Mentoring: Benefits, Challenges, and New Approaches

June 2011
Introduction
The “Mentoring Tool”\textsuperscript{i} has proven to be a useful resource for improving employee performance and confidence and assisting women and minorities in gaining a clearer path to upper management. As traditionally defined, mentoring is an “intense, committed relationship in which a senior person (the mentor) motivates and supports the personal and professional development of a junior person (the protégé).\textsuperscript{ii} Mentoring has evolved to include new approaches, such as “e-mentoring” and “peer-mentoring.” Human resources professionals are also developing new approaches to reduce the barriers preventing minorities and women from gaining the full benefits of mentoring programs.

Practically unheard of until the 1970s, mentoring programs are common today. According to statistics from the Menttium Corporation, a provider of formal corporate mentoring programs, the number of the 500 largest corporations in the United States with official mentoring programs grew from 10 percent in 2002 to 50 percent in 2007.\textsuperscript{iii} “Downsizing, restructuring, teamwork, diversity and individual responsibility”\textsuperscript{iv} helped spur the proliferation of these programs during the final decades of the last century, as competitive realities and new management philosophies transformed the relationships between companies and their employees. Globalization, technological evolution, and corporate devaluation of employee longevity in favor of a younger, and less established workforce helped give rise to the “free agent, or individuals who commit to careers and relationships with colleagues rather than entrust loyalty to an organizations.”\textsuperscript{v, vi}

This report reviews some of the benefits of formal mentoring programs to organizations and employees (particularly women and minorities), touches on how companies are meeting the special needs of women and minority protégés, looks at several new approaches to mentoring, provides several examples of best practices in mentoring, and offers suggestions for strengthening the mentor/protégé relationship.

The Importance of Mentoring Today
Mentoring programs may be even more critical today. Retiring “baby boomers” are creating a shortage of experienced workers and a corresponding loss of organizational knowledge. An article in *Women in Management Review*, Debra Cohen, Chief Knowledge Officer of The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), warns companies to confront these challenges. “Many employers feel that the knowledge, experience, and skills employees acquire in their day-to-day tasks is sufficient for developing talent,” says Cohen. “However, with so many key employees positioned to retire in the near future, companies need to take formal steps to ensure smooth transitions and business continuity. When the talent and knowledge of retiring workers walks out the door, every organization needs to make sure they have others ready to fill the gaps.”

Mentoring by employees about to retire is an invaluable tool for preserving institutional knowledge.

**The Benefits of Effective Mentoring Programs**

Employers and employees have embraced mentoring, and 30 years of experience and scholarship have validated the benefits of mentoring programs. Mentoring:

- Promotes career advancement, personal growth, and job satisfaction for the mentor and the protégé,
- Opens access to organization resources and rewards,
- Provides an effective way to familiarize new employees with company policies, culture, and expectations,
- Improves the protégé’s technical skills,
- Develops an “atmosphere of reciprocal collaboration between mentees and mentors.”

Research has shown that mentoring enhances the protégé’s cognitive, skill-based, and affective learning. According to Sarah A. Hezlett, researcher on human resources issues, protégés “gain at least two kinds of verbal knowledge—organizational knowledge and technical knowledge; several skills, including technical, interpersonal, time management and self-organizations skills; and affective changes, particularly self-confidence.”
Mentoring programs for women and racial minorities are particularly advantageous in transforming a company’s culture. They facilitate the creation of diverse management teams more representative of workforces and markets. Mentoring programs for disadvantaged populations have proven so successful in the United States that they are having a global impact. Australians, for example, employ mentoring to integrate the indigenous population into the workplace. According to John Burgess and Sharlene Dyer, professors at the University of Newcastle in Australia, “Culturally sensitive, formal mentoring is seen as a major component to ensuring positive indigenous employment outcomes. Research has indicated that effective mentoring can keep disadvantaged groups, such as indigenous Australians, in jobs longer and advance their careers faster than other forms of support or intervention.”

Burgess and Dyer also report that, “Mentoring can offer the bridge between being inside and outside of the workforce. Entering a new workplace can be daunting for any new employee, and indigenous employees face added pressure. The indigenous employee may find it difficult to adapt to the mainstream workplace culture and behaviour, they may now be living cross culturally dealing with differing cultural and behavioural requirements at work and home … They become disillusioned and discouraged under the social pressure and may have few role models to assist them in this transition; therefore it is a distinct advantage to have the added support of an effective mentor service.”

