



Mentorship ['mentôrSHip, 'mentərSHip]

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Defined as ‘the guidance provided by a mentor, especially an experienced person in a company or educational institution’, mentorship has a definition that only begins to scratch the surface of what a true mentorship program should include.

As an organization, we recognized the gaps in our mentorship program during an analysis of our employee retention. Our deep dive revealed employees were leaving our organization due to:

- Lack of engagement with peers
- Lack of MANAGER guidance, recognition, and support
- Feeling stuck “in a rut” and/or did not perceive growth opportunities
- Feelings of disconnection to the BIGGER picture: vision, goals, and mission

Discussion around these issues had management stating, “But, we talk about that,” “I have a scheduled call with them every two weeks,” and “We post our Vision and Mission.” These are all accurate statements, but clearly our method of communication, to include our formal mentorship program was not effective. As a

result, our mentorship process was completely revamped and is revealing significant improvement in employee retention and performance.

Mentorship that guides learning, or core job skills, is only half of the process. A well-known paradigm for competency and learning is Bloom’s Taxonomy. In this model, there are six levels of learning. Developing a training strategy built around these six levels can help you ensure you have a “competent” employee. However, mentorship should also lead to a feeling of empowerment, which can occur only after one demonstrates skills and trusts they are making an impact and/or connection.

Ultimately, and probably more importantly, a system must be built around empowering the employee to be fully engaged within the organization, feeling ownership to the results and being committed to their own performance. This step requires a large commitment from the mentor to have open, two-way continual communication with the mentee, with step one being that of developing a relationship.

As with any relationship, trust is the key component.



Building this trust is not a single step process, rather one that occurs through continual conversations with the mentor meeting the mentee at their level. To have influence over a mentee's development, a mentor should ensure four things are present in the process: Commitment, presence, advocacy, and direction.

Commitment

The mentee needs to feel that the mentor's commitment to their development is sturdy and unconditional. A mentee needs to be supported in making learning mistakes that don't result in fear of failure or feelings of being judged. Remember, this is a perception by the mentee, not the mentor; mentors need to get to know the person and further work to make them feel known through questions and conversations.

Presence

This leads us to presence. The mentor should be available on the mentee's terms as much as possible. Approachability is crucial for initiating relationships, but deeper inquiry into their struggles ensures more insight and influence. Open-ended, probing questions are key to guiding this dialog. The mentor should be careful to not judge the mentee, yet should ask clarifying questions and mirror back what they are hearing. As the relationship begins building, this same tactic of discussion can be directed with work related questions, such as, "Can you give a real scenario where you have been able to identify a postural risk and use the appropriate corrective actions to mitigate this risk?"

The mentee's answers to this type of probing question may only partially meet the mentor's expectations, but it is a great platform to then add multiple situational applications that require the mentee to dig deeper in their thought process. As this two-way conversation goes on, silence on behalf of the mentor is critical, but also difficult as most mentors just want to "give the answer." Allowing the mentee to come to their own conclusion and vocalize this is a great method that allows them to own the process.

Advocacy

This is probably the most important piece of developing a person to meet their full potential. People do their best work when they feel safe. It's instinctual. A baby ventures further and explores more when they have a loving

parent nearby. Adults are more likely to risk vulnerability when they know that the person they are working with is an advocate for them. Advocacy gives people the courage to work within their strengths. Mentors should be encouragers, pointing out the mentee's innovations or accomplishments publicly and often. A mentor should also tie compliments back to the big picture as often as possible. For example, instead of saying, "Your report was very well done," try, "That report you did allowed the team to show the providers exactly where their time was the most effective. This is going to help us all be more efficient."

Direction

Mentors must be able to speak truth into the lives of the mentees. Generally, this is the most difficult thing for a mentor to do if they don't have leadership/management experience. However, if the first three items are solid, speaking truth should be well-received. As a matter of fact, some would argue a mentor does not have the right to re-direct someone unless there is a set foundation based on commitment, presence, and advocacy. Think about it; people are far more likely to take criticism from a trusted advocate than from even a supervisor. Advocacy does not mean mentors tolerate poor performance. It means you have the power to tell someone you know they are capable of more!

Committing to this process for all new hirers is no doubt time consuming, but requires far less time and cost than replacing dissatisfied employees. ◀

BLOOM'S TAXONOMY

CREATING · Can students create a new product or point of view? They would be able to assemble, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, write, or invent.

EVALUATING · Can the student justify a stand or decision? To evaluate information, a student might appraise, argue, defend, judge, select, support, value, and evaluate.

ANALYZING · Can the student distinguish between the different parts? They would be able to compare, contrast, criticize, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, or test.

APPLYING · Can the student use the information in a new way? They would be able to choose, demonstrate, dramatize, employ, illustrate, interpret, operate, sketch, solve, use, or write.

UNDERSTANDING · Can the student explain ideas or concepts? They would be able to classify, describe, discuss, explain, identify, locate, recognize, report, select, translate, or paraphrase.

REMEMBERING · Can the student recall or remember the information? They would be able to define, duplicate, list, memorize, recall, repeat, reproduce, or state.