

# Mentoring

Career Development

## Info-line

The *How-To* Reference Tool for Training & Performance Professionals



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Association for  
Talent Development



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# Mentoring

## Career Development

<b>The ROI of Mentoring</b> .....	1
<b>Types of Mentoring Programs</b> .....	2
One-to-One Mentoring .....	2
Selecting a Mentor.....	3
Group Mentoring .....	6
Virtual Mentoring .....	13
<b>References &amp; Resources</b> .....	14
<b>Job Aid</b> .....	15

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## The ROI of Mentoring

It is ironic that in this time of technological achievement, the lifeblood of corporations is the accumulated insight of the people who choose to give their gifts of talent and commitment to any given organization. So, the question is this: How do we ensure that the intellectual legacy of our people continues?

A large portion of the answer lies with mentoring initiatives. Mentoring is a powerful, dynamic process—for both employees and organizations. To share wisdom is to share life experience. No matter which methodology is used, mentoring has the potential to elevate corporate dialogue from the mundane to the truly transformational.

The case for mentoring is compelling. According to an emerging workforce study done by Louis Harris & Associates, 35 percent of employees who do not receive regular mentoring are likely to look for another job within 12 months. In contrast, just 16 percent of those with good mentors expect to leave their jobs. Through mentoring programs, protégés develop vision and expertise, and mentors become reinvigorated, knowing that they are leaving a legacy to their organization, profession, and community.

Once an organization has accepted the value of a mentoring program, what approach is the best? While still popular, one-to-one mentoring is no longer viewed as the only or best approach. Many organizations find that group mentoring and virtual mentoring are attractive alternatives or supplements to traditional mentoring. Based on information contained in a previous *Info-line* on mentoring, this issue expands that focus and provides additional mentoring ideas. Here you will find an overview of the three approaches to mentoring, as well as techniques, guidelines, and tips to make your mentoring programs successful.

### The Business Case for Mentoring

Among other trends reflected in the changing workforce is a growing employee commitment to careers, rather than jobs. Beginning with their first job out of college, today's employees are looking ahead to a solid career, and any individual job may be little more than a convenient stepping stone to a more ambitious end. Because of that, employers stand a better chance of retaining top-performing

employees if they take an active interest in their careers—and even help shape those careers through mentoring initiatives.

### Career Development: Tradition With a Twist

A key benefit to mentoring programs is that they offer something other career development programs do not: individual attention. In a complex organization, it is particularly beneficial for an employee to learn how the system operates from someone who is better educated or more experienced. It is also worth noting that when a mentor relationship works, it is the easiest way for an organization to support career development; once in place, it usually no longer requires much involvement from the organization.

Traditionally, organizations are interested in grooming employees to take over jobs of increasing responsibility. On another level, they might be concerned with retaining the bright young graduates who are still “testing the waters” but could easily take their skills and enthusiasm elsewhere if they are not quickly involved with the excitement, goals, and—most important—people of the organization. The more specific the overall goal, the easier the mentoring program is to design and the better chance the organization has of receiving a return on its investment.

Employers stand to gain as much as employees through such efforts. Among other things, mentoring programs can help resolve such organizational problems as the premature departure of young professionals, the stagnation and boredom of solid performers, or the lack of qualified people to fill senior management positions vacated by retirees.

### Succession Planning Initiatives

Organizations often look toward a formalized mentoring program as a means of instituting a management continuity system at a variety of levels. Some use the program to groom middle management for senior-level jobs. Mentoring programs are an effective means of increasing the political savvy, exposure, and visibility middle managers need if they are going to succeed in top-level management positions.

## Why We Mentor

Mentoring is a tool to accomplish the following goals:

- Attract and retain high performers.
- Upgrade employee skills and knowledge.
- Promote diversity of thought and style.
- Develop leadership talent.
- Preserve institutional memory.
- Create inclusion.
- Develop a line of succession.
- Foster a collaborative environment.
- Ease the transition to new assignments.
- Strengthen corporate competitive advantage.

Because many organizations are challenged by ever-evolving work environments, the implementation of such a succession, or replacement, planning program requires using change management strategies that put the right people in the right places at the right times. To find those employees who have the skills to meet organizational challenges, the planning process entails the following elements:

- identification and analysis of key positions
- assessment of candidates against job and personal requirements
- creation of individual development plans
- selection of candidates

To meet the goals of their succession planning programs, organizations are asking managers to coach and mentor in more intensive ways than they have in the past. Mentoring helps develop future executives through structured activities that allow employees to acquire leadership skills as a part of their natural rate of development.

