

Gaining Momentum with Mentoring

Mentoring is a business relationship where an individual with greater experience provides strategic counsel, guidance and instruction to assist another individual to develop both personally and professionally. A successful mentoring relationship can provide positive outcomes for both parties through the expansion of knowledge and skills. By providing feedback in areas such as job performance, relationships, role expectations and technical information, the mentor can share lessons learned from their experience to help the protégé achieve their learning objectives, which in turn furthers organizational development as well.

How Mentoring Can be Used as a Low-Cost Training Tool:

Mentoring is a great way of assisting and bringing new employees up to organizational standards; sharing cultural practices and organizational experiences as well as fostering relationships amongst employees. Without mentoring programs, it can take new employees years to understand an organization's culture which might affect their communication styles, decision making abilities and relationship opportunities, all of which affect their individual performance and impact organizational effectiveness. In addition, it can support and reinforce classroom training and assist employees in further development and is particularly suited for leadership development skills. Mentoring also enables employees to become more responsible for their own learning and development and ensures that they apply it at their work which increases their application of skills and retention of learning. Furthermore, it has proven extremely effective in improving confidence levels since the employee is more involved in designing their own learning!

Considerations for an Organization Starting a Mentoring Program

- Decide what your business reasons are for developing a mentoring program (e.g. speed up development of future leaders; share organizational knowledge; employee retention)
- There are many types of mentoring programs and the organization should first consider if they wish to have a formal or informal program. As well, they should also give consideration to whether they wish to have peer mentoring; group mentoring; individual mentoring or even virtual mentoring!
- Once support is obtained from senior management, roles and responsibilities will have to be decided in terms of which group will be responsible for the process and day to day operations as well.
- If deciding upon a formal mentoring program, the organization will also have to decide what resources will be needed (e.g. financial, human etc).
- Once the organization has decided to go ahead, it is absolutely critical for them to define the mentoring program's objectives (e.g. leadership development; support for diversity initiatives etc) and to link them to the organization's strategic objectives
- Another critical element is identify a pool of mentors and managing the mentoring program selection process, including the identification of protégés
- The organization will also have to effectively develop and market and communicate the program
- Mentors should be provided training (e.g. listening skills, feedback skills) as well as the protégés
- Start with a small number of employee and increase the program slowly (tip – start with the locations or sites where you expect the most support and participation)
- The mentoring process should also be mentored to ensure that the employees achieve their objectives
- As well a formal evaluation of the program's success should be undertaken and any challenges/obstacles to the program's success should be addressed.

Tips for Success Implementing Mentoring within your Organization (A Checklist):

- Link program goals to business strategy
- Define criteria for evaluation and ROI (use of metrics including qualitative and quantitative outcomes)
- Prepare protégés for their role
- Senior level support and endorsement
- Clearly stated expectations and goals with specific areas to focus on
- Provide training and support for mentors as well on topics such as setting expectations; effective communications etc.
- Defined criteria and identification of positive behaviours for successful mentors
- Encourage participation in selection of mentors/partners from the employee's perspective so that the relationship and the mentoring will suit their individual needs as well.
- Create a mentoring program that is customized to your organization's culture and industry (link it to informal mentoring initiatives as well!)

When implementing a mentoring process or program, there are some potential traps that should be avoided. Organizations have experienced, less than desired results because they did not provide mentors with the time or recognition for their mentoring. Furthermore, they did not ensure that there was enough senior employees to provide mentoring. One organization even decided to start “mentoring” program after a “downsizing”. Its success was very limited because the culture and the people were not supportive and receptive. Finally, one last trap to avoid is not providing support to mentors or protégés on relationship building; setting expectations; generational differences etc. Mentoring, if properly prepared for and implemented can be very valuable for increasing employee engagement; developing employees, increasing productivity and performance and can also be used as a key retention tool! For more information, please contact Michelle at Chambers and Associates (michelle@chambersandassociates.ca).

Submitted by Michelle Chambers, M. Ed, CHRP, CTDP
Organizational Learning and Development Consultant, Chambers and Associates
www.chambersandassociates.ca (905) 430-6016
Leader Development & Coaching – Process Facilitation - Strategic Planning Change Management - Team Development – Organizational Renewal - Customized Learning Solutions- Human Resource Management