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INTRODUCTION

Inception

This book has been gestating in my mind for the last 35 years. For me, mentoring is very personal and rooted in my career history. Had I not had the persistent guidance and influence of a network of more experienced practitioners throughout my career, I feel confident that I would have been doomed to a life of underachievement. Just like the Grateful Dead took their experiences of traveling on the road and turned them into the lyric, “What a long, strange trip it’s been,” I likewise have been on a long quest to create more effective learning relationships.

I enlisted in the U.S. Navy right out of high school and became a fabricator and welder, following my father’s advice that I should learn a trade. My father was a machinist and my uncles worked in foundries or machine shops. My family was a living definition of the blue-collar worker. I had no idea what having a career meant; I was looking for a job. The navy helped me understand my unique capabilities and sent
me to Nuclear Welding School, where I became certified to work on nuclear power plants. This event alone made me the most educated person in my family. I stayed in the navy for 10 years working exclusively on submarines. I have many wonderful and not so wonderful memories of my military service. I had no idea that I would eventually look back and recall all the important leadership and mentoring lessons that came from that time in my life. I’ll share some of these stories in later chapters.

Toward the end of my last hitch in the navy, I began to realize my life’s calling. As I looked back on my time in the military, I understood with certainty that I was more passionate about helping others develop than I was about fabrication or engineering. Leadership and leadership development became my all-consuming quest. I used my last two years in the navy to learn how to be a nonprofit leader and entrepreneur. I took a volunteer leadership position, which equated to a full-time nonpaying job, in a local organization focused on community development. I became immersed in small group leadership fundamentals.

Upon leaving the navy, I embarked on a six-year journey deep into nonprofit work. During those years I worked with and trained hundreds of leaders in North, Central, and South America. I earned my living in North America, and helped organize and lead medical relief and humanitarian aid trips to Central and South America. I also participated in three nonprofit startups. It was during this time in the nonprofit sector that the primary importance of mentoring began to
grow clearer. Mentoring was very simple for me in those days. When I saw something in someone’s life that I wanted to emulate, I would ask him to help me get it. I cannot remember anyone turning down my request and I took great pleasure in learning from the passion of others. Before I left the nonprofit world, I had the pleasure of leading more than 400 volunteer leaders who were, in turn, leading others. I doubt I will ever have the opportunity to learn as much about the transformational effects of mentorship as I did then.

During this time I designed and conducted dozens of leadership incubator groups that I dubbed turbo groups. These peer-driven collaborative learning groups would serve as a blueprint for my life’s work. Today, I would call what happened in these emerging leadership groups modern mentoring. During the turbo group process, we would bring together a dozen emerging leaders and engage them in personalizing the principles of leadership behavior while leading community-based outreaches. We embraced learning-while-doing in a peer-to-peer, collaborative environment under the guidance of more experienced practitioners. There was a high degree of personal accountability in the form of sharing what was working and what was not. Creating these turbo groups had two immediate results: Those who were not serious about leadership dropped out quickly (about 35 percent), and those who stuck with the process emerged as confident leaders who made a difference.
My transition into working with for-profit organizations was not one that I would have predicted. In 1995, Tom Reed, a very close friend and mentor, approached me and asked if I would help him start up a training consultancy. The pitch that put me over the top and helped me commit to this new challenge went something like this, “Randy, people in these large for-profit organizations are struggling in isolation. They feel cut off and adrift in their careers. We have the opportunity to bring purposeful learning to them.” Tom’s words helped me understand the valuable service that we would be rendering to our clients.

So, I found myself co-founding Triple Creek (now River). For the first three to four years I learned how to create learning interventions for Global 1000 companies. I designed and delivered custom course content and curriculum, observational leadership assessments, performance management, and global learning processes.

This was during the rise of the e-learning revolution. We in the training profession were wrestling with the implications of the demise of the physical classroom. At Triple Creek, we had a burgeoning reputation as experiential trainers who relied solely on highly interactive course design and delivery. We licensed and supported hundreds of trainers who delivered our custom training. The thought of e-learning as a suitable replacement for our leadership courses was unfathomable. E-learning alone simply lacks context; and without context, course content is left to very limited perceptual understanding. So, when a
major client asked me to design a course to help their midlevel leaders become better teachers, I immediately suggested that they allow me to create a scalable mentoring process instead. To my great surprise, they commissioned the project, and in 1999 Triple Creek created the first web-based mentoring software system. In 2000, we launched OpenMentoring (now River) as a commercially available e-mentoring software system.