## Types of Mentoring Programs

Mentoring can take at least three forms, and many variations of each are possible depending on the organization's needs. **One-to-one mentoring** uses mentoring partners, traditionally called protégés and mentors. Historically, this relationship was seen as rather patriarchal, with a powerful mentor responsible for guiding the career of a junior up-and-coming employee. The updated view of one-to-one mentoring is that of two partners, each with areas of expertise and contribution, who work together to achieve the development or learning goals of the protégé partner. The new view of one-to-one mentoring acknowledges that mentors often gain as much from the relationship as the protégés.

**Group mentoring** is a format in which small groups of people commit to jointly support and pursue one another's learning goals. The group has a learning facilitator, who takes on the role of group mentor. In addition, each group member is considered a mentor to the others, serving as feedback giver, supporter, and ally. This mentoring method leverages the power of group motivation and knowledge exchange. It is an appropriate model for many of today's fast-paced and flexible organizations that rely on knowledge networks and include everyone in the decision-making process.

**Virtual mentoring** is a form of one-to-one or group mentoring that is conducted by telephone, email, and video conferencing. Once considered a "last resort" mentoring method, it is growing in popularity because of geographic considerations. While it overcomes the challenges of distance, it requires special rigor and disciplined implementation to compensate for lack of face-to-face contact.

### One-to-One Mentoring

Despite all their advantages, one-to-one mentoring programs are not easy to establish. To set up a mentoring program you need to be familiar with program components, mentor selection, and what mentors and protégés do.

## Program Components

There are five essential components of mentoring programs.

1. Determine the purpose of the mentoring initiative and set specific goals. Frequently cited outcomes include high potential development, leadership development, support for diversity initiatives, knowledge transfer, and retention of key individuals.
2. Identify and match mentors and protégés. Select participants based on fair, attainable, and known criteria, and make sure that matching mentors and protégés is voluntary. Experts have found that the best matches occur based on the development needs of the protégés. Some companies find cross-functional matching valuable as well.
3. Train mentors and prepare protégés. Good mentor/protégé matches alone do not guarantee success. Improve chances for successful mentoring by training mentors how and when to apply skills such as empathetic listening, conflict resolution, flexible leadership, assertiveness, providing feedback and positive reinforcement, motivating, and using effective instructional techniques. Prepare protégés by helping them define their goals for the mentoring relationship.
4. Monitor the mentoring process to make sure that protégés are achieving their goals. The monitoring phase offers opportunities to identify poor matches and allow participants to request specific persons to replace their current mentor or protégé.
5. Evaluate the program. Base your program evaluation on the overall objectives for the mentoring initiatives.

## Selecting a Mentor

Mentors find their roles to be rewarding and developmental, but they must be seasoned employees who fulfill specific criteria. Here are items to consider when selecting mentors:

## Mentoring Myths

There are several common myths about mentors:

- All mentors are good communicators.
- Mentors control the next career step.
- Mentors have the latest information available on the organization.
- It is the mentor's job to keep the protégé's boss informed.
- A mentor should have information on special career path possibilities.
- People should have the same mentor for their entire careers.

## Job Performance

- Are prospective mentors recognized as effective leaders, and have they performed well in leadership roles?
- Are they considered role models of character and values consistent with their leadership competencies?
- Do prospective mentors support the organization's vision and goals?
- Do they develop subordinates well?

## Business Acumen

- Do prospective mentors have a long-view perspective? Are they comfortable with strategic business outlook planning and thinking?
- Do they deal well with the inherent ambiguity and complexity of any organization? Are they role models of flexibility and change management?

## What Protégés Do

Protégés bring their own personalities and perspectives to the mentoring relationship. Their fresh outlook and enthusiasm can make a real contribution to the organization, as they and their mentors develop their relationship. These are the characteristics found in good protégés:

### Proactive Learner

Nowhere is the notion of “active learning” more important than in mentoring relationships. While the mentor is a respected and valuable resource, it is the role of the protégé to grasp learning opportunities, take learning risks, and engage the mentor as an active development partner.

### Change Agent

The best mentoring relationships are action oriented and emphasize doing, trying, and practicing versus telling, listening, and passive learning. The role of change agent means that the protégé realizes that growth and development are goals of the process. Indeed, the protégé’s role is to change based on this learning relationship.

