

# Setting up a Corporate Mentoring Program

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Mentors and mentorees both have something to gain, says  
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Most companies would like to have an educated, well-trained workforce, but they may not have the budget to provide more than a few days of periodic training to their staff. How then can they develop their workforce and groom employees to take on additional responsibilities and move up through the ranks? What can they do to guide employees through problems and create positive relationships within the office?

One low-cost solution that addresses these problems is a corporate mentoring program. This article will walk you through the steps of setting up a program in your workplace.

Before we start, let's discuss the difference between coaching and mentoring. Coaching focuses on taking employees with substandard performance and through training, encouraging, monitoring and following up, guiding them up to an acceptable level of performance. Mentoring focuses on taking an employee who is already doing well and grooming them for career growth. A corporate mentoring program is not intended to replace the human resource functions of training and development or performance improvement plans.

## Developing a vision of what you will accomplish (goals, defining success, etc.)

Take some time to envision your program. What will it look like? How will employees feel about it? How will success be defined? What is the desired objective in implementing the program? Once you've got a general vision in your mind, it's time for specific questions so you can start putting together a proposal for management.

Examples of questions you might consider include:

- How long will it take to organize the program?
- Will you need help, such as an ongoing committee to oversee the process?
- Will there be limits on who can participate?
- If so, who will set those limits and ensure they remain fair?



- Is manager approval necessary for an employee to participate?
- What kind of training will be needed to prepare people to participate?
- How long will the mentoring be expected to last (minimum or maximum amount of time)?
- How often should the individuals meet and for how long each time?
- Can they meet on company time?
- What kind of issues will be addressed in the mentoring relationship?
- What kind of issues shouldn't or can't be addressed?
- What documentation will be needed? Example: a confidentiality form, a mentor or mentoree sign-up form, evaluation forms, etc.
- How will they know when to end the mentoring relationship?
- Should this program be incorporated into the existing performance review process?

## Approaching management

Starting a corporate mentoring program will naturally require the full support of management. Once you have gone through and considered the above questions, as well as any additional questions unique to your company, you can put together a proposal that will emphasize the positive elements of a corporate mentoring program.

There are many benefits you can include, such as increasing networking among employees, improving morale as employees see their career paths developing, encouraging employees to think of their fellow employees and actively seeking ways to help them grow, and developing leadership skills and self-confidence in employees. One of the biggest advantages is that it demonstrates the commitment of management to the career growth of all employees.

Mentoring has been shown to reduce turnover rates and create a positive working environment. You want to ensure that your proposal spells out the value of the program on an individual level, department level, and corporate level.

Sandra Charles, Manager of the Equal Opportunity & Diversity Office at Fermi National Accelerator Lab in Batavia, IL suggests that you need to consider the culture of your company as part of the process of building your proposal for management. Identify any hurdles in the process that might result from the way your company conducts business. Be prepared to address any likely concerns management will have, as well as identifying any concerns employees may have.

### Organizing logistics and ground rules

There are many considerations which must be addressed with a corporate mentoring program. For example, who is going to be “driving the bus” in the relationship? Will it fall on the mentoree to initiate contact with the desired mentor? Will the mentor be expected to seek out potential mentorees? Should a third party, such as an organizing committee, be responsible for overseeing the program and ensuring that mentors and mentorees are matched up and following the program guidelines?

Will there be limits placed on either side? Can one mentoree have multiple mentors? Can mentors mentor multiple mentorees? There is no right or wrong answer, but the question should be considered *before* a problem arises from time management, personality conflicts, etc.

How will you identify the potential candidates for the program? Will there be a screening process? Will everyone be accepted or will some people be declined?

What will the physical process of sign-up be? Will you set up a corporate website? Just have people go through the committee? Fill out forms?

### Implementing the program

With the logistics determined and addressed and the approval of management, it's time

to move on to the implementation of the mentoring program. This is where you will roll out the program to the company, promoting it heavily via email, posters, corporate intranets and any other marketing means at your disposal. Before you go jump all the way in though, you might want to start with a pilot program to test communications, responses, and the overall process.

Training should be provided to all mentors to guide them through any established rules and procedures. Topics to be discussed will include how the mentors/mentorees will be matched, how often they should meet, any forms they should be expected to fill out, identifying any issues they may face and how they should be addressed, and more. This is the point where clear expectations can be reinforced.

Once the mentors have been trained, open the enrollment in the program. Ensure that the process is as easy as possible for everyone to participate. A strong communication and marketing plan will assist in making all employees aware of this venture and hopefully excited to participate in it.

### Overcoming employee resistance

One of the key factors in the success of your mentoring program involves marketing the program to the employees in such a fashion that it becomes a positive to participate in it. Unfortunately, some organizations struggle with a stigma attached to mentoring. Employees may believe they know everything they need to know already and thus wouldn't benefit from mentoring.

Another area where you may struggle lies in finding mentors. Many people feel they can't serve as mentors unless they can call themselves experts and they aren't willing to apply that label to themselves. They may lack the self-confidence to step into the mentoring role.

### Incorporating the program into performance review process

While there may be merit in incorporating the mentoring program into the performance review process, recognize that this may inadvertently create an impression of guaranteed promotions.

After all, if the employee's performance review goal says they will participate in a mentoring program, it would be a reasonable expectation that if they do so successfully, they would see some career benefit at the company. It may prove beneficial to keep the mentoring program entirely separate from the performance review process.

### Measuring and evaluating results

Regular evaluation of the program and the results of the various mentoring relationships is critical for the long-term success of a corporate mentoring program. Evaluation forms could be incorporated into the mentoring relationship, with updates provided after 30, 60 and 90 days, for example. These forms should include a space for submitting recommendations for improvement to the program.

The program as a whole should be evaluated at least annually and perhaps more often by the program manager or organizational committee. At that time they can determine which recommendations should be implemented.

By following all of these steps, you will be able to create and implement a mentoring program at your company that will serve your employees well and help your company's bottom line grow. Advanced planning and scenario-based brainstorming will go a long way in helping ensure that the program rolls out smoothly to long-term success.

#### about the author



Marie Herman CAP-OM, ACS operates a successful business, MRH Enterprises ([www.mrbenterprises.com](http://www.mrbenterprises.com)), whose services include teaching computer and other classes in-person and via the internet, writing articles, and conducting workshops and other speaking engagements. She can be reached at [execsecmagazine@mrbenterprises.com](mailto:execsecmagazine@mrbenterprises.com).

