



# DO YOU NEED A **MENTORSHIP PROGRAM** AT YOUR ORGANIZATION?

In his leadership classic entitled *On Becoming a Leader*, Warren Bennis suggests that one can learn through reading books, through one's own personal experiences, and through the experiences of others. Whether one is a mentor or a mentee, corporate mentoring programs provide an opportunity for an employee to gain insights and perspectives from others.

In this series of articles on mentoring programs, we will cover the benefits of mentorship for organizations and program participants, the subtle art of mentorship (what it is and what it is not), and mentorship program design.

Each article features a unique case study intended to highlight types of mentorship program models and to highlight the process of designing, developing, and delivering a mentorship program.

## **PART 1**

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# WHAT IS A CORPORATE MENTORSHIP PROGRAM?

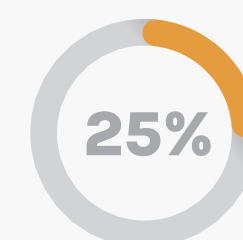
In a corporate environment, mentoring programs provide opportunities for individuals within the organization to share organizational knowledge and insights that help spread knowledge on specific content and best practices, including communication and leadership.

Mentorship programs differ from training programs in that mentorship programs are **relationship-focused**. Rapport is key to success because much of the learning takes place in the form of open and honest communication and feedback.



# SOME RESEARCH DATA FOR YOU ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MENTORSHIP AND MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS

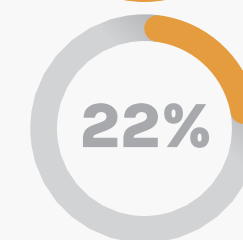
Research on mentorship programs suggest that they can significantly benefit an individual's career trajectory in such a way that they can learn new skills, get promoted faster, and be more motivated and focused on career advancement. According to a study conducted by Gartner (2006), a research and advisory firm:



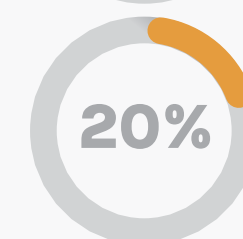
25% of employees who enrolled in a mentorship program had a salary-grade change, compared to only 5% of workers who did not participate



Mentees are promoted five times more often than those not in a mentorship program



Retention rates were higher for both mentees (22% more) and mentors (20% more) than for employees who did not participate in a mentorship program



More recent research from Deloitte confirms the important role that mentors play in the career development and progression of others. In the 2016 Deloitte Millennial Survey: Winning Over The Next Generation of Leaders, it was found that Millennials intending to stay with their organization for more than five years were twice as likely to have a mentor (68%) than not (32%).



# THE BENEFITS OF MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS FOR YOUR PEOPLE

Mentorship programs have immense value for program participants and, in turn, for the organization as a whole.



## Benefits for Mentees

Through regular interaction with a mentor, mentees receive tailored and specific skill development or training that a classroom situation cannot provide as the content is often role- and relationship-specific.

The transfer of knowledge from mentor to mentee, not only provides invaluable knowledge to the mentees, but the experience as a whole is psychologically impactful.

Mentees are inspired and motivated when they know they can experience another



**Mentees are the immediate beneficiaries.**

individual's career success story told to them. It also reduces their fear and anxiety when they know that they can achieve goals similar to their mentors.

Mentorship also provides mentees opportunities to network and identify career growth opportunities most suitable for them to take. Mentors do not necessarily model their career path but the thinking process involved in figuring out one's career path.



**By offering mentors with the opportunity to serve aspiring employees within the organization, mentorship programs help mentors to feel validated and valued as knowledgeable and skilled leaders.**

## Benefits for Mentors

As social creatures, we all need to feel that we matter to others and that we make a difference in culture and society.

In working environments where the limits of our abilities are constantly being tested, a mentorship program may boost their confidence by helping them realize that they have actually developed a wealth of knowledge that they might otherwise take for granted.

Furthermore, mentorship programs also help mentors to grow and progress in their own careers. Through their participation in mentorship programs, mentors gain valuable opportunities for them to actively focus on the development of their soft skills such as providing motivation, open and honest communication, critical thinking, and constructive feedback to others.



In this way, mentorship programs can help mentors hone their leadership skills. Mentors can gain insight and clarity regarding aspects that affect more junior roles. This leads to more rounded and effective business decisions being made. Effective leadership makes use of everybody's thinking, not just that of the leader.