### Contributor

A hallmark of a successful relationship is that the mentor learns as much from the protégé as the protégé does from the mentor. A key role of the protégé is to share ideas and expertise with the mentor, and view the relationship as one of reciprocal learning.

### Interpersonal Skills

- Do prospective mentors have a history of positive relationships with a broad scope of individuals?
- Are they seen as trusted resources in their own organization?
- Do they have a history of freely sharing expertise and insight with others?

### Learning Capacity

- Are prospective mentors aware of their strengths and weaknesses? Are they willing to talk about these with others?
- Are they personally committed to continuous growth and receptive to new approaches and ideas?

### What Mentors Do

Every mentor brings unique experience and expertise to the relationship. Here are the roles most mentors perform:

**Guide.** A guide takes you through a journey, shows you a path, and helps you see important things along the way. This role can be accomplished in two forms. The *wise owl* offers perspective about what is going on in the organization; while the *teacher* helps people teach themselves by asking the right questions, throwing out ideas, and keeping conversation moving. These mentors lead with questions, share their views freely, and reflect on their own journeys.

**Ally.** An ally can help by offering honesty and friendship while helping others understand how they are seen in the organization. The role can be one of a *sounding board*, where the mentor creates an environment for venting feelings and frustrations. Or the ally can take the form of a *straight talker*, where the mentor provides honest and candid feedback from his or her vantage point. Allies tell it like it is, feel comfortable when others are venting, and freely offer their own feelings and views.

**Catalyst.** A catalyst may use ideas and knowledge from his or her own experiences to stimulate others to explore the culture and environment that surrounds them. This mentor can be an *entrepreneur*, helping the protégé to see the organization in a new light, or a *creative motivator*, stimulating the person to discuss feelings, ideas, visions, and creative concepts. Catalysts know the inner workings of the organization, think of themselves as creative or idea persons, and get excited when they see others get excited about new possibilities.

**Savvy Insider.** The savvy insider knows the ropes. Insiders understand how things really get accomplished in the organization. They can be *people connectors*, putting protégés in touch with people in the organization who can take their learning to another level, or they can be *information providers*, supplying specific data that comes from their connections and activities.

**Advocate.** The advocate actively seeks to propel the protégé's growth and helps him or her develop action plans. Advocates may be *champions*, using their positions to help protégés gain visibility and exposure, or serve as a *powerful voice*, taking action on one or more of the protégés. These mentors go to bat for their people, let others take responsibility and share credit, and enjoy strong credibility and the respect of their peers.

### Tips for One-to-One Mentors

Here are some ideas for achieving success in the mentoring relationship:

#### ■ **Get in Gear**

Every mentoring relationship needs two elements. First, what are the protégé's goals for the relationship, and what are your own—what do you want to learn or achieve as well? Second, what role does the protégé want you to play? Are you comfortable with that role? Explore these questions at your first, and most important, mentoring meeting—it is the foundation for the relationship.

#### ■ **Recognize the Power of Feedback**

Mentors provide the gift of feedback. By sharing unbiased perceptions in a kind and honest way, mentors have tremendous impact. Be sure to provide coaching points, and recognize growth and change. Feedback given in the spirit of helpfulness and progress is appreciated and acted on, as long as it is specific and direct, solicits the protégé's input, and points the way to change in the future.

#### ■ **Be Yourself**

Be straightforward about your own strengths and weaknesses. By doing so, you model how a successful person deals with reality. Offer your own lessons learned, struggles, and successes. Being a mentor does not mean being perfect. Many protégés report that their mentors helped them by disclosing how they had handled difficult aspects of their own personalities.

## Conversation Starters for Mentors

At first, it may be difficult for mentors who are new to the role to get started in the relationship-building process. Here are a few suggested ways to get the conversation going:

- Which assignments in the past have provided you with the most challenge? The least challenge? Why?
- Tell me about an accomplishment of which you are particularly proud.
- What are your most important values? Which values are met and not met at work?
- What makes you unique? What about your values, interests, competencies and skills, personal traits, and style?
- What part of your education or work experience has been the most valuable to you over the years?
- What actions have you taken to manage your career? What assistance may I provide?
- What lessons have you learned from your successes and failures?
- What is your biggest challenge in trying to balance your work life and personal life?

#### ■ **Be a Question Coach**

Mentors do not have all the answers, but they can help their partners self-discover. Use questions to help others reflect on their experience and draw out key learning points. The fast-paced action orientation of the business day does not allow much time for reflection, so promote insight by asking questions such as these: "What did you learn from this situation?" "How might you approach this situation in the future?" "What patterns are you noticing about yourself?"