During the last 14 years, I have had the pleasure of working with several hundred organizations as they sought to create more effective mentoring cultures. During that time, there have been many changes in the way that organizations view and apply mentoring. The message in this book represents the major lessons that I have learned during my career as I sought to help my clients create more productive learning environments.

My personal mission is to create a world of abundance and security through helping others to understand and practice modern mentoring. I hope you will join with me in making modern mentoring a more commonly used career development process.
If you want to do more with mentoring, you’ve opened the right book. If you dream of broadening the impact that mentoring can have on your organization or about creating a culture in which learning from others is an embedded behavior, my hope is that you will find your answers on these pages.

That said, before we can embark on creating a modern mentoring culture, we must first take mentoring out of the metaphorical box where corporations have placed it, and instead begin to practice it in a vastly different way. To help explain why we must take mentoring in a new, more meaningful direction, let me tell you a story.

During the time I spent doing leadership development work in the nonprofit world, I read Robert Clinton and Paul Stanley’s book, Connecting: The Mentoring Relationships You Need to Be Successful (1992). The larger message of this book ignited a passion in me that has inspired my life’s work. Clinton and Stanley argue that mentors are
all around us, and that mentoring has always been a broad practice. Anytime you learn something from others that can help your personal development, you are participating in mentoring.

Their book broadened the way I think about how people can influence one another from a learning perspective. They made me ponder whether mentoring is so wide-ranging that it includes historical mentors, such as Plato, Buddha, or Confucious, whose works have influenced entire cultures; and deceased mentors, such as Einstein, Darwin, and Steve Jobs, who still shape the way modern society thinks, acts, and works. I asked myself: Is my boss my only mentor? Could my contemporaries who live halfway across the world be my mentors? What about my peers with whom I practice, or the subordinates I manage and am constantly learning from—are they also my mentors?

For me, the answer to these questions is a resounding yes. People all around me have mentored me in one way or another. I decided that I would learn how to effectively implement and institutionalize this concept of mentoring that, to me, is a learning process that is inclusionary, networked, and centered on sharing knowledge with others.

With this in mind, I began to apply this idea of mentoring and use it as a relationship-centered developmental process for the people I worked with on nonprofit projects in Latin America. In an effort to help volunteers develop into leaders more quickly, I created “turbo” leadership development groups, where people would connect, share, and learn from one another. To my delight, these turbo groups not only
worked; they worked far better than the process I had used before. My volunteers learned quickly and effectively in this networked manner.

With the help of my friend and partner, Tom Reed, I soon had one of those moments that could be described as an epiphany—where a once out-of-focus future became ever so clear. I would bring my concept of mentoring to for-profit organizations so that they could leverage it to achieve more effective learning. I thought to myself: "Imagine the power that unleashing this type of relationship-centered learning would have on the productivity and performance of an organization of 10,000, 20,000, or 100,000 people. What if organizations could start tapping into the collective knowledge of their workforce using this process? The results could be truly transformational."

As a result, I created the first e-mentoring technology and started on my quest to embed mentoring and broad social learning into the fabric of my clients’ organizational cultures.

To my disillusionment, I discovered that while almost all organizations could see the benefits and agree with the broader concepts of mentoring as I saw it, the way they had traditionally been applying it in practice had made creating a new mentoring culture impossible. Mentoring took hold in the business world during the 1980s primarily as a way to advance diversity and inclusion efforts for women and minorities. There was (and still is) a lack of diversity in the upper levels of many organizations, and human resource departments attempted to address this issue by pairing up a female or minority employee with a hand-picked senior leader who could guide the protégé’s development.
It was a laudable endeavor, but it affected an incredibly small number of people, typically around 1 percent of an organization. Corporations tried to address an enormous problem, which demanded more open social learning and knowledge sharing, with a very narrow and limited solution. Their efforts had unintended consequences—formalizing mentoring with rules and barriers to the point where it became exclusionary and extremely limited. In their application, corporations had unconsciously put mentoring in a box, and as a result put a lid on the benefits it could create.

Then as today, everyone in an organization could benefit from guidance from upper-level leaders (from people at all levels of the organization), but an organization’s leaders most certainly do not have time to mentor every employee. Setting mentoring programs up so that there are only as many mentees as there are upper-level leaders to mentor them leads to social justice issues in which some employees receive special treatment and opportunities, while others are left out. This exclusionary practice is counter to the broader mentoring ideals that would benefit employees the most.

