

**EXAMPLE PAPER**

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Date

Over the last two decades much press has been given to mentoring in the workplace. Corporate mentoring programs have helped define mentoring and have increased awareness of the concept. Originally started to prepare and promote women and minorities into leadership roles, structured mentoring programs have evolved to include many other employees. Although definitions of a mentor vary slightly, most are similar to the following:

Simply put, a mentor is someone who helps someone else learn something that he or she would have learned less well, more slowly, or not at all if left alone. Notice the power-free nature of the definition. Mentors are not power figures; they are learning coaches - sensitive and trusted advisors ("The Mentor as Partner," 2000, p. 53).

The recipients of the information are commonly referred to as proteges or mentees. The term mentee is growing in popularity, as protegee is often associated with a person who is chosen for success.

In order to be effective in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, managers will need to provide generous amounts of training, share information, and ensure the good fit of employees with the corporate culture (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2001, p. 4). Mentoring programs provide opportunities for employees to learn these skills and meet training needs. The organization benefits when "the optimism and energy of younger, more culturally, technologically, and ethnically diverse employees intersect with the efficiency and confident decision-making skills of more experienced personnel" (Hagevik, 1998, p. 60).

Factors to be considered when establishing a company mentoring program include goals for the program, structure of the program, and age/characteristics of those participating in the program. Goals for mentoring relationships vary by company, but may include preparing employees to move to greater levels of responsibility and

improving employee retention. A review of current literature finds mentoring programs are looked upon favorably by a number of companies. According to the Corporate Leadership Council (1999), companies included in the study noted benefits such as:

- Higher productivity
- Improved succession planning (mentoring helps identify high-potential employees)
- Increased communication across functions and business units
- Increased employee loyalty to company
- Knowledge sharing across company (p. 3).

Research suggests mentoring programs benefit the company, yet recommendations differ on how the program should be structured. Some companies support formal programs, which are characterized by in-house administration, formal matching of mentor and mentee, and defined minimum frequency of meetings. Others recommend informal mentoring relationships, which are characterized by mentor and mentee deciding to work together on an individual basis. Detractors of formal programs describe them as arranged marriages based on compliance rather than sturdy personal relationships. Advocates respond that programs benefit those employees that lack the necessary networking acumen to develop mentoring relationships without a formal framework (Corporate Leadership Council, 1997, p. 1).

The current trend in mentoring programs is toward structured programs. Formal mentoring programs can be structured in a variety of ways. Traditionally, programs were based on one mentor and one mentee. One strength of the traditional model of one-on-one mentoring is that it addresses people's needs and thoughts as they evolve, in a free-flowing manner with no set agenda or plan (Kaye & Jacobson, 1996, p. 48).

In recent years, programs based on group mentoring have taken shape. According to Kaye and Jacobson (1996):

The past mindset for developing mentoring programs or participating in informal mentoring was mainly reductionist thinking. Such thinking limited employee development to a one-on-one experience between a mentor and his or her proteges. The new mindset requires expansionist thinking in which employee development involves groups of employees led by organizational veterans networked with the managers responsible for proteges' day-to-day supervision (p. 45).

In a group mentoring program, the mentor's role can be described as a learning leader. The learning leader works with a "learning group of four to six employees so that peers (possibly across departments) can learn from each other as well as from the leader" (Gregg, 1999, p. 89). This arrangement encourages mentees to develop relationships with each other and become less reliant on the mentor.

Regardless of how a company structures its mentoring program, goals and expectations should be documented. The most successful programs have "clear expectations of the [mentoring] partners, realistic outcomes, and flexibility to accommodate schedules and different learning styles" (Hagevik, 1998, p. 61). Failure to consider such issues before starting a mentoring program can lessen the benefits to the company, mentor, and mentee.

Starting at a new company can be a frustrating experience for any age or experience level. New hires often feel that they've joined a mystery cult, the secrets of which are closely guarded by the senior members (Asher, 1999, p. 25). Recent college graduates can feel especially unprepared for this experience. Asher (1999) states:

Consider how much it costs an organization to hire college graduates, train new hires and make them productive, and replace each new hire who quits in the first year. . . . Most managers want to blame first-year attrition on bad hiring decisions or the new hires themselves, but often the problem is not in the recruiting process but in the transition process. The transition process is supposed to create a bridge experience for the new hire, who is going from the comfortable experience of being a fourth-year, full-time student to the comfortable experience of being a valued, productive, and rewarded employee (p. 24).

In response to such frustration, some companies have started using mentoring programs to ease the transition for new college graduates. Cecil Gregg (1999) writes of the Travis Wolff accounting firm, “Each new employee is assigned to a senior staff member on the first day of employment. The two-year mentoring relationship is designed to assimilate employees into the firm’s culture and provide ongoing professional development” (p. 89). At Pitney Bowes a similar program is in place. Once they come onboard, new hires are matched up with “company champions” who coach new employees and identify training needs (American Management Association, 2000, p. 15). Ideally, mentoring of younger workers reduces turnover, helps mentees deal with organizational issues, and accelerates their assimilation into the culture (Hagevik, 1998, p. 60). Employees are generally agreeable to such programs. When an organization dedicates time and energy to developing a junior-level executive, “he or she will likely feel loyal to the organization and want to stay on as an employee” (Lanser, 2000, p. 20). Building loyalty is an important benefit of mentoring programs.

Mentoring programs have been found to be successful if specific goals are identified and if the structure meets the needs of those participating. A common frustration of newly hired college graduates is making sense of the organization. Mentoring programs are effective in easing this transition and preparing employees to become effective managers for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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