

the magic of mentoring

We hear a lot about mentoring these days, but just what does it involve? And how are companies using this process as a training tool?

"Mentoring is investing in others," says Ron Alexandrowich, President of HRP AO's York Region Chapter and President of World Class Human Resources Inc. "It is the relationship in which a person guides, counsels and provides wisdom and encouragement to others."

Michelle Chambers, CHRP, an OD Consultant with Chambers & Associates, and a member of HRP AO's Durham Chapter, defines mentoring as, "... a business relationship where an individual with greater experience provides strategic counsel, guidance and instruction to assist another individual to develop both personally and professionally. A successful mentoring relationship can provide positive outcomes for both parties through the expansion of knowledge and skills."

For Lynn Lochbihler, an HR Consultant specializing in employee relations and maximizing employee potential, and a director with HR-Fusion and Foresight Management, "Mentoring is aimed at releasing all of an employee's potential. The person being mentored can assess what top performers do differently from others and begin to model their behaviour in order to emulate it. A mentor helps someone learn something they might not have learned as quickly or at all if not helped."

Lochbihler, also a member of HRP AO's Hamilton Chapter executive, adds that, "In the financial restraint we're all in, the first budget to be cut is training. Mentoring can help by concentrating on people in their day-to-day routines and future growth. It's a liaison between someone who has the skill set the mentee needs to learn."

"Mentoring has several applications in a person's business and personal life," Alexandrowich says. "It can involve providing counseling in a leadership development scenario, or the pairing up of experienced HR professionals with newly graduating human resource students from Seneca College and York University, as in the program the York Region Chapter of the HRP AO offers at no charge. The mentor feels a level of personal accomplishment and satisfaction, and the mentee is guided into a new horizon of opportunities."

As a low-cost training tool, Chambers says mentoring is, "... a great way of assisting and bringing new employees up to organizational standards, sharing cultural practices and organizational experiences, as well as fostering relationships amongst employees. It has proven extremely effective in improving confidence levels since employees are more involved in designing their own learning."

According to Alexandrowich, a company can start a mentoring program with two people who would like to learn from each other. "The domino effect eventually takes place when word gets around. It's as simple as that. Some companies that would like to share knowledge and retain corporate memory could move to a more formalized process and keep track of people looking for developmental

opportunities, and match them with others who want to share their experiences."

"Look around at all employees, what they're good at and who would benefit from knowing the same skills," Lochbihler says. "Then align a liaison between the people, making sure they will get along, and that the potential mentee will accept direction. Usually the people involved feel honoured, and it's a good way to retain employees. It's important to discuss expectations, rules and outcomes."

"Before you set up a mentorship program," advises Chambers, "decide what your business reasons are. In addition to deciding between formal and informal, give consideration to peer mentoring, group mentoring, individual mentoring or even virtual mentoring. Roles and responsibilities have to be decided in terms of which group will be responsible for the process and day-to-day operations. Define the mentoring program's objectives; link them to the organization's strategic objectives; and identify a pool of mentors and protégés. Mentors should be provided training (e.g. listening skills, feedback skills) as well as the protégés. A formal evaluation of the program's success should be undertaken and any challenges/obstacles to the program's success should be addressed."

To help ensure success, Alexandrowich suggests having a "relationship contract" that highlights the mentee's and mentor's expectations. "This could include how you will communicate with each other to establish the goals and objectives of the relationship. This will keep the developmental piece in the forefront. Different generations of people have a preferred mode of communication. If one likes to use text messaging, it may not work as well if he or she is being mentored by someone who prefers face-to-face encounters. It's best to not over-think the mentoring process, and allow individuals to set their own pace."

In addition to defining parameters for the relationship, Chambers suggests defining criteria for evaluation and ROI. "Protégés need to be prepared for their roles," she says, "and the mentoring program requires senior-level support and endorsement. Mentors need training and support, too, as well as defined criteria and identification of positive behaviours for success. It's best to avoid starting a mentoring program after downsizing, as the culture and the people may not be receptive enough for it to succeed."

Another potential problem that can arise, according to Lochbihler, is ego. "This can happen if mentors see this as a power trip. Mentors are learning coaches who have to be sensitive and become trusted. On the other hand, the mentee has to pay attention to the message being delivered, and not take advice as personal criticism. It's a supportive relationship, not an enabling one. Mentoring encourages positive attitudes, builds self-confidence, trust, respect and rapport in relationships among people, which is better for productivity. Remember that mentoring does not replace the need for training programs within the workplace."



Lynn
Lochbihler



Michelle
Chambers



Ron
Alexandrowich



Shaping Organizational Excellence

Membership Means Access...



Certification – The Certified
Human Resources
Professional (CHRP)

Local Chapter Affiliation

Conferences, Seminars

Management and
Executive Programs

Web Site

Resource Centre

Government Affairs

HR Professional Magazine

Affinity Centre

The Hire Authority Career Site

and more!

To gain access to HRP AO's expanding network of HR professionals, information, knowledge and professional development, simply visit our Web site. Learn more and join online.

Human Resources Professionals Association of Ontario (HRPAO)

Tel: 416.923.2324 | Toll-free: 1.800.387.1311 | membership@hrpao.org | www.hrpao.org