#### ■ **Shine a New Light**

Mentors have the luxury of being distant from their protégé's work problems and trials. Use this distance to provide the "big picture" as a context for daily ups and downs. Take the long view, and teach your protégé to do the same.

■ **Let Actions Speak Louder Than Words**

Ask your protégé to accompany you on projects that will expand his or her point of view. Look at your own job for situations that could provide learning experiences. Most people learn by doing, so bring the protégé along. Afterward, spend time debriefing the events and relating them to the protégé's development. Share your thought process regarding how you handled or acted in the situation. In the process, the protégé may have some valuable feedback to contribute.

## Group Mentoring

Today's organizations are flat, sparse, team based, and self-directed. They must constantly learn new ways to serve customers and beat competitors. Employees are required to look everywhere, even outward, not just upward. In these environments, structuring one-to-one relationships may be the wrong way to go. Such relationships only strengthen patriarchy, and the notion that someone "else"—at a higher level—must have the answers. Furthermore, copying the one-to-one relationships that work so well in the informal system gives us a different animal when we try to "formalize" them. So, why replicate? Why not invent something totally different?

A group approach, whereby a mentor works with a group of protégés, sets very different dynamics in motion. Protégés are responsible for the group agenda—setting it, requesting what they need for their development, and working together. Peers recognize how much they can learn from one another, and group mentors, when freed from the responsibility of coming up with an agenda, can respond more candidly to real concerns and issues. All participants feel better about the process and learn more as a result.

Mentors look forward to the group meetings. With shared agendas, they learn too. Some bring their own current organization issues to these meetings, to elicit the fresh viewpoints of their protégés who have a different status and tenure in

the organization. Many group mentors do not look upon this as the added burden they felt in earlier one-to-one efforts.

The group mentoring concept has a number of pluses. It places a successful organization veteran with a group of four to six less-experienced protégés. As a group they do the following things:

- exchange ideas
- analyze development issues
- receive feedback and guidance
- build team-development skills
- build interpersonal interaction skills
- become a "learning group"

## The Learning Group

The mentoring group should be assembled with care. Participant qualifications include not only demonstrated ability to perform, but also interpersonal skills and a willingness to learn from others.

**Group composition.** The ideal protégé group consists of four to six high-performing employees who are seen as making important contributions to the organization currently and in the future. Typically, their names are on the succession-planning lists. They have expertise the organization does not want to lose—whether the expertise is technical, managerial, or administrative.

In selecting high-performing people for a protégé group, it is important to consider the interaction and the synthesis of the group as a whole. Diversity in position levels, functions, gender, race, and career goals serves several purposes. A diverse protégé group creates a unique opportunity for the members to learn the perspectives of people in different positions and areas of the organization. It also helps create a peer network of contacts. In addition, when people in a group do not think alike, valuable interaction is more likely. But achieving diversity in a small group is usually deliberate. The members must be selected with diversity in mind.



## Mentoring Do's and Don'ts

The difference between mentoring success and failure lies in the ability to retain intellectual capital and integrate learning continuously. Here are some do's and don'ts for successfully rolling out a mentoring program:

### Do

Look at employee retention rates, the percentage of senior managers who will reach retirement in the next five to 10 years, and current bench strength; then develop objectives.

Set long-term goals that will help make your organization a better place to work, increase productivity, make people more savvy about managing their careers, connect people, increase diversity, and build trust and communication.

Benchmark the practices of other successful mentoring programs. Consider the limited use of outside consultants to advise and provide feedback to the program developers.

Publicize the program in a variety of forms and forums. Conduct briefings, enlist champions, and create mentoring resource centers.

Carefully screen protégés and mentors to assess their level of interest and commitment. Pair participants who can and want to help reach learning goals.

Provide training and coaching to participants about creating specific and appropriate learning goals, building trust, communicating, and defining roles and responsibilities.

Encourage mentoring partners to meet face-to-face and connect via telephone or email at least once a month. Recommend that they plan at least one event outside of the office during their relationship.

Make continuous improvements to your program based on what you learn along the way. Use surveys and exit interviews to assess effectiveness.

### Don't

Develop a mentoring program because it is popular or because you have read that it works for other organizations.

Develop a mentoring program without setting goals.

Develop a mentoring program that relies solely on internal resources.