The traditional approach to mentoring perpetuates the idea that mentors are special and only certain people are qualified enough to share knowledge. The reality is no one person can have all the answers. Pinning all of your career aspirations and expectations on one person is ludicrous. Our world changes so rapidly and is so complex that I would wager there truly is no single person who could be your lifelong mentor, guiding you every step of your career.
This leads to another problem: Who is to say that the executive you would be paired with is the right one to guide you? What if you need to learn more about cross-channel partnerships or emerging technologies, but the executive assigned to you doesn’t know about those things? Or what if your executive is the one who could use a mentor? How would that conversation sound?

In traditional mentoring, the task of matching people falls on program administrators. They act as gatekeepers who handpick participants and matches. Just imagine sitting in your office with a spreadsheet in front of you as you try to determine who gets matched. If you’ve ever run a formal program, chances are you don’t have to try too hard to picture this outdated and burdensome process. The sheer amount of time it takes to simply select and match people makes it difficult to accommodate more than a handful of participants. Add to this the fact that many formal mentoring programs require administrators to guide the mentoring process and check in with participants, and you can see why these programs are so difficult to run effectively.

I’ve met many mentoring program administrators over the years, and it’s fair to say they truly want what is best for their participants and are doing their best to make facilitating mentoring programs a meaningful endeavor. Unfortunately, they are going about it the wrong way. High-touch formal mentoring programs are time-consuming, costly, reach too few employees, and require too many resources.
Organizations are doing themselves more harm than good when they force connections between people. By requiring people to connect with one another in specific ways, organizations:

- limit who can talk, connect, share, and learn from one another
- stifle innovation and creativity
- perpetuate a mindset that treats adults like children
- build a reputation as a staid company, which can turn off prize candidates who decide to work somewhere else.

The bottom line is that we need to do away with the barriers that surround the current or traditional corporate practice of mentoring. We must force ourselves to ditch the spreadsheets, forget the limited populations we designate as being special enough to participate, and abolish the idea that any of us could broker relationships that have productive learning value for every single employee in our diverse workforces.

To release the transformative power of mentoring from the narrowly conceived box in which mentoring currently resides, leaders from all areas of an organization—business units, HR, talent, learning, and diversity—must embrace a new mindset about mentoring.

**Combatting the Traditional Mentoring Mindset**

Even though we know that mentoring has evolved well beyond its traditional beginnings, chances are that you will encounter people with
a mindset that views mentoring as a formal, long-term, one-on-one, face-to-face practice in which an older mentor grooms a younger employee for a specific job. Those who feel strongly about the traditional practice of mentoring often question the expanded practice of modern mentoring. How many of these objections sound familiar?

- Leadership sees mentoring in a traditionalist fashion, and I can’t do anything to change that. (And if my senior leadership doesn’t participate in the process, no one will.)

- Modern mentoring (and the related social learning) will only appeal to people in younger generations, such as Millennials.

- We won’t have enough mentors. If we open up the program, our small quantity of expert mentors will become inundated with requests.

- Traditional mentoring is how our organization has always facilitated learning, and none of our participants are complaining.

Don’t let these opinions hold you hostage. Traditional mentoring mindsets will stifle any attempt at enabling a more open, relationship-centered way of learning. To break free from that mindset, embrace a more adaptive approach to mentoring in order to get modern mentoring programs off the ground at your organization. To learn more about combatting the traditional mindset, see Appendix I.

Here are four ways you can overcome these common objections and make modern mentoring thrive.
Senior leadership will need to get behind your modern mentoring initiative in order for it to be successful. That said, many senior leaders likely participated in traditional mentoring during their careers and will tend to see mentoring in this way. Because of this, it may be difficult to change their mindset around mentoring. If you envision presenting modern mentoring to your senior leaders and having your ideas rejected, simply change your terminology. For example, you could refer to your initiative as social learning or learning collaboration.
Then, instead of having to split hairs over the definition of mentoring, you can focus on the substantial and scalable benefits of such a program. Most leaders can get behind any initiative that produces a smarter, more connected workforce that is better prepared to perform their jobs.

While on the topic, nonparticipation by senior leadership is not critically important for modern mentoring. Senior leaders are certainly key stakeholders who will need to support and champion the initiative, but the demographic with the most to gain from modern mentoring are those employees in the middle and bottom of the organization who still have a lot of room for personal and professional growth.

