

# How to Build a Successful Mentoring Program



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## Introduction

**M**entoring is a strategic tool that, when done right, can attract and retain high-potential talent and accelerate leadership development and readiness.

Mentoring is also an effective tool for shaping organizational culture and closing engagement and generational gaps. It has often been said that the most important work of a leader is the development of other leaders. Employers are increasingly recognizing the benefits of mentoring in leadership development. According to a Corporate Executive Board survey, 25 percent of U.S. companies now host peer-mentoring programs, a significant increase from before the 2007 recession, when only 4 to 5 percent of U.S. companies reported sponsoring mentorship programs (Rouen, 2012). Unfortunately, as many HR and talent managers can attest, it can be quite challenging to develop and maintain successful mentoring programs.

This white paper:

- Discusses the benefits of effective mentoring programs and why more employers are embracing mentoring programs in their organizations;
- Delineates the difference between coaching and mentoring, terms that are often used interchangeably but erroneously;
- Reviews various types of mentoring programs;
- Offers steps HR and talent management professionals can use to launch successful and sustainable mentoring programs in their organizations, and;
- Provides examples of mentoring programs being used in organizations today.

## Why Mentoring Programs Are on an Upswing

**M**entoring improves employee satisfaction, retention, and recruitment in an organization (Kessler, 2010). It can also improve an organization's diversity by improving promotion rates for people from under-represented groups like women, African Americans, Latinos, and Asians (DiversityInc, 2014). Mentoring can even be used as a branding tool to attract talent, particularly high-quality college recruits.

Employers who mentor new hires find that they acclimate more quickly to the organization's culture and work processes which translates to faster ramp up time and return on recruiting investment. This mentoring during the onboarding process can also lower turnover and help identify high-potential employees early on (Vaccaro, 2013). There is another, perhaps more compelling, reason why mentoring is being embraced by more organizations; the Millennial generation, the most populous force in the workplace, craves it.

A 2012 study, "No Collar Workers," found that three-quarters of Millennials want a mentor. Eighty percent of Millennials responding to the survey said they wanted regular feedback from their boss, and 89 percent said they thought it was important to constantly learn at their job. Two-thirds of Millennial respondents also said they thought they should mentor more experienced workers on technology (Emelo, 2013). This generation is demanding mentoring, and employers are listening.

Mentoring may also be on an upswing because it is an effective and inexpensive way to prepare future business leaders. In an article for *Fortune* magazine, Brian Kropp, managing director for the Corporate Executive Board, noted that during the recession, mid-level management at large corporations was decimated. Today, mid-level managers have 50 percent more direct reports and 20 percent less time to spend with them. They also have far less time for professional development. Peer mentoring can help in skill development and in improved engagement for this group (Rouen, 2012).

## Formal Coaching Versus Formal Mentoring

Coaching and mentoring are both a form of professional development used to develop skills and organizational capabilities, but they are distinct.

Coaching is used to help employees hone their potential and performance capabilities. Coaching can be delivered through the Internet or with a personal coach external to the organization and is aimed primarily at developing skill competence, performance improvement, and very specific leadership opportunities and challenges. Coaching usually has a shorter timeframe than mentoring and has more finite, tangible learning objectives and goals.

Mentoring is used to help employees in their career development paths, to simplify increased responsibilities, to build confidence, and to help individuals learn and grow in an organization. Mentoring pairs the mentee with another person in the organization. Mentoring relationships can last anywhere from six months to a year.

(Source: Merrick and O'Brien, 2014.)

## Types of Mentoring Programs

**T**oday's mentoring programs come in all shapes and sizes, although traditional one-on-one mentoring remains arguably the most common form. In **one-on-one mentoring**, a mentor and mentee are paired. This one-on-one pairing allows the duo to focus on specific, identified competencies that the mentee would like to further develop. One-on-one mentoring relationships can be nondirective, where the mentor acts as a sounding board, catalyst, or role model. The relationship may also be more of a sponsorship, where a senior executive acts as the mentee's champion, overseeing the mentee's career path. A drawback for this mentoring is that there are often more mentees available than mentors (Merrick and O'Brian, 2014; Way et al, 2011).