Expect employees to flock to the program without an aggressive internal marketing plan.

Develop a program that mandates relationships or is limited to certain employees, such as high-potentials.

Expect people to know how to mentor and be mentored—even senior-level executives who have had significant mentors in their lives need guidance.

Let more than three or four weeks go by without contact between mentoring partners, or the relationship may falter.

Rest on your laurels.

*Adapted from "Play '20 Questions' to Develop a Successful Mentoring Program,"  
by J.G. Lindenberger and L.J. Zachary in Training & Development, February 1999, © ASTD.*

## Organizing Mentoring Groups

When forming mentoring groups, take into consideration the following guidelines:

- Diversity makes a difference. Select groups with diverse racial and gender representation to foster different ways of thinking about careers and success.
- Group mentors do not necessarily need to be the very highest-level executives in the organization. Choose people who are about two levels above the protégés.
- Group mentors should be outside the protégés' functional chain of command.
- Don't forget the protégés' immediate managers. Their roles are crucial too. Plan some meetings that include the protégés' managers, in order to help clarify those roles.
- Give group mentors some ideas for getting dialogue started—questions to ask, concepts to discuss, and experiences to share. But mentors are not in charge of the process. They should encourage the group to set the agenda.

**Learning needs.** Protégés need many broad opportunities for growth to attain their potential. Development assignments outside the group setting are a vital program component. Such assignments provide an excellent laboratory for a research and development manager who has not had much experience in a business unit. Or, a budget officer who needs field experience in what it takes to manage a profit center. Many protégés have never managed teams, run meetings, negotiated contracts, or planned client presentations. Consequently, they need opportunities to round out their repertoires. Group members must be willing to experiment. Testing new waters should be a stimulating challenge, providing grist for group meetings.

The learning continues when group members come together again to discuss the meaning of their on-the-job experiences. But the key is to make the learning deliberate. Ask group participants to take on specific development assignments that will offer growth opportunities in the workplace. Such assignments fall into the following three categories:

1. **Platform.** These assignments enable group members to learn new skills in a temporary work assignment or short-term project constructed specifically for them. After the assignment is completed, the “platform” is dismantled.
2. **On-the-job.** These assignments enable group members to try out new skills and responsibilities while working at their jobs.
3. **Dedicated.** These assignments enable group members to gain exposure and experience in different areas of the organization. The members are accountable for the work they do while on the assignment, and they must live with the consequences.

Managers and mentors need to continually debrief the learning embedded in these assignments.

**Group action.** Typically, a protégé group meets with its mentor each month for several hours. The agenda should accommodate any topics or concerns, and anyone should be permitted to initiate a dialogue. The leader and group members share the responsibility for learning every step of the way. In *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge suggests that through an open framework of shared responsibility, groups are able to pursue dialogue rather than discussion. Discussion involves:

- attempting to influence others
- seeking solutions
- determining actions
- making decisions
- gaining consensus
- maintaining hierarchy

Dialog, which is critical to the group model, entails the following elements:

- thinking more freely at deeper levels
- talking about beliefs
- exploring ideas and gaining insight
- adding knowledge
- stretching oneself
- diverging toward varied interests

## The Group Mentor

The ideal group mentor is someone concerned with his or her own learning, the learning of others, and the future of the organization. The group mentor should be a senior person on the technical or management track, preferably at the manager or director level. The mentor's experience must be broad (acquired at different organizational levels), and his or her insight should stem from having done the job.

Specifically, a group mentor's track record should include the following things:

- success in his or her field
- contact with a wide variety of people
- vast accumulated experience
- substantial power
- history of fostering employees' development
- control of substantial resources
- broad organizational experience
- success in managing teams
- reputation for competence

It is crucial for group mentors to be sensitive to diversity. They must approach diversity issues with candor and understanding, especially when differences related to gender, race, or ethnicity arise in the learning group. Group mentors also must have, and be able to pass on, appreciation for the paradox of organizational life, which is not necessarily rational, formula driven, or goal oriented. It is full of variables with competing and conflicting demands. This awareness and admission can help people deal with ambiguity just when they thought they had things figured out.

## Tips for the Group Mentor

To make a group mentoring process successful, do the following things:

### ■ *Ask the Right Questions*

This is often more important than giving the right answers. Opening the conversation so that the group can take charge of the process is essential to success. Do not push them to look for answers to problems and issues, but rather to look for all the various options and consider what they really think about the issues. Preparation is a critical factor in making a group meeting successful. Simply jotting down four or five questions that will get the group thinking can be your best prework.