However, if senior leadership participation is non-negotiable for you, then you need to make participation easy for busy executives to fit into their workdays. I’ve found through my own experiences that executives will gladly participate if you make it clear it will not take too much of their time. As an executive myself, I feel the innate need to give back and recycle the knowledge that has helped me achieve my career success, but I don’t have patience for time-consuming or difficult processes. I use my company’s social learning technology, which makes participating in mentoring a quick five- to 10-minute process that I can easily fit in between meetings and projects. Time is today’s ultimate scarcity. If you ensure that participation in your initiative is quick and easy, you’ll find that your executives (and the rest of your employee population) will be more than happy to share their hard-gained knowledge and expertise.
Don’t Fear Technology

Modern mentoring is scaled and enabled by technology, yet there is a misconception in the workforce that older employees can’t or won’t use new or social technologies. This is a fallacy; for example, a 2013 study by the Pew Research Center indicated that seniors were the fastest-growing group of social media adopters, with 45 percent of Americans over 65 using at least one social networking site. Social and digital technologies are the new normal for all adults, not just those who may have been early adopters or who are from younger generations. Additionally, all of today’s employees work in the same fast-paced environment where most skills have a shelf life of 18 months or less. Regardless of age, workers want learning that matches their reality. They need ways to connect with peers to address knowledge needs in a more dynamic and fluid way. Modern mentoring helps remove barriers between people, adds context to training content, and allows knowledge to flow from person to person.

Look for Experts at All Levels

There once was a time when knowledge and information were scarce and the people who had access to them were few. Enter the Internet and egalitarian access to the digital world. Today’s organizations are filled with knowledge workers and look nothing like companies of days past; knowledge and expertise is found throughout the entire organization (yes, even at the very bottom). This means that everyone
can be an advisor in her area of expertise, which falls in line with modern mentoring’s idea that everyone has something to teach and something to learn. If you encounter people who say modern mentoring programs that allow all employees to participate won’t succeed because there won’t be enough mentors, explain that learning from extreme experts does little to help a beginner. A beginner would learn best from someone with intermediate skills and knowledge. This saves the extreme experts for your intermediate learners, who will benefit from their advanced skills and knowledge. This broader approach opens up the scope of available advisors who will be able to support your inclusive and open modern mentoring environment.

**Listen to What Is Not Being Said**

A lack of complaints about your formal mentoring process does not equal complete happiness with it. It’s no surprise that your formal mentoring participants (especially your mentees) aren’t complaining about the process—it would be akin to career suicide if someone who is specially selected to receive exclusive treatment through formal mentoring complained about his inclusion in the process. And it’s true that employees may enjoy and derive value from participation in a traditional program, but organizations that limit their social learning to formal mentoring only serve between 1 and 10 percent of the employee population. Not only does this cause social justice issues to arise in the minds of employees (both excluded and included), but
it also limits the impact that relationship-based learning can bring to an organization. Beyond being fair, organizations have much to gain from scaling improved performance, engagement, and retention across their employee population by including everyone in modern mentoring. You can even wrap formal mentoring into your modern mentoring approach, which would allow you to offer the practice that serves the few, while also creating a way to serve the masses through a broader program.

Modern Mentoring for a Modern Workforce

Today’s global complexity requires a nimble workforce that can adapt to rapid change, new demands, and unforeseen challenges. To succeed, companies must constantly innovate. Providing your organization’s workforce with ways to connect, collaborate, learn from, and share with their colleagues across all levels, locations, and functions is critical—and it is the driving force behind modern mentoring.

The purpose of mentoring has moved away from getting a handful of people ready for leadership roles and shifted to a practice that focuses on three key areas:

- increasing an organization’s intelligence (emotional, leadership, technical)
- enhancing an organization’s ability to compete
- accelerating employee development.

This shift in purpose means that more people need to get involved in mentoring so that the workforce can keep pace with competitive
and technological changes and spur the organization ahead in innovative, profound ways. Companies have more to gain from a broader, more open program and philosophy in which knowledge, insight, and connections are shared across all levels and departments.