**E-mentoring** allows organizations to expand mentoring programs beyond one location. It uses social media platforms, email, or specialized software to facilitate communication and to allow the mentee to learn from the mentor's experience regardless of physical location. This type of mentoring can build organizational relationships across locations and can help match more mentees with mentors (Way et al, 2011).

**Reverse mentoring** pairs a younger mentor with an older mentee to share knowledge that the younger mentor may be more in tune with than the mentee, such as social media and other technology. This type of mentoring can also help close generational gaps by encouraging communication between generations. In **group mentoring**, also known as mentoring circles, one mentor can offer guidance and advice to multiple mentees. **Peer mentoring groups** allow individuals with similar interests to meet

### DiversityInc's Top Ten Companies for Mentoring



1. KPMG
2. Sodexo
3. PricewaterhouseCoopers
4. Target
5. EY
6. Abbott
7. Accenture
8. Cleveland Clinic
9. Prudential Financial
10. Johnson & Johnson

(Source: DiversityInc staff, 2014.)

together to discuss issues and to learn from each other. Peer mentoring groups may be from a single department in an organization or from many departments (for example, a peer mentoring group for women throughout the organization). Peer mentoring groups can provide a safe, supportive forum in which to discuss challenges and to learn from one another (Way et al).

Employers may use some, all, or a combination of these mentoring approaches in their organizations. If the programs are to succeed, however, they must align with the organization's business goals and have a clearly articulated strategic purpose. It is equally critical that they are time-limited, so that participants know they have a limited amount of time to achieve their stated goals. This time limitation helps the mentorship relationship move along with purpose.

## How to Launch a Successful and Sustainable Mentorship Program

**M**any mentoring programs miss the mark because of a lack of alignment to business goals and strategy and because they fail to clearly articulate the goals of the program from the outset. Others fail because of poor mentor/mentee matches and insufficient training at the beginning of the program. HR and talent management professionals can avoid these pitfalls and launch successful, enduring mentoring programs using the following steps:

- Lay the groundwork – business case, buy-in, sponsorship
- Prepare for the launch – tools, communicate intentions with laser focus
- Launch the program and train mentors and mentees on process and tools
- Build relationships and assess progress and momentum
- Evaluate effectiveness of the mentoring program and pairings at regular intervals

## Step 1: Lay the groundwork

Laying the groundwork for the mentoring program is a time-consuming but critical step in the program's ultimate success, and it is one in which HR and talent management professionals must take the lead. There are several stages to this step:

- Recognize the need and set program objectives
- Determine program structure
- Plan for program launch (Insala staff, 2014)

### *Stage 1: Recognize the need and set program objectives*

Successful mentoring programs are designed to address organizational needs or skills gaps usually identified through a needs assessment. Examples of these needs or skills gaps may include improved onboarding, transitioning into a new culture, leadership development, more effective succession planning, development of a specific skill, and more. Once the needs are identified, the objectives of the mentoring program can be set. HR and talent management professionals should be as specific as possible when articulating program objectives, using SMART goal formatting and linking them to business goals (Insala staff, 2014).

### **Company Spotlight: Adcap Mentors for Talent Development**

Adcap, an Atlanta-based technology service company,



works in a niche industry which makes it difficult to find qualified talent. Rather than settle for unqualified talent from outside and training them, the company created two apprenticeship programs to develop technical engineers and sales professionals internally. Fifty percent of the apprenticeship program consists of training, 30 percent consists of practical experience, and 20 percent is spent mentoring. Mentors are encouraged to “share their craft” and work experience one full day a week during the apprenticeship. Apprentices are tied to their mentors for their entire Adcap career, and mentors are given financial incentives to advance their apprentices in the organization.

(Source: Wilkins, 2014.)

It is recommended that at this stage, HR and talent management professionals form a governing committee for the mentorship program. HR should be represented on the committee, but it should also be comprised of other stakeholders. If the mentoring program is limited to one particular company location, for example, committee membership could include representatives from throughout that location. The committee may initially offer input to HR about the program objectives, structure, metrics to be used to measure success, etc., but once the program is launched, the committee will serve to identify mentors who meet specified selection criteria. To avoid stagnation and to ensure the introduction of new ideas and recommendations, committee members should serve on a 12-month rotation as a best practice.

