Embrace Mentorships

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EMBRACE MENTORSHIPS

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Mentoring has developed during the past few decades to provide the exceptional benefits of a social learning relationship. Research continually demonstrates the impact of mentoring on everything from job performance to talent pool mobility to employee engagement and retention.

In fact, a study with Clorox shows—according to its figures—a 19-fold return on investment for its internal structured mentoring programs. Data that Cardinal Health collected on its own program reveals that participants with two or more mentoring relationships are twice as likely to stay with the organization.

Talent development practitioners have started gaining ground in introducing formal or structured mentoring programs internally to achieve great results in leadership development, career planning, diversity and inclusion, and more.

During my 20 years of professional experience, my mission has been to help support talent development practitioners who are leveraging mentorships internally. These practitioners have increasingly raised a flag in our interactions that, while they are...
committed to bringing mentoring to the talent they are responsible for, they have been unable to benefit from those types of relationships.

Sometimes talent development professionals themselves aren’t sure where to turn for a positive and valuable mentoring experience. Occasionally, they may have tried to reach out to a potential mentor and the experience didn’t work out well. For some, unfortunately, in rare circumstances, the mentors they found have done more harm than good. Still, mentorships are most often valuable, and all individuals—talent development professionals included—should seek out these opportunities.

In this issue of TD at Work, I will
• Demonstrate the value of finding a mentor for any stage of your career.
• Show the different types of mentoring relationships.
• Describe how to build significant mentoring relationship with trust and respect.
• Talk about the importance of setting expectations and developmental goals.
• Equip you with practical tools for achieving your learning goals.

**Mentoring Benefits**

Mentoring, coaching, and sponsorship are all words that the talent development or HR industry uses to describe social learning relationships. Those words are sometimes used interchangeably, and sometimes have specific and different meanings. For this issue of TD at Work, mentoring refers to a relationship built on mutual trust for the purpose of learning and growing as a professional.

Social learning relationships are consistently the most effective methods for developing talent, including yourself. According to Panopto, a learning software company, “Social and collaborative learning may be one of human-kind’s oldest forms of learning. At its essence, social learning is the continuous process of learning from other people. We are learning socially when we observe other people, ask questions, and share knowledge resources.” Social learning through mentoring opens networks, improves skills, and empowers participants.

Not only is mentoring an important developmental tool, it's especially effective for increasing diversity and building an inclusive culture. According to a 2017 study by executive search firm Heidrick & Struggles that surveyed more than 1,000 professionals, mentoring relationships were most important to women, along with racial and ethnic minorities. Because of the relationships that

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**Hollywood’s Single Mentor Myth**

What do Star Wars’ Yoda, Back to the Future’s Doc Brown, Harry Potter’s Albus Dumbledore, and The Karate Kid’s Mr. Miyagi have in common? They are some of the greatest mentors to have graced the movie screen. Joseph Campbell’s formula, from his renowned work The Hero’s Journey, says that a mentor helps a hero transition from a state of general obliviousness to an awareness of the imbalance of the universe. The mentor then provides training and tools so that the hero can go forth and independently right the wrongs in the world—or take down Cobra Kai, as in The Karate Kid.

The problem with these fictional mentors is just that: They aren’t real. Popular culture teaches us that if we are deserving, a magical influence will arrive and hand us the keys to a perfect future. This is an unrealistic idea and even harmful in many ways. It creates the expectation that a perfect mentor will arrive to address all our skills gaps without any effort on our part.

In reality, the best way to progress in various developmental areas is to find different mentors who each bring unique expertise. Be mindful as to how you use the relationships, though. Seek to build each mentoring partnership as appropriate for your career stage and path. For example, if you are early in your career, you likely won’t seek to develop your executive presence. And if you don’t plan to seek a managerial or leadership role, you may never opt for this goal.

Remember, everything doesn’t have to happen at the same time. Spending quality time and effort on each step of the journey will help you build a foundation for later experiences and successes.
they had with their mentors, the respondents said they felt more supported, were exposed to more opportunities, had a clearer vision of their contributions to organizational goals, and had more effective relationships with co-workers across different teams.

That is not only great for employees but also for the organization. McKinsey studies indicate that inclusion—which the company defines as openness, equality, and belonging—can show positive results in recruitment and retention, organizational profitability, and creating value for customers and stakeholders. Mentoring is clearly a win-win for everyone involved.

In real life, mentors who have a lasting affect on your career start out working with you on specific development areas. The learning-focused relationship often develops over the years, leading to more robust, deeper, and broader discussions. However, the mentoring relationship must build a strong foundation of trust and learning.

Early in my career, I participated in a talent review meeting with the executive team of a large sales organization. Throughout the meeting, the leaders identified some of their team members as high potentials, well placed, or at risk. The executives had an easy time labeling individuals as high potentials when they had developed deeper relationships and taken these individuals on as informal mentees.

For the chosen few, that meant they would receive further investment—in the form of training, formal mentorship, and stretch opportunities. Meanwhile, everyone else was unlikely to see much investment at all. That was the first time I saw the power of mentoring at play.

The world runs on relationships and connections. Mentorship is just one form of relationship—and it’s powerful. A stellar mentor can provide incredible opportunities, greatly expand your network, and change the trajectory of your career.

I have had the honor of working with many mentors over my career:

- Elaine has been the catalyst for many of my professional accomplishments. I hope to match her achievements in my chosen field.
- Charlie works in a different field and offers unique and innovative practices.
- Nancy’s success is incredible, and her mentorship has been about authentic leadership.

Outside of professional areas of expertise, I even have several mentors for health and parenting. Given the benefits that can come from having an effective mentoring relationship, everyone should have at least one professional mentor during their career.

**Know Your Purpose**

Before you think about finding a mentor, you first need to know the purpose behind the desired relationship—know the why, what, when, and how before jumping into a mentoring relationship. Finding a mentor who will help guide you and will ask great questions depends on the information you are pursuing.

- Why are you seeking a mentor?
- What do you want the individual to help you with?
- When and how often will you meet?
- How will conversations take place?

Look for a mentor for an identified area of growth. No single person will serve all purposes. The more clarity you have about your mentoring journey, the better off you will be. The last thing you want to do is start on this journey with no discernable plan in place. A plan will help you narrow your search to potential mentors who will be a good fit in the specific areas that make sense for you.

While this may seem like common sense, it definitely isn’t common practice. One of the most frequent mistakes I see practitioners make is deciding they want to be mentored but they can’t explain the purpose for that desire. Mentors aren’t typically excited to work with a mentee who approaches them with little clarity about their plans.

The more clarity you have about your mentoring journey, the better off you will be.
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