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Creating a Mentoring Culture for Organizational Success:

A Guideline for Successful Mentoring Programs

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Mentoring is a management practice that can assist organizations in building a desired corporate culture, while enabling the careers of those who are already motivated to pursue one. It is an efficient and effective method of shortening the learning curve of new executives and providing more knowledgeable employees with broader perspectives. New executives with a mentor have a sounding board, as well as the benefit of their mentor's experience as they navigate through situations that may be unfamiliar to them. Based upon a foundation of trust, the relationship of mentees with experienced executives can offer a safe place to try out ideas, skills, and roles with minimal risk, while focusing on their individual development needs.

In this article, I will discuss the impact a mentoring culture can make in an organization, how mentoring differs from coaching, the value of a structured approach to mentoring and the steps to set up a mentoring program.

Successful Mentorships

Mentoring is defined as a professional and confidential relationship between two individuals that assists one of them in developing "business strategies" and acquiring new "technical" knowledge and skills. One mentee concluded, after a year-long mentoring relationship in a structured program I designed for a large public sector organization,[1] that: "It is an evolutionary process, where mentors become a resource for someone enabling an exchange of ideas and experiences. Avoid matching of those who have known each other a long time… the forging of the relationship is a valuable part of the process."

Table 1: Successful Mentorships

Successful mentorships:

- Align with organization objectives
- Enjoy organization-wide senior support
- Meet specific developmental needs of mentees
- Recognize contributions of mentors
- Offer training, orientation and networking opportunities
- Establish realistic and time-bound milestones
- Launch with a written, signed commitment
- Respect confidentiality of the relationship
- Recognize successful outcomes

According to Edward E. Lawler III, in his book *Managing Talent: Making People Your Competitive Advantage*:

[1] Kubicek, A. (2007). The Mentoring Adventure, 2006-2007. Unpublished report for a public sector organization.

> "Human capital-centric organizations excel only when they have outstanding talent. To have outstanding talent, they need an outstanding talent management system—one that attracts the right talent and helps them understand exactly what to expect from their work experience with the company. The best talent management systems also provide employees with the kind of developmental experiences that build the organization's key capabilities and core competencies. Last but not least, they retain the right talent."[2]

Clearly some companies get it. They find the talent and they keep the talent. They recognize the need to hang onto those employees who demonstrate best fit with organizational culture, who share the passion for the vision, who have the education and technical skills to succeed. As an organization, you would want to invest in their futures knowing that theirs will become yours. As Lawler states, they become "the keepers of the corporate identity and knowledge bases."[3] So, if your work culture focuses on becoming highly involved with your employees, you probably are already closing the gap between your corporate talent and your financial success.

Creating a Mentoring Culture, Not a Coaching Program

Coaching Vs. Mentoring
Where coaching is task-oriented, focused on specific skills for improvement, be they interpersonal or operational skills, mentoring is relationship-based, where the interaction and commitment of mentor and mentee will greatly influence the success of the mentee's career development process. It extends beyond the workplace to the individual's self-confidence and esteem. Both mentor and mentee benefit from the relationship.

According to Lawler, we know generally that the cost of turnover to the organization is based on salary. "The larger the salary, the greater the multiple should be. For example, in replacing relatively unskilled individuals, often the cost is one or two times the monthly salary. However, in the case of a senior executive, the cost is more likely to be ten or fifteen times monthly salary."[4]

We know that more often than not, the most expensive turnover occurs when it is unplanned. Unplanned turnover as opposed to involuntary departures creates an unexpected financial drain on the budget as well as incurring the hidden costs of lost knowledge capital in the short term and a potential risk to your competitive advantage.

So organizations that wish to hire the best, keep the best, and all the while be at the top of their game, will consider how to leverage the excellent talent they have already attracted and want to keep, instead of relying on sourcing new brainpower elsewhere. The assumption is of course that the

[2] Lawler III, E. E. (2008). Talent making people your competitive advantage. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.

recruitment process was successful to begin with, where good fit went beyond technical skills and knowledge.