There are several reasons why forming a governing committee is recommended. It helps define HR's role in the mentoring program. HR should serve as a thought leader for the program's design, which means it needs to do the homework to determine how mentoring fits into the organizational culture. HR should lead in identifying mentoring best-practices, the program objectives, and aligning program goals and objectives to organizational strategy. HR should also be responsible for measuring the program's effectiveness. The governing committee, however, should provide input and feedback to HR about organizational needs. The governing committee also serves to create interest about and support for the program, a critical piece to a successful mentoring program. Once the committee is formed and objectives are identified and set, it is time to develop the program's structure.

### **Company Spotlight: KPMG's Leaders Engaging Leaders Program**

At accounting giant KPMG, mentoring is ingrained in their company culture. In fact, everyone in the firm has a mentor. KPMG's Leaders Engaging Leaders program was established to expand opportunities for leaders. The program pairs the 60 top managers in the company with members of the management committee, the board of directors, and national managing partners. The program's objective is to show mentees that there are leadership opportunities available to them farther up the corporate ladder. It also helps senior leaders get to know managers who they would otherwise never meet or get to work with.



(Source: Rouen, 2012.)



## *Stage 2: Determine the program structure*

The program structure will be determined by the organization's culture, the metrics that flow from the program's identified objectives, and the people needed to achieve those objectives (Insala staff, 2014). The duration of the mentoring experience (usually a maximum of 12 months) is also established at this stage. Establishing how long the experience will last helps mentors and mentees remain focused and goal-driven. Finally, the type or types of mentoring experiences that can effectively meet program goals and objectives should be identified.

The organization's culture plays a large role in how the program will be structured. If the organization has a formal culture, for example, HR and talent managers may want to create a formal application process for the program and articulate minimum time requirements (including frequency and duration) for mentor/mentee meetings. If the organization's culture is informal, less structure may be called for—a simple matching of mentors and mentees, for example. Even with an informal structure, however, it is a good idea to have some minimum requirements in place (Kessler, 2010).

Metrics will be discussed in more detail later, but they should be identified during this phase. If a goal of the mentoring program is to increase the promotion rate of high-potential employees, a metric should be designed at this stage that will demonstrate if the goal was met. For example, a metric that compares the promotion rates of high-potential employees who participated in the mentoring program to a control group of non-participating high-potential employees could be developed. All metrics should be reviewed and approved by the governing committee because at the reporting phase, it will be important to remind all stakeholders and senior leaders that governing committee members agreed that the identified metrics would measure program success.

The next step in this phase is to identify the people available who can help meet the program's stated objectives. This includes identifying potential mentors with any specialized skills sets and the mentees who would benefit from the mentorship experience. Now that the structure and scope of the program has been determined, the types of mentoring that best fit the program goals should be considered. Mentoring can be done one-on-one, in groups, and virtually. It can be traditional, senior-level leaders to younger executives or managers, peer-to-peer, or reverse mentoring. Each variation or a combination can be used to help meet the program's objectives. Once all of these stages have been completed, the program is ready to be launched.



## Step 2: Prepare for the launch

First and foremost, communicate, communicate, and communicate some more.

Employees at all levels should be told about the program, its goals, objectives, target population, requirements, and the process to participate. The program's progress should be reported at every step of the way, from the needs assessment stage to its conclusion, and on the metrics that demonstrate the program's success.

Communication will be key to obtaining initial and ongoing senior-level buy in and management support. It will also be helpful to identify interested mentors and mentees. It is important to be transparent about why a specific section of the workforce population was selected for mentoring. Everyone should be informed of the strategy. If not, employees who don't participate will perceive the program as unfair or exclusive. HR and talent management professionals should share the strategy with the broader population. This communication helps enlist people's support of the initiative, even when they are not part of the targeted group.

Before the program can be launched, a process to match mentors and mentees will need to be developed. Way et al (2011) recommend selecting a matching method that works well with the company's organizational culture and program objectives. The process may be formal or informal. At McGraw Hill, for example, the mentoring match process includes a questionnaire, an interview, and a committee recommendation for each mentee (Kessler, 2010). Another method may be to offer the mentor or mentee several options based on an interests/strengths inventory completed by all parties and let them choose. In either case, the process should include some participant choice in selection.