Of course, most new employees have problems adjusting to their new companies, but minorities and women face unique challenges:

- Minorities and women have difficulty finding mentors of the same race or gender because of underrepresentation in the upper levels of management. This is a particular problem for women, because people can misconstrue seeking a mentor of the opposite sex as a sexual advance.
- Women and minorities are “most likely to receive the psychosocial functions of mentoring but have less access to the instrumental functions.”
• Potential mentors may not select a minority protégé, because of race-based stereotypes and cultural biases.
• The level of the success achieved by their protégé is often a measure of a mentor’s managerial effectiveness. Consequently, managers may not select women and racial minorities as protégés because of the common misperception that these groups are less likely to succeed.\textsuperscript{xiv}

**Meeting the Special Needs of Minorities and Women in Mentoring**

Although minorities and women have the greatest need for mentoring, they are less likely than their white, male counterparts to have the opportunity for full participation in these programs. Companies that wish to gain the most benefits from mentoring are enhancing their programs to accommodate the unique needs of their women and minority employees.

Forward-looking enterprises are:

• Encouraging potential protégés to be proactive in seeking advice, feedback and professional connections including mentoring relationships,\textsuperscript{xv}
• Introducing cultural awareness training programs to help mentors understand the issues facing their protégés and develop the necessary skills for effective interaction,\textsuperscript{xvi}
• Providing sufficient resources, funding, and oversight to ensure the success of mentoring programs, and
• Becoming strong advocates of mentoring minorities and women.

**New Approaches**

The introduction of new forms of mentoring is helping minorities and women overcome the obstacles faced by these groups. Anya Kamenetz, author of *Generation Debt*, argues that “We need a new model of mentorship. We're living in an age of networks, not hierarchies; knowledge and wisdom is distributed, rather than concentrated among the gray hairs.... The new model has to be more flexible and forgiving, to allow for the fact that mentorships, like any relationship, come in different flavors and change over time.”\textsuperscript{xvii} *E-mentoring, peer mentoring, reciprocal mentoring, and reverse mentoring* have proven to be particularly effective.
E-mentoring or virtual mentoring employs communications technology to mediate the mentoring relationship. Laura L. Bierema and Janette R. Hill see virtual mentoring as a “an alternative to traditional mentoring that is easier to manage, less costly, unconstrained by geography or time, faster, and more egalitarian than traditional mentoring.” They point out that face-to-face, on-site mentoring is “not always practical in a knowledge society where communication is instantaneous, computer mediated and global.” E-mentoring enables protégés to look outside their workplace to access a broader pool of potential advisors and to create communities of practice that cross the boundaries of professions and employment sectors. According to Kamenetz, The benefits of E-mentoring are considerable.

E-mentoring:

- Leverages many technical mediums to enable mentoring relations that are asynchronous, allowing mentors and protégés to leave messages at any time,
- Eliminates many of the difficulties of face-to-face mentoring, such as race and gender issues and power differences,
- Fosters more “deliberative, reflective, and thoughtful” exchanges,
- Yields a written record of the mentoring interactions, and
- Has fewer long-term costs than traditional approaches.

Reciprocal mentoring is a similar approach that relies on mentoring networks. These networks enable interaction between groups of professionals with similar needs that can be cross-organizational or intra-organizational. Thus, they allow members to remain connected to the network as they change jobs and advance in their careers.

Peer mentoring offers many of the benefits of traditional mentoring, providing “psychosocial support, information opportunities for career strategizing, feedback, and friendship.” Peer mentoring provides protégés with mentors who are experiencing similar challenges. This mutuality fosters the development of a sense of equality, empathy and understanding. Consequently, these relationships tend to last longer than
more traditional ones. Peer mentoring also offers a greater variety of peers who can serve as mentors, offering greater opportunities for diversity mentoring.\textsuperscript{xxiv}

Another new mentoring paradigm is \textit{reverse mentoring}, which pairs younger employees with older workers. Having grown up with advanced information technologies, the younger employees can help their older protégés better understand and become comfortable with these advances and their impacts on the marketplace.\textsuperscript{xxv} Reverse mentoring is also useful in battling ageism in the workplace by encouraging positive relationships between generations.