In a Global Assessment Trends Report (from CEB-SHL Talent Measurement)[5], 56% of HR professionals agreed that employee engagement is a top priority, but only 19% reported having a formal process to engage employees, and while leadership development ranked second in the list of HR priorities in 2014, only 30% had a formal process in place. In addition, best practices research into career development identifies a need for structure, standardization, consistency and executive support when introducing formal engagement and leadership strategies.

Table 2: Structured Engagement and Development Programs

The organization benefits from:

- Long -term development of leadership
- Aligned organization strategy
- Planned succession

The selected employee benefits from:

- Career growth potential
- Learning focus on specific skills
- Challenging assignments on high profile committees or initiatives

Companies with unstructured approaches offer limited-resourced programs where there is no expectation of long-term impact or link with strategy, leadership development or succession planning. On the other hand, these programs do offer individuals a networking opportunity, "nice to have" connection with someone who can show them the ropes and perhaps recommend a book and seminar or two.

Value of the Structured Approach

Since the late 1980s, global survey after global survey has suggested that the most critical elements of leadership success in all sectors are fourfold:

1. Competence
2. Honesty
3. Inspirational
4. Forward Thinking

[5] 2014 Global Assessment Trends Report | CEB-SHL Talent Measurement. (2014). Retrieved October 6, 2015, from http://www.cebglobal.com/shl/images/uploads/GATR-Executive-Summary-2014-USeng.pdf

Therefore, instead of gambling on future leadership, an organization's financial success can be facilitated by creating a mentoring culture that is structured to deliver specific results. The structure ensures that both mentee and mentor are carefully identified and matched based on their past and current performance, their interests and expertise and their desire to participate in co-creating a successful future organization. Mentors are selected because they are known in the organization as:

- Something of an authority in the field
- Influential in decision-making
- Vested in the professional growth and development of the mentee
- Willing to commit necessary time and emotional energy
- Secure enough not to be threatened by other people's success
- Providing wise counsel, coaching advice and support
- Excellent communicators with strong interpersonal skills
- Having an extensive network of resources, including other potential mentors
- Team players
- Doing the best to help the mentee understand the secrets learned the hard way about the nuances of the corporate structure, special politics and its key players
- Practicing competence, honesty, inspirational thought and forward-thinking

A structured approach does not imply a compulsory program for your high potentials. Rather, a successful outcome of mentoring is directly related to the commitment of both mentor and mentee to the relationship. Therefore, participation is voluntary, both mentee and mentor are invested and the mentee's supervisor lends support but is not directly involved in the process.

Pamela Ryckman, author of *Stiletto Network: Inside the Women's Power Circles That Are Changing the Face of Business*, is quoted in the May 17, 2013 issue of Forbes Magazine, saying that:

> "A mentor must believe in her mentee, both personally and professionally … Mentors help fill your knowledge gaps and seek opportunities to help you grow and excel. A mentor is someone with whom you can let down your guard, share your insecurities, and ask the 'stupid' questions we all have sometimes."[6]

Structure also requires some sort of plan, with SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Action-Oriented, Realistic and Time-Bound), signed learning contracts, firm meeting schedules, and check-in points with the organization to discuss progress, debrief the mentees' and mentors' experiences and obtain constructive feedback on the mentee's development.

In particular, when mentees and mentors attend an orientation session, to learn about each other and together create a mentoring agreement and personal learning plan, the relationship is most likely to succeed.