### Company Spotlight: Microsoft Mentors for Motivation

Microsoft recently launched a new twist on mentoring



when it paired 300 new senior employees (hired for their entrepreneurial and innovative spirit) with veteran Microsoft employees with similar work experience. In this program, the new senior employees serve as the mentors and the veteran employees are the mentees. The program was designed to keep employees motivated and to increase employee retention, an objective that is particularly challenging in an industry where career advancement and job hopping are often perceived as one in the same.

(Source: Rouen, 2014.)

The process should also include how mentors and mentees can best dissolve the partnership if, during the course of the mentorship, one or both realize the pairing is not working (Way et al, 2011). If a person asks for a new mentor or mentee, a member of the governing committee or HR should find out why and see if the issue can be resolved. If it can't be resolved, HR should contact each party privately and separately to end the relationship and try to find a new match (Way et al, 2011).

The chances of needing to dissolve a partnership diminish significantly if both mentors and mentees are properly trained and have clear expectations about the goals and objectives of the relationship. Linda Phillips-Jones, of The Mentoring Group (Grass Valley, Calif.), offers the following ingredients for a successful mentoring relationship:

1. **Purpose:** Both parties must take the relationship seriously, make it a high priority, and have clear, mutual goals.
2. **Communication:** Both parties must understand that communication is two-way. They must also meet in a method both prefer, whether it is in person, by phone, text, or email. Mentors and mentees should meet monthly for one or two hours.
3. **Trust:** Both parties must agree to keep confidential information confidential and understand that trust is built through honesty and follow-up.
4. **Process:** Both parties must make an effort to ensure that meetings and other interactions move along at a good pace.
5. **Progress:** Both parties must identify goals of the mentorship experience and actively work to build the competencies needed to reach those goals. They must also agree to identify and record the interim mileposts that signal achievement toward those goals and link the goals to organizational strategy.
6. **Feedback:** Both parties must provide constructive and honest feedback and ensure that the feedback is acted on.

HR and talent management professionals may want to use these ingredients to create a verbal or written "mentor/mentee" contract that can be used during mentorship training.

### Step 3: Launch the program and train participants

Natural mentors are a rare find in any organization, so talent management professionals must be prepared to build their own. The mentoring program's launch should begin with training all participants, and it is recommended that the mentors and mentees are trained together in pairs. Pairs should be taught what mentoring is, preferably in a formal, classroom-style setting and led by a professional trainer with mentoring expertise (Kessler, 2010). Pairs should mutually identify the goals of the mentorship and link them to the broader program and organizational goals, establish milestones, and timelines (when they will meet, how, how often, and for how long) so that expectations are managed. Because feedback is an essential ingredient in effective mentoring relationships, a refresher course on providing constructive feedback might be included in the training. Training mentors and mentees together builds organizational capacity. The mentees learn the skills and behaviors of great mentors.

### Step 4: Build relationships and assess progress and momentum

The bulk of the work in this step—relationship building—is the responsibility of the mentor and mentee, but that doesn't mean that HR and talent management professionals can wash their hands of the program for the time being. It is HR's role to ensure that relationships are on the right track, goals and objectives are still on target, milestones are being recorded, and that competencies are being acquired. HR and talent management professionals may assume this follow-up or distribute the responsibility among governing committee members. If the latter is the case, HR is still responsible for making sure committee members are checking in with their assigned mentor/mentee pairs. The frequency of follow-up during this stage should be mutually agreed upon among governing committee members during the preparation phase, but some experts suggest check-ins at the two, four, six, and eight month marks with a final meeting after the close of the mentorship experience.

### Step 5: Evaluate effectiveness of the mentoring program

By the end of a 12-month mentoring period, there will be many people beyond the mentor and the mentee who have a vested interest in the program's effectiveness. Senior leaders and the governing committee will want to know how the program met organizational objectives. In addition, the governing committee will want to know if participants met their personal goals and if not, why. HR and talent management professionals will want to know if the program structure was effective and what might

need to be tweaked moving forward. All of these metrics should be considered and identified during the preparation stage. At this evaluation stage, it is time for HR and talent management professionals to gather and report the analysis of the data to all stakeholders.