This gets to the heart of modern mentoring. Modern mentoring is a form of open, social, and collaborative learning. Everyone can participate, and people meet in large groups to learn from and share insights with one another. It broadens the scope from one-to-one and top-down connections, and makes them many-to-many and across all levels, functions, and locations. It is typically driven by the needs of the individuals participating, instead of the needs of the organization, meaning that learning is self-directed. It also means that anyone can be an advisor (note that I didn’t say mentor), regardless of their job title or tenure, and anyone can be a learner (again, note that I didn’t say protégé or mentee). Table 1-1 shows the differences between traditional and modern mentoring.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentoring Program</th>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th>Modern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose</strong></td>
<td>Career advancement</td>
<td>Broad learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participants</strong></td>
<td>Mentors are senior leaders and protégés are high-potential employees</td>
<td>Advisors and learners can be anyone in the organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connections</strong></td>
<td>One to one</td>
<td>Many to many</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Duration</strong></td>
<td>Long term</td>
<td>As long as needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Method</strong></td>
<td>Face to face</td>
<td>Virtual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Design</strong></td>
<td>Top down and matched by outside administrator</td>
<td>Flat and self-directed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Building Blocks of Modern Mentoring

The following five core concepts form the foundation of modern mentoring:

• open and egalitarian
• diverse
• broad and flexible
• self-directed and personal
• virtual and asynchronous.

Following these principles will help you get started as you create your own modern mentoring culture.

OPEN AND EGALITARIAN

As younger generations make their way into the workforce, they bring their beliefs and values with them. These can sometimes fly in the face of what organizations consider standard operating procedure, but it does not mean they are wrong. Some of the strongest voices of change come from Millennials who want more openness and equality—both in their personal and professional worlds. This viewpoint plays very well with modern mentoring because for uninhibited and meaningful learning to take place, you must encourage an open environment where people have equal access to one another. Modern mentoring is built on the idea that everyone has something to learn and something to teach. In order to let knowledge flow freely and unimpeded, this type of unrestricted and egalitarian environment is essential.
DIVERSE
Diversity is what will help your modern mentoring program thrive. Here, *diverse* isn’t limited to gender, race, and ethnicity—it also encompasses learning connections and relationships that cross functional, geographical, hierarchical, and generational lines. Supporting diverse learning connections and participation will help form the foundation of a solid modern mentoring culture. Different perspectives within mentoring communities help novel ideas and approaches arise in answer to problems faced by individuals or the organization as a whole. People in a different functional area or geographical area, or even from a different department or age group, will likely view situations and issues through a distinctive lens and be able to offer a unique perspective and innovative solutions.

BROAD AND FLEXIBLE
Seeking all of your answers and career advice from one person is outdated and inefficient, and I’m not the only one who thinks so. At the 2014 Skillsoft Perspectives Conference, Jack Welch said employees should see everybody as a mentor. He encouraged people to grab the best of what they like in multiple people and run with it, and stressed that we should not get stuck in one person’s mold. I agree. No one can possibly know everything, nor are they likely to want to participate in a mentoring program if the expectation loomed that they would have to be an all-knowing sage.
Instead, modern mentoring breaks the cycle of the sage on the stage and pushes the idea of the guides on the side. Learning connections typically occur with multiple people who simultaneously act as advisors and learners, thus forming broad mentoring relationships. People can rotate in and out of these groups depending on who is available and willing to participate. Multiple learning connections and conversations can occur at the same time, allowing someone who is an advisor for one group to be a learner in another group because her level of expertise on the topics at hand will vary. Modern mentoring allows for this type of flexibility so that people can find the right learning connections at the right time, helping them find and apply insights on the job and bring about real results.

SELF-DIRECTED AND PERSONAL
Adults want to drive their own learning. Malcolm Knowles popularized this theory in the 1970s with his idea of andragogy, or adult learning theory. In his book, The Modern Practice of Adult Education (1970), Knowles argued that as people mature, they become more motivated to learn based on internal drivers, such as their own personal desire to learn about something, rather than external drivers, such as someone telling them they need to learn about something. He also postulated that as people age, experience becomes an increasing resource for learning, and people seek to apply new insights immediately to solve problems. Jump ahead 40 years and you have the framework for modern mentoring.
People are more likely to be engaged, active learners if they choose what they learn and with whom they collaborate. With modern mentoring, you empower individuals to be in control of their learning and development. Modern mentoring enables employees to address their own personal, real-time learning needs by helping them find, connect with, and gather insights from colleagues from anywhere within an organization. They can gain skills that help them with their own unique work context and make them more productive in a given instance. Moreover, it’s not just learners who benefit from this; advisors do as well. They can choose which topics and areas they offer their expertise in, and decide when and if they have the time to participate. This process puts the control back into the hands of the participants and lets them guide their own development.

