps bridge the knowledge gap that occurs when senior people leave
- There is a positive connection between mentoring and factors that impact retention
- There is a positive connection between mentoring and factors that impact productivity
- Mentoring programs with proven results attract new talent
- Mentors represent continuity in knowledge and practice

Mentoring 1-2-3

Given the benefits of an effective mentoring program, and potentially crippling knowledge drain that looms on the horizon, it seems unwise to leave the success of your mentoring program to chance. So what does a well thought out mentoring program include? Based on 20 years of organizational development experience, we have found the following three key components that

should be part of your mentoring program in order to ensure success:

1. Careful selection of mentor/mentee matches
2. Support for mentoring program participants
3. Measuring and managing

1. Selection of Mentoring Matches

Much research has been done on the impact of various personal characteristics on mentoring partnerships. Studies have looked at race, gender, culture, career stage, what mentors look for in a mentee and visa versa, and much more. Although conclusions are occasionally conflicting, research supports the conclusion that overall success and satisfaction are higher when partners perceive themselves to be similar. This is a point echoed by those who have first hand experience with mentoring, including Marco Pagani, the former president of Nortel's Optical Division. In an open panel discussion at a forum on mentoring in the high tech industry, Mr. Pagani offered this advice, "There isn't a cookie cutter approach. The mentor and mentee have to click, as well as have an alignment of values and styles."

It is important to know, up-front, that the partnerships developed in your mentoring program are going to be immediately productive. Mentoring programs fail because participants do not have key similarities, clear goals and ease in connecting. Thus, an effective mentoring program will offer a strategic approach to matching on a variety of criteria. Strategic matching is the first step in building a successful program, however, since no program can consider all variables, an effective mentoring program must also include support and immediate and ongoing feedback on how well the pairings are moving the mentor and mentee toward desired outcomes.

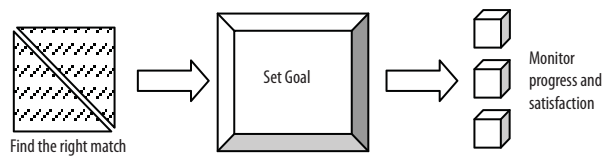
Mentor vs. Coach

There is often confusion between mentoring and coaching. Coaching is focused on functional outcomes while mentoring implies the development of a relationship that extends beyond the functional into the personal. Mentoring may include coaching, but coaching does not include mentoring.

Mentoring	Coaching
Mentoring offers support for general professional development including technical, professional and personal skills.	Coaching offers support for technical, skills-related learning
Implies the development of a social relationship between mentor and mentee in order to share what the mentor has learned personally to provide context or a different perspective	Generally within the bounds of a professional relationship, following a specific development process

2. Support

The second step to ensuring a mentoring program is effective is monitoring and supporting the mentoring relationships to ensure that purposeful connections are taking place. The best approach for this purpose would be to collect feedback from both mentor and mentee after every interaction. Individuals should be able to report honestly and confidentially to an impartial third party on how they feel each interaction is moving them toward their stated goals.



3. If you Can't Measure it...

Perhaps you've heard the old business adage, "if you can't measure it, you can't manage it". This rings especially true for mentoring programs. Since measuring everything your mentoring program is accomplishing is not possible, it is important to identify the elements of the program that will determine its success and measure those. When you are considering what to measure, be sure to consider those things that will interest key stakeholders in your company such as:

- increased productivity
- increased efficiency
- increased quality
- better problem solving
- less time spent correcting mistakes
- lower staff turnover, less recruitment, lower training costs
- improved communications and information flow
- improved employee satisfaction/engagement

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Mentoring	Coaching
A mentor is generally a person who occupies the position the mentee wishes to achieve or who has the insight the mentee needs into a specific part of the organization or level of responsibility.	Coach can be a manager or colleague, but the tendency recently is to hire external executive or life coaches
An interactive activity that can be either formal or informal.	Based on a model that uses observation, data collection and descriptive, nonjudgmental reporting on targeted behaviors
Develops context and confidence as well as overall competence	Develops specific skills and self insight
Contingent on the mentee to reach for assistance	Process is driven by the coach's process

Though individual learning is an internal process, it happens best in a social context where the individual has the ability to apply their new knowledge and skill. In this way, mentoring picks up where coaching leaves off by offering more than feedback. Mentors are guides, models, supporters, and sounding boards. A mentor offers their partner the opportunity to make mistakes and by doing so, the pairs travel beyond the boundaries of the coaching relationship - mentors turn experience into expertise.

Mentoring Gets Results

It's been said that every 7.5 seconds another baby boomer retires. With a remaining talent pool that is insufficient to fill the gap, how will your company fair in the coming struggle to obtain and maintain talent, knowledge and skills? In this paper we have discussed how a strategically developed mentoring program is one of the best ways to inspire loyalty, promote knowledge continuity and attract new potential to an organization. To ensure your investment in mentoring realizes the desired returns for all involved, ensure it embodies the three success factors. It's as easy as 1-2-3.

Resources

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