\textbf{Conclusion}

The introduction of new approaches to mentoring will enhance the value of the mentoring experience for mentors and protégés and likely accelerate growing support for these programs. Research tracking studies of the careers of protégés over time have found that mentoring has both immediate and long-term benefits. These studies suggest that mentoring new employees reduces orientation costs and provides them with more in-depth knowledge of their new companies. Mentors tend to provide their protégés with a better understanding of “organization politics, people, goals or values, language traditions, policies and culture.”\textsuperscript{xxvi}

One longitudinal study followed protégés over a five-year period and found that they continued to be better socialized that employees without mentors, remained more informed, and maintained their relationships with their mentors. There is evidence that former protégés continue to learn from their mentors.\textsuperscript{xxvii}

Corporations will continue to rely on mentoring programs to gain competitive advantages in these times of increased globalization and the maturation of new markets.
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<th>Companies</th>
<th>Best Practices</th>
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<td>PricewaterhouseCoopers</td>
<td>Formally assigns a more senior consultant to each new person, regardless of level. The mentor is responsible for the new employee’s initial orientation and coaching.</td>
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<td>African-American Credit Union Coalition (AACUC)</td>
<td>Established in 1999 to increase minority representation in credit union leadership, the AACUC’s mentoring program supports struggling credit unions. The Coalition helps credit unions with marketing plans, community presentation, board training, and collection services. It also works with African credit unions.</td>
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<td>Johnson and Johnson</td>
<td>Executives use town hall, “brown-bag,” and invitation-only meetings with eight to 10 staffers to mentor employees. The meetings are generally open-ended and lack an official agenda.</td>
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<td>Gartner Consulting</td>
<td>A new consultant is assigned a “buddy” who is responsible for the initial orientation and socialization, and a “coach” who is responsible for formal guidance and coaching.</td>
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<td>Synchron (Australia)</td>
<td>The mentoring program includes a webcast portal and TV programming for both financial advisors and consumers. It connects experienced advisers with new entrants to learn from one another. Many experienced advisors have untapped knowledge, but they may lack the computer and Internet skills to communicate them broadly. New advisors, who can benefit from the knowledge, help the experienced workers communicate this information to the sales force.</td>
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<td>Intel</td>
<td>The mentoring philosophy at Intel allows the protégé to set the agenda. Mentoring is especially useful for project managers because they move from initiative to initiative, often working with cross-functional teams aligned with different departments. Mentoring “can transform even the most skittish micromanager into a well-developed and confident project leader ready to take on the most complex initiatives.”</td>
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<td>Booze Allen</td>
<td>Mentors are assigned to staff from different backgrounds and utilize storytelling methods to share the company’s history and culture. Experienced staff members meet in groups with junior employees in mentoring circles to share their insights on what it takes to succeed. Mentors are required to meet specific criteria in terms of experience, and they must commit time to the program and participate in six two-hour orientation sessions.</td>
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<td>IBM</td>
<td>Uses social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter, as business tools to mentor employees. IBM’s Virtual Speed Mentoring facility allows informal meetings of their employees worldwide using a virtual setting.</td>
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### Appendix Two: Best Practices for Company Leaders, Mentors, and Protégés

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<th>For Company Leaders and Mentors</th>
<th>For Protégés</th>
<th>For All</th>
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<td>Initially, relationships should be advisory-focused&lt;sup&gt;xxxii&lt;/sup&gt; Mentors should not encumber the relationship with unreasonable personal expectations&lt;sup&gt;xxxiii&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Be proactive</td>
<td>Respect the value of the relationship</td>
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<td>Recognize the amount of effort put in by the protégé&lt;sup&gt;xxxiv&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Do not rely exclusively on your mentor Expand your mentoring circle&lt;sup&gt;xxxv&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Successful mentoring relationships are based on multidimensional, personal connections&lt;sup&gt;xxxvi&lt;/sup&gt; Mutual respect underlies a successful mentor/protégé relationship</td>
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<td>Become skilled in active listening</td>
<td>Be careful of choosing your supervisor as your mentor. “Office politics can compromise your loyalty, and loyalty can compromise your career.”&lt;sup&gt;xxxvii&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Both mentor and protégé should feel comfortable speaking freely in a relationship that is open, non-judgmental, and confidential&lt;sup&gt;xxxviii&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Ensure senior executives participate to demonstrate support for mentoring</td>
<td>Analyze your needs before you seek a mentor. It may be wiser to look for a consultant to solve a specific need or a professional coach to revive your career.&lt;sup&gt;xxxix&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Carefully and honestly consider if you have the time and commitment before entering a mentoring relationship.&lt;sup&gt;xl&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Provide part-time employees with mentors.&lt;sup&gt;xli&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Employ stories, metaphors, and other figurative language to communicate the “big idea” or essence of a situation.&lt;sup&gt;xlii&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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VI Fortune 500 companies, such as the Ameritech Corporation, overtly and aggressively encouraged workers to recognize that employment security was a function of personal development and the willingness to seek new opportunities and not company loyalty.

VII Anonymous, “As baby boomer reach retirement and companies a labor shortage, developing current employees should be the answer,” *Women in Management Review*, 20, 7/8, 614-615.