So how does modern mentoring answer the question, “What’s in it for me?” By allowing participants to control the process, they can tailor their learning so that they reap the benefits. See chapter 9 for more about this concept.

VIRTUAL AND ASYNCHRONOUS
Modern mentoring is all about what is right—it pulls together the right people, at the right time, for the right conversations, to find the right solutions for any problems an organization might face. Because of technological advancements, this can be done virtually and asynchronously. The people who would like to connect and learn from one another could be in different parts of the company, different cities,
and even different countries. For this reason, modern mentoring often makes use of asynchronous communication and collaboration. Of course, there will be times when synchronous or instantaneous collaboration occurs, but those factors do not have to be present for modern mentoring to work. The growing use of technology for mentoring also means that companies can scale the program and offer it to everyone in the organization at a reasonable price. Viewing mentoring as a practice for the masses will help you harness the collective knowledge, skills, abilities, and passions of your entire workforce.

The Benefits of Modern Mentoring

Modern mentoring can have far-reaching organizational influences, which makes it a great vehicle for engaging and developing all employees in your organization. Some of the benefits you can anticipate a modern mentoring program to have on your organization include increases in retention, engagement, collaboration, innovation, knowledge transfer, and productivity. Keep in mind that modern mentoring is scalable and so are its benefits. The more employees who participate in your program, the wider the positive impact your program will have on your company.

INCREASED RETENTION AND ENGAGEMENT

In *The 7 Hidden Reasons Employees Leave* (2005), author Leigh Branhan states that “mentoring programs have been found to be effective in
increasing employee retention in 77 percent of the companies that implemented them.” That’s an impressive success rate. It’s no wonder so many companies clamor to implement mentoring programs. Mentoring can help employees feel more connected to others throughout the organization and allow people to reach out to colleagues for support addressing work-related topics, issues, or situations. Mentoring also makes it easier for employees to navigate career progression options within your organization, be it moving up the career ladder or learning about other functions for a lateral move. Having multiple learning and career options available makes it more compelling for them to stay.

Modern mentoring can also have a large impact on enterprise engagement levels. According to the Corporate Leadership Council’s 2011 *The Power of Peers* study, when employees effectively participate in peer mentoring, organizations have seen a 66 percent increase in engagement. High engagement levels are known to increase the number of top performers you have in your organization and the level of loyalty, commitment, and productivity from your employees. Most notably, increased engagement can affect profit. The *Profitable Talent Management* study (2011) conducted by Taleo Research estimated that by increasing employee engagement by 5 percent, an organization of 10,000 employees could boost its bottom line by more than $40 million. Boosting engagement and its associated benefits is one of the many reasons companies are beginning to rapidly adopt modern mentoring practices.
INCREASED COLLABORATION AND INNOVATION

Collaboration between people from different geographies, offices, genders, and generations is essential because it can help spread best practices and critical knowledge across your entire company. Diverse and collaborative learning networks can help employees generate creative solutions, novel ideas, and unique approaches to organizational problems or issues. Broad collaboration can help in several ways:

- People reaching across different generations will gain insights into how people of various age groups tend to think and behave.

- People reaching across cultures can leverage differences to better understand colleagues and clients, and increase creativity and effectiveness when working with people from other cultures.

- People reaching across functions can harness the power of best practices from colleagues in other business units and locations so that they can repeat what works well, rather than trying to invent a new process.

In an era marked by increased competition and rapid change, the need to spur innovation and enable collaboration has never been greater. Modern mentoring can become a key competitive advantage for your organization because it enables this collaborative and innovative behavior.

INCREASED KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER AND PRODUCTIVITY

Transferring organizational knowledge has become increasingly important as more inexperienced Millennials enter a workforce that
Boomers and traditionalists will soon depart. Corporations must seek ways to help older generations spread their knowledge and experience to younger workers who have limited corporate experience and who could learn much from veterans who have years of know-how, best practices, and overall experience in their field. Modern mentoring is a perfect mechanism for connecting the knowledge assets of your organization to help facilitate the development of others. In this way, modern mentoring helps build the capabilities of an entire workforce by increasing knowledge transfer.