Mentorship programs,  
taken as a whole, benefit  
organizations.

## Benefits for Organizations

They boost the quality of the organization's workforce, help the organization in retaining existing talent, and provide an excellent opportunity to identify, not only future leadership in the short term, but also those individuals best suited for special projects or growth opportunities.

Mentorship programs, depending on how they are designed, can support organizations in fulfilling various organizational goals:



Help organizations to  
identify their organizational  
goals



Retain their existing or  
engage new talent



Develop the next generation  
of leaders



Promote diversity



Build workplace culture



Provide employee career  
development

## CASE STUDY - GROUP MENTORSHIP PROGRAM



This particular initiative  
was aligned with the  
organization's own goal to  
retain staff.

Mentorship can take many forms and suit many and multiple needs. For mentorship programs to succeed, careful planning is required to ensure they meet both organizational and employee expectations. While traditional mentorship programs pair a less experienced professional within an organization with a more experienced one, there are also group mentorship programs involving a mentor working with a group of mentees.

In this article, we will turn to an auditing firm based in Cyprus that decided to use

the group mentorship model. The auditing firm was keen to create a culture where the most suitable talent was given the opportunity to grow and progress their careers.

Leadership understood that such a radical change in culture would require employees to develop required soft skills.

They wanted to develop a mentorship program to tackle this challenge. They also considered that personal relationships and family ties feature strongly in Cyprus's business culture.



## Initial Assessment

The firm engaged an expert who carried out an assessment and put together a proposal based on the feedback. Key pieces of feedback were as follows:

- 1 Many young employees wanted to build networks and requested to have mentors who dealt with customers so they could build their own network.
- 2 The organization's leadership team was unsure of how they could fit the work of this program into their busy schedule.
- 3 The organization wanted to encourage a more open and collaborative workplace culture, with high cross-functional support.



## Program Design

To implement this program, time was set aside for weekly group meetings. A package of suggested activities was put together so the leadership did not have to spend too much time planning in the early stages.

Every two months, the groups would rotate mentors, allowing a broad range of perspectives, advice and experiences to be shared.



## Program Delivery Preparation

The auditing firm conducted two-day training sessions with mentors explaining the benefits of mentoring, the required soft skills, and the general purpose of program activities.

A communications package was also put together and company-wide messaging was sent out to help attract interested employees and explain to them how the program would work and how to sign up if interested



## Employee Reception to the Group Mentorship Program

Executive leadership revealed that, in the beginning, the uptake was a bit disappointing.

Nonetheless, the organization remained committed to the value of the mentorship program and continued:

- ▶ socializing the idea
- ▶ providing regular communication updates, and
- ▶ sharing individual experiences within the mentorship program



In a matter of just weeks, participants played a role in promoting the idea. These efforts led to a high level of engagement after the initial two months.



After the initial six-month trial, almost all participants responded that it had been of benefit and wished to continue being enrolled in the program. The leadership reported employees feeling more energized and confident, not only in their role as mentors, but also when dealing with clients and customers.



After the first year, a number of employees had been given the opportunity to participate in growth projects, some choosing to move into other departments and areas of the business.

**Morale was up.** The workplace culture had become one focused on open communication and collaboration. The mentorship program played a role in helping employees to grow the capacity of the organization.

## HOW TO PREPARE EMPLOYEES TO BE MENTORS AND MENTEES

Whether an organization simply asks for volunteers or mandates participation in a mentorship program, organizations will need to ensure the mentors understand what is involved and have the correct skills and knowledge to be effective mentors and that mentees have a realistic understanding and expectations of what the program will and will not offer them.

Mentors should be leaders that are highly experienced and knowledgeable in their field. They will need to be empathetic listeners - giving the mentees time and space to explore and vocalize their difficulties or concerns and knowing when to listen and when to guide.

Mentors will also benefit greatly by being exposed to different perspectives. Mentorship is a two-way street. The program is meant to be a learning journey for the mentor as well.



# LOOK OUT FOR OUR **SECOND ARTICLE ON** MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS



In the second instalment of this series of articles on leadership development and mentorship programs, we will further delve into the process of mentorship – what mentorship is and is not, the dynamics of pairing mentors and mentees, and how to provide psychological safety to both mentors and mentees. We will look at a different organization that decided upon having a one-on-one peer mentorship program.

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