### ■ *Listen More Than You Talk*

Do not feel that just because you are the leader of the group, it is your responsibility to do most of the talking. Once the group has jelled, members should be able to generate dialogue themselves, and you should not need to spend much of your time talking. It may be easy to get into the trap of being seen as the guru or the leader of this small group and always being there to provide insight and advice. Yet for true learning to take place, it is necessary for you to hold back and allow the group to find their own answers and solutions. You are more of a facilitator of this process.

### ■ *Let the Group Create the Agenda*

If group members feel that they are responsible for what is being discussed at each session, they will have a much greater sense of ownership in the process. This, in turn, will stimulate attendance because the sessions are of their own making. You can guide and assist members in the process of creating the agenda, but do not let this be your sole responsibility.

### ■ *Do Not Have All the Answers*

Many questions and issues will come up in this group for which you do not have the answers, and there is no reason you should assume that you must have answers for every situation. It will be far more interesting for everyone if the group brainstorms answers or ways to obtain answers together, rather than looking to the learning leader. You do not want to create a student-teacher environment where there is a built-in sense of inequality. The

## Mentoring in Action

Many organizations have been successful in establishing mentoring programs. Here are just two examples:

### Chemical Company

Began originally by one business unit as an effort to gain vertical parity for its women and minorities and develop leadership capabilities, group mentoring gradually spread throughout a global chemical company. Approximately 30 protégés moved through the year-long program each time it was offered. Protégé groups included six to eight high-potentials from diverse locations. Each group was assigned to a mentor who met with the group once a month for a minimum of two hours.

Mentors were selected by senior management. Protégés were those tapped for succession planning and continuity planning. Groups developed their own agendas and asked their mentor for the kinds of interaction and discussions they felt were important. Managers of the protégés met with mentors at the beginning of the process and kept in touch on an individual basis after that. All groups were brought together four times during the year to join in a learning community and hear from other senior leaders. Groups reported that the interaction with their peers was as important in their learning as the interaction with their mentor.

### City Government

When the engineering group of a large California city saw that it needed to develop not only its future leadership but also its middle managers, it launched its own group mentoring effort. Protégés self-selected into the program by completing an application describing their interest in the process and talking about their career goals. Members of the protégé group selected mentors they thought demonstrated a concern for development. All protégés attended a career development class and then used the subsequent meetings with their mentors to discuss various aspects of this learning. Mentors attended a brief training session, followed by get-togethers to learn more about each other's experience in the mentor groups. Groups met for a year, decided their own agendas, and also decided whether or not to continue once the year had ended.

group should feel collegial, recognizing that answers grow out of its collective intelligence, and work together rather than exclusively.

### ■ Give Advice Through Storytelling

Often the best way to give examples is to use the lessons of your own experiences. This will increase your credibility and breathe real life into your suggestions so that the group can identify with you on an intimate level. You can make the dialogue richer by considering articles that the group has read in advance of the meeting. But if the conversation becomes theoretical or didactic rather than personal, it will not have the same learning potential. Encourage the group to tell stories and give individual examples related to their readings and assignments so that they personalize the learning.

### ■ Have Something Up Your Sleeve

Do not assume that just because you are not responsible for the agenda you should not have some ideas for group dialogue ready to interject. For the most part, conversation will come easily as the members of the group get to know one another and the issues with which they are most concerned. If the easy flow of dialogue gets jammed up, however, you will want to be prepared to get things moving again.

### The Manager

Because protégé group activities go beyond group meetings, it is crucial that the managers of the protégés be committed to making the group experience a success. Some managers may view learning groups as tugging at the allegiance of their own direct reports, taking them away from job tasks and work groups. To that end, managers should receive orientation or training on the benefits of the mentoring process. An orientation leads managers through several activities that teach them how to help employees think through a development assignment.

Managers explore their roles in facilitating development conversations and providing feedback and coaching. They also link high-performing employees to organizational information and networks, helping them to shape goals and process learning on an ongoing basis. Development-minded managers enrich the process by encouraging members

## Mentoring Strategies

When deciding to harness the benefits of informal mentoring activity, organizations should take the time to plan management strategies that guarantee results. These are the issues they should consider:

### Business Case for Mentoring

What are your reasons for developing the program? What business impact do you want to achieve? What success indicators will tell you that the mentoring initiative is succeeding? (Consider both quantitative and qualitative measures.)