For example, if an identified organizational objective for the mentoring program is to improve time-to-proficiency for new hires, it should be presented during the preparation phase using the SMART (specific, measurable, assignable, realistic, and time-related) goals methodology, e.g., “The mentoring program will improve time-to-proficiency for new hires by XX months.” (Fickenscher, 2013). At the conclusion of the mentoring relationship of a new hire to a veteran employee, that time-to-proficiency should be assessed and compared to the time-to-proficiency for new hires who did not participate in the mentorship program.

Qualitative measures can be used effectively to assess the achievement of the personal goals of the mentorship program. Surveys or interviews can be used at the end of the mentorship program to assess the mentoring pairs’ perceptions of how well personal goals were achieved. Were milestones noted? Were competencies acquired? Did the process improve the mentee’s visibility in the organization? Surveys or interviews should also ask for suggestions on how to improve the program (Way et al, 2011).

### Company Spotlight: Sodexo’s Mentoring Program

Sodexo, a leading provider of food and facilities management services in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, created its mentoring programs with several goals in mind. The company wanted to establish a diverse talent pipeline; develop leaders; align resources and strategies; drive organizational culture; cut costs, and; enhance the company’s reputation as an employer of choice. More than 100 mentoring partnerships are formed each year. Mentoring pairs make a one year commitment. After the pairs are trained, the program begins and pairs meet for 90 minutes once a month. The mentoring program team checks in with mentor/mentee pairs at the two month mark. At four and eight months, a webinar is held and at six and 12 months, a survey is conducted to assess progress. A survey of mentors and mentees found that 72 percent of mentees and 79 percent of mentors cited improved job satisfaction, and 72 percent of mentees and 74 percent of mentors cited improved organizational commitment.



(Source: DiversityInc staff, n.d.)

Qualitative measures also can be used to assess effectiveness. These are relatively straightforward metrics and may include the number of:

- Mentor/mentee applications;
- Applicants who accepted and started a mentorship;
- Successful matches;
- Mentees retained in the organization, and;
- Mentees who advanced in the organization (Way et al, 2011).

Talent management metrics must stay focused on the long-term business outcomes. HR and talent management professionals should take the lead in establishing realistic expectations of mentoring and the timing of the returns. Mentorship effectiveness must be assessed to ensure that all stakeholders—from the senior leadership on down—are provided with tangible proof of the contribution mentoring has made to their organization.

## Conclusion

**M**entoring can have a positive impact on an organization, improving employee retention, engagement, and shaping culture. It can also serve a strategic purpose when linked to talent strategy, leadership development, workforce planning, and organizational goals. Mentoring programs, however, can quickly flounder if there is no buy in, insufficient structure, or lack of follow-through. HR and talent management professionals who want to establish successful and sustainable mentorship programs must ensure that the groundwork is thoroughly completed, that participants are trained, and that the program is regularly assessed for effectiveness. Mentors and mentees must have both the passion and skill to develop themselves as well as others to really multiply the returns on mentoring for the organization.

## About UNC Executive Development

Our approach to program design and delivery draws upon the power of real-world, applicable experiences from our faculty and staff, integrated with the knowledge our client partners share about the challenges they face.

We call this approach [The Power of Experience](#). We combine traditional with experiential and unique learning to ensure that all individuals gain relevant new skills that they can easily implement within their own organizations. Through action learning and business simulation activities, we challenge participants to think, reflect and make decisions differently.

### Our Approach: The Partnership

Our team customizes each leadership program through a highly collaborative process that involves our clients, program directors, faculty and program managers. We are dedicated to following-up with our clients and individual participants to ensure that their learning experiences have been meaningful and impactful. This integrated approach consistently drives strong outcomes.

### Our Approach: The Results

Our executive education programs are designed with results in mind, and we are focused on successfully meeting our clients' business and academic expectations. Below are a few examples of the results our client partners have achieved:

- Leadership refocused with new strategy and cohesive vision
- Strategic plans created for the global marketplace
- Supply chains streamlined
- Products redefined
- New markets targeted
- Cost-saving measures developed
- Silos leveled
- Teams aligned

Participants leave empowered to bring in new ideas, present different ways to grow business and tackle challenges. The result is stronger individuals leading stronger teams and organizations.

### Contact Us

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