



## Points to Consider Starting a Mentoring Initiative? Here are Some

A mentoring initiative requires careful planning to ensure results. First step? Learning a mentor is not a friend or counselor. It is a someone willing to share hard-earned business knowledge and experience.

It seems like mentoring initiatives would be easy to implement. All it requires is matching up a couple of people and letting one guide the other. Right? Not so fast! A quality mentoring initiative addresses many factors, like participation eligibility, program format, duration, goals, and success metrics. In fact, there are different types of mentoring initiatives that include formal career mentoring leading to upward mobility, senior management development mentoring for succession planning, supplier mentoring, and so on. Obviously, each mentoring program requires a different approach, goals, and results. Given the emphasis on developing a diverse, global workforce with leadership capabilities, this discussion focuses on career and leadership mentoring initiatives designed to develop capabilities for personal and business success.

One of the first steps is taking a step backwards. The mentoring initiative needs to be viewed within the business context so the final product contributes to meeting organizational competitive challenges now and in the future. Evaluating current and future leadership needs will drive the content and mentor-mentee selection. For example, is developing global leadership a priority? Does the business need to strategically groom leaders? Is there a need to increase the diverse composition of mid-management?

### Worth the Investment

One of the challenges most businesses face when considering a mentoring initiative is convincing executive management it is worth the investment. However, a the selling point is the very fact a mentoring initiative is structured and avoids wasting scarce business resources on non-specific training and development. Directing specific resources to a specific program ensures there is accountability. The goal of any mentoring initiative is to take advantage of talent - those willing to share organizational knowledge and those ready to learn. Getting senior management on board is much easier if the financial and other benefits are clearly outlined in the proposal and opinion leaders have a chance to voice support or objections, make suggestions and propose alternatives. In addition, communicating the strategic value of the mentoring program garners support. A good



approach is to get a top leader on board who will vigorously champion the program, making it much more likely people will step forward and volunteer as mentors.

Mentoring programs can take several formats. A formal mentoring program uses one-on-one mentoring with a manager assigned to a staff member. The staff member can be a new-hire or a longer term employee. There are some advantages to this format because it increases the probability the mentee will get the specific mentoring needed. The disadvantage is that the mentoring results can be limited by how well the mentor and mentee can effectively develop a working relationship. The formal mentoring program is often used within departments or divisions, which can limit outside information sources unless the program structure incorporates external input. Team mentoring can eliminate some of the disadvantages of one-on-one mentoring by including a varied group of mentors and one or more mentees. However, a new format more commonly used is pairing mentees with an outside business leader as well as an inside manager to add scope to the program.

Once the preferred mentoring structure is chosen, the next step is to build a mentoring program. What does the program expect to accomplish? One of the important guidelines to building a successful mentoring program is defining success and methods of assessing progress. It is the only way to ensure the program stays on track and produces desired results. For example, is the program successful when mentees enjoy career advancement within a certain period of time? Once success is determined, the program expectations have to be outlined and eventually communicated to mentees once the program begins.

### [Recognizing Leadership Quality in Enablers and Innovators,](#)

How are mentors and mentees selected? Even a carefully designed program will fail if the wrong people are chosen for participation. Clearly, no single approach works for every business. The mentoring program has to identify potential leaders, which means diagnosing the capabilities most needed to achieve strategic goals within the business context. The initiative can focus on enablers who drive innovation and results in their current jobs or new talent hires with great potential. Either way, mentees must have the potential to increase their contributions in terms of skills, knowledge, leadership ability, and so on as a result of the mentoring. The program must choose people who can serve as role models and change leaders for enterprise-wide improvement and sustainability.

Mentorship should not be confused with employee training and development or viewed as an advocacy program for promotion. It is a relationship in which a manager or other staff member shares insight and provides guidance that only develops through experience. People chosen as mentors must be supportive of the program, appreciate its value to the



business, and be prepared to share time and knowledge to help others succeed. The mentors chosen will depend on the organization's strategic needs.

Mentor selection is not a process of saying "Tag! You're it!" and then walking away. Mentors need training to better understand program goals, methods for measuring progress and success, expected participation, boundaries, and developing business relationships of trust. What time commitment is expected, and can the mentor work with that framework? Of course, program success relies on an accurate pairing of mentor and mentee. A nuance of any mentorship program often missed is that the mentor does not choose someone's career path. The program is meant to pair the right people together so that the natural relationship built on a formal framework enables the mentored to pursue a path that is fulfilling.

Keep managers on board through participation and by regularly communicating results. This is one reason most mentoring initiatives include periodic opportunities to get together with senior level managers where the mentees can ask questions, share experiences and get new perspectives. Measurable results include career advancement of internal talent, successful onboarding, higher retention or lower turnover rates, a sustainable business culture, and increased job satisfaction. Mentors are not friends or counselors. They are people who share their experience and advice. Mastering that concept first will put the mentoring initiative on the right path from the start.