### Organizational Concerns

What is your organizational history with mentoring programs? How have previous mentoring efforts been perceived? How will this history affect how you implement and communicate the current initiative? Do you have organization-wide cooperation and support from top management? Will you request organization-wide input or advice from a limited number of experts and decision makers? Does the organization have positions for the new talent it develops in mentoring programs?

### Communication

What will you name this mentoring initiative? How will you present the program? What will you say about its purpose, objectives, goals, mechanics, and benefits? What are the benefits to the organization and the program partici-

pants? How will you publicize the program? What resources do you have (memos, discussions, meetings)? How will you regularly communicate the purpose, progress, and results?

### Roles and Responsibilities

Who will be the process owner? Who will be the day-to-day manager? What other resources and roles are needed?

### Implementation

How will you select participants for the program? What will the selection criteria entail? How will you present these criteria to interested candidates? Will participation be voluntary or mandatory? Why? How will the program foster and support mentor-protégé relationships? Will it provide opportunities for mentors and protégés to meet and exchange views and opinions so they can assess their own suitability? Or will the program assign mentors to protégés?

### Evaluation

How will you evaluate the results and outcomes of the program? When will you make adjustments to ensure accomplishment of program goals? Is the mentoring program the best way to impart skills and knowledge and to develop human resource potential? What are its advantages over other training methods?

to explore new ways of contributing to the job while still monitoring their continued responsibility. Such managers understand their role in terms of day-to-day authority and skill building.

As partners in the process, managers perform the following functions:

- Provide personal feedback to learners on values and mindsets that arise in group meetings.
- Cultivate people's capabilities for their current and future jobs.
- Help craft and debrief challenging learning assignments in partnership with learning leaders and learning group members.
- Endorse experimentation, applaud new approaches, and permit mistakes.
- Ask questions to encourage discussion on what participants are learning and how.

## Mentoring Guidelines

Use the following guidelines for organizations setting up programs, mentors working with protégés, and protégés seeking mentoring relationships.

### Organizations

- Get top management support of the program. Managers should endorse and be willing to fund the program as well as give mentors, protégés, and learning groups time away from the job to meet and form relationships.
- Make the mentoring program part of succession planning, or a larger career or management development effort to help employees.
- Start with a short program—six months at most—to accomplish specified learning goals without imposing a long-term, burdensome commitment.
- Minimize the dropout rate by making the program voluntary and by establishing clear expectations.
- Publicly announce the criteria for selecting program participants. Selection criteria should be fair and attainable so as not to invite the resentment of those who feel they have been unfairly excluded.
- Select mentors with high levels of expertise, rank, and power. Select protégés who have basic skills and capabilities, but most important, the desire to learn from mentors.
- Give mentors and protégés an orientation that addresses the concerns, expectations, and benefits to participants and the organization.
- Allow for diverse mentoring styles, providing structure but permitting flexibility. Prevent problems by specifying responsibilities of mentors, protégés, and their immediate supervisors or managers.
- Document the progress of the mentoring program using evaluation instruments, meetings, reports, and logs, and use this documentation to recommend maintaining, expanding, or eliminating the program.

### Mentors

- Expect to invest considerable time and effort. Like any other strong relationship, the one between mentor and protégé or learning group requires a solid foundation of mutual trust and understanding.
- Be prepared to initiate the relationship; protégés often are apprehensive about approaching senior advisers.
- When the time is right, let protégés or learning groups go. If they are gradually given more independence to act and make decisions on their own, protégés will be prepared mentally for separation.
- Have realistic expectations of the relationship. Do not expect lifelong gratitude; some protégés may consider this a business arrangement to which they owe improved job performance only.

### Protégés

- Look for a mentor among the ranks of middle and senior managers. Observe work and communication styles to select the kind of mentor who would be right for you.
- Do not wait to be chosen. Express your interest by asking middle and senior managers for advice.
- Know what you want from the relationship, based on your current situation. Think about your competencies, the skills you would like to develop, and your long-range career plans.
- Know what is expected of you in the relationship. Besides providing mentors with respect and psychological support, as your relationship develops into one of mutual assistance, you will be returning the mentor's help by acting as his or her agent.
- Have realistic expectations. Relationships may not last a lifetime and most cannot fulfill *every* need, because individual mentoring styles vary as do degrees of mentoring.