Modern mentoring also provides a great way to help create a more productive and effective workforce. In a 2012 study by McKinsey Global Institute, companies saw a 20 to 25 percent increase in productivity in the average knowledge worker as a result of their participation in technology-enabled social collaborations, such as modern mentoring programs. The study also noted that employees spend 47 percent of their work week writing and responding to emails and searching for information internally so that they can complete tasks. Using modern mentoring to effectively source and locate internal information will help free up employees’ time for more productive activities. When the impact of increased employee productivity is amplified, it can have a positive effect on your company’s bottom line.

**CREATING A CULTURE OF LEARNING AND AGILITY**
Creating and fostering a culture of learning is important today because it encourages the practice of self-directed learning and development.
In a culture of learning, employees want to proactively share ideas, knowledge, and experience with one another for the sake of mutual benefit and advancement. As businesses become increasingly global and complex, it will be important for employees to collaborate and share best practices so that companies can plug into the collective intelligence of their enterprise. Additionally, it is important that employees look to one another as a resource for learning emerging skills or understanding developing trends. A culture of learning can help employees become more effective at facilitating ongoing learning that is both informal and self-directed. Having an employee base that can quickly respond to changing requirements, skills, and trends will help your organization become more agile. This is paramount, because corporate agility will be a characteristic that defines organizational success as the world continues to change at an extremely rapid pace.

Putting It Into Practice

Modern mentoring can be summed up as mentoring without constraint. It removes barriers, eases administrative burdens, and it broadens the impact mentoring can have by opening up participation to everyone within an organization.

To put modern mentoring into practice and start down the path of building a modern mentoring culture, follow these four guidelines.
Focus on Competencies and Interests

To make mentoring a more practical productivity tool that helps people find the knowledge they need when they need it, the focus should be on competencies and interests. Modern mentoring is about more than just learning from a mentor who can guide your career. It is about learning from everyone around you and applying those insights immediately. Focusing collaborative learning relationships on competencies and interests helps give structure to the group. Employees who want to improve their skills in certain areas should be able to do a quick search for people already using those skills to learn about that competency or capability. Or, if they have an interest in a particular issue or topic, they should be able to affiliate themselves with that competency and show over time that they are contributing to the company as an avid learner or trusted advisor. Either way, the demonstration of a particular expertise forms the backbone of modern mentoring connections and helps give them direction and meaning.

Be Inclusive, Not Exclusive

Modern mentoring should be available to everyone—it is mentoring for the masses. We have to stop selecting a few people for special programs and at least provide a company-wide program that is open to all employees. Special programs too often raise social justice issues and feelings of being left out—no one likes to feel excluded. By creating a broad, inclusive modern mentoring program for your employees,
I suspect you will discover that wisdom, insight, curiosity, and talent have been hiding right under your nose.

**Keep Your Purpose Simple**

Don’t overcomplicate your program by having it address too many things. People will throw around all kinds of phrases to describe mentoring connections—peer mentoring, traditional mentoring, reverse mentoring, group mentoring, on-the-job training, and so on. People may hear reverse mentoring and picture a formal program in which people are hand-selected to participate. The mentor may be younger and the protégé may be older, but not much else changes in that limited view. Can you have group mentoring that is reverse? Do you have to set up programs to support each type of mentoring? Do you have to monitor and lead mentoring groups? Instead of adding to the confusion, I urge you to simplify your message and your purpose. Modern mentoring is about helping people come together so they can learn from one another. It uses technology to do so and removes barriers and limitations found in more traditional programs, but ultimately it is still about learning from those around you.

**Advocate for Andragogy**

This may be the hardest piece of advice for people to take, but it is one of the most critical. For modern mentoring to work, you have to let people decide for themselves what they want to teach and learn,
and make it easy for them to find others who want to do the same. The desire to learn positively influences the commitment and accountability people will have to the group, creating connections that thrive. Taking the power out of the hands of administrators and putting it into the hands of the participants can be a scary thing, but trust that your employees are adults and will know for themselves what they want to learn and if they have time to participate. Your program will hold more appeal because it will honestly represent those who have the passion, desire, drive, and time to participate at that given moment.

Now that I’ve (hopefully) changed the way you view mentoring, let me help you build your program in a way that embraces the modern mentoring philosophy so you are better positioned to succeed in this rapidly changing world. The rest of the book will provide practical advice and instructions on how to develop a modern mentoring culture—and all the aspects that go along with it.