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[6] Pamela Ryckman quoted in Smith, J. (2013, May 17). How to be a great mentor. Retrieved October 6, 2015, from http://www.forbes.com/sites/jacquelynsmith/2013/05/17/how-to-become-a-great-mentor/

Table 3: Mentoring Roadmap

Steps for creating a mentoring program:

- Obtain organizational support
- Communicate/ engage supervisors
- Solicit, interview and select prospective mentors
- Invite potential mentees to participate
- Match-make and communicate
- Describe roles and responsibilities
- Design and deliver an orientation launch
- Follow-up at milestones to monitor progress

As part of the structured program I designed for a public sector organization,[7] follow ups with mentees at key milestones (3, 6 and 12 months) were required to track their progress. After 6 months, I was able to confirm that:

> "Those participating in orientation held a stronger commitment to the mentoring relationship than those who had less initial time together… directly attributed to the time and opportunity those dyads had in developing a personal learning plan and a mentoring agreement while on training… Setting SMART objectives are critical in ensuring the success of the mentoring program but providing the time for that activity is as significant."

Mentoring agreements spelled out the terms of the relationship between the mentor and mentee and what they were both committing to. This agreement became their contract to work together, understanding their respective expectations regarding availability, acceptable behaviours and confidentiality. This last point, in fact, became a most critical point as the relationship developed.

Table 4: Mentoring Agreements

Key points in mentoring agreements include:

- Confidentiality
- Written commitment
- Conflict of interest
- Behaviour protocols
- Refusal of compensation
- Responsibilities of mentor, mentee and organization

[7] Kubicek, A. (2007). The Mentoring Adventure, 2006-2007. Unpublished report for a public sector organization.

In this organization, the orientation also provided them with an opportunity to meet other pairs who were participating. This created a community for mentors who could, going forward, support each other throughout the mentoring period. As well, mentees were able to share their experiences which in some ways, also provided a support network. Mentors in the same program agreed that:

> "The more time working together to develop those agreements, the more likely to be on track with completion of mentee learning goals. Little time spent together developing goals resulted in more distance and less structure to the relationship, and a lower likelihood of moving the mentoring objectives forward… "

Steps for Successful Mentoring

1. It goes without saying that successful mentoring will not happen without first obtaining overall organizational support to create a mentoring culture. How to do this is a subject for another article. However, once it has been confirmed, certain structural steps to facilitate success should be considered.

2. Develop written guidelines to detailing how to involve supervisors in the mentoring process.

3. Call for mentors and mentees and ask them to complete their profiles. These forms enable participants to identify their skills, experience, goals and any other essential criteria to assist in the matching process. Online systems are available to assist in this process.

4. Review the matches of mentors and mentees within a pre-determined timeframe. The matching process considers all criteria in order to secure an appropriate match.

5. Officially register mentors and mentees in the mentoring program when a match had been made.

6. Distribute written guidelines to mentees and mentors to assist them in initiating and engaging in "exploratory" meetings to discuss their goals and objectives and determine a personality fit.

7. Design and deliver a mentoring orientation to launch the dyads (mentee and mentor pairs). This workshop provides them the time to formalize their mentoring agreements, create SMART developmental objectives, and determine their next steps.

8. Encourage the dyads to sign the mentoring agreement that formally commits them to the mentoring relationship. If there is some hesitation at this point, determine the cause: availability, poor fit, inability to identify the overall developmental objectives.

9. Monitor progress during periodic program audits, at three and six-month intervals and prepare written progress reports to track success.

10. Prepare an annual detailed evaluation report that enables the organization to validate mentoring as a cultural input to their overall success.

"What I've heard time and again from executive 'elders' is how much they gain in return when they mentor young people. They're often surprised at how much they learn from their mentees. Mentoring really goes both ways; when different generations come together, their blend of skills can be highly complementary."[8]

About the Author

As Managing Director of ***akpsGlobal,*** Alice focuses on leadership and teams and performance management practices. Diversity, organization reviews and professional development, and non-profit board governance are key elements of her work. Alice is a Senior Fellow with the Faculty of Social Sciences, Centre of Governance at the University of Ottawa, Acting Executive Director at Daybreak Non-Profit Housing and adjunct professor with the Grenoble Graduate School of Business.

[8] Smith, J. (2013, May 17). How to be a great mentor. Retrieved October 6, 2015, from http://www.forbes.com/sites/jacquelynsmith/2013/05/17/how-to-become-a-great-mentor/

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