## Virtual Mentoring

Cross-site or distance mentoring often involves alternative communication such as telephone, email, and video conferencing. Whichever methods you choose, you will want to use some strategies to compensate for less face-to-face time. Communication research shows that it takes about 25 to 30 percent more time to build a personal relationship when you build it at a distance. That is because you miss the gestures, body language, and subtle communication of direct contact. The *good* news is that people involved in distance mentoring report high satisfaction because they often develop better listening skills and plan their time more carefully than face-to-face mentoring partners.

### Tips for Virtual Mentoring

To make virtual mentoring programs successful, consider the following suggestions:

- Pay special attention to outcomes and objectives. Be clear and precise about the relationship's purpose.
- Exchange photos. If you are not familiar with each other's sites, send some photos of your facilities, work areas, co-workers and anything else that would help your partner get to know you.
- Exchange "artifact" boxes. Package up and send items that will help your partner understand your site's products and your job. Use your imagination.
- Establish a "mentor hotline time." This is periodically designated time dedicated to mentor-learning partner conversation.
- Keep commitments. If you view conversations as "just a telephone call," it is easy to cancel or postpone them. Follow through on plans and activities. Dependability contributes to strong partnerships.
- Exchange information that paints a "whole picture" of each person's work environment on a routine basis. For example, share regular status reports.
- Do not begin by replacing teleconferencing with email. Email is very useful, but early on you will want to hear each other's voices, and the spontaneity associated with live conversation is important.
- Combine communication methods. For example, use email to supply detailed information in conjunction with a planned teleconference or project review. Send a follow-up email after a telephone conversation.
- Listen with a third ear. Be sensitive to tone of voice as a substitute for seeing body language.
- Ask "why" and "how" questions to obtain deeper understanding in conversations.
- Connect at conferences or organization-sponsored events.
- Create a mentoring group at your site for people who have distance mentors. Form a collaborative group to support mutual development.
- Plan field trips to your partner's site when you have opportunities to be near or at his or her location.

### Putting It All Together

While the time-honored practice of mentoring has always been with us, today it is a dynamic tool for employee development. Whether you select one-to-one mentoring, learning groups, or virtual mentoring, know that relationship learning forges an environment that reduces learning curves and development cycles.

Yes, there is time investment. And mentoring in any form requires careful preparation and fit with business objectives. The payback comes not just in rewards for the organization, however, but also in personal dividends for the participants. Use the ideas and tools in this *Info-line* to unleash the potential for you and your organization.

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## Program Outline/Planner

When you are charged with setting up a mentoring program for your organization, use this outline as a guide. In it you will find the questions you need to address in order to have a successful program.

1. State the objectives of the mentoring program:

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2. List the benefits of the mentoring program for each of the following:

- a. Organization:

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- b. Mentor:

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- c. Protégé:

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3. Which mentoring method(s) can help you achieve your goals?

- One-to-one mentoring
- Group mentoring
- Virtual mentoring

4. Who are the key stakeholders in the mentoring initiative, and what will their involvement look like?

*Stakeholder*

*Involvement*

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5. Consider the following questions concerning the structure of your mentoring program:

- a. What criteria will you use to select mentors?

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- b. What criteria will you use to select protégés?

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- c. What role do you see for the managers of the protégés?

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- d. How will you orient mentors, protégés, and managers to the mentoring process and prepare them to be successful?

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## Job Aid

e. How will you “match” mentors and protégés?

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f. What plans do you have to follow up on the process and gather periodic input from all participants?

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g. How will you recognize and reward all those involved?

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6. How will you present the benefits and selection criteria (bulletin board, employee newsletter, and so forth)?

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7. How will the program foster mentor/protégé relationships? List ways of providing support for the participants (program guidelines, weekly meetings, councils, and so forth).

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8. List the positions that the organization has for the protégés. Are there enough? Will the organization create new ones?

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9. Consider the following when deciding on evaluation factors:

a. How will you evaluate the program? State your method(s)—questionnaires, surveys, interviews, and observations.

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b. How did the program affect protégés?

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● Attitudinal effect: \_\_\_\_\_

● Behavioral effect: \_\_\_\_\_

● Accomplishments: \_\_\_\_\_

c. How did the program affect mentors?

● Attitudinal effect: \_\_\_\_\_

● Behavioral effect: \_\_\_\_\_

● Accomplishments: \_\_\_\_\_

d. How did the program affect the organization?

● Overall performance rating: \_\_\_\_\_

● Productivity: \_\_\_\_\_

● Condition of corporate climate: \_\_\_\_\_

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