

GUIDE TO MENTORING

Mentoring is a key means to integrating, developing and retaining employees in the workplace. The process involves pairing a more skilled /experienced employee with a new employee for the purpose of encouraging dialogue and information sharing. The purpose of mentoring is to give the new employee a thorough picture of what it is like to be an employee at your company and what it takes to succeed. The mentee decides the topics they would like to discuss based on what is most relevant and helpful to them at any given point.

Companies that support mentoring programs are more likely to successfully integrate new employees in their organization, and reap such bottom line benefits as:

- Reduced employee turnover
- Increased innovation and loyalty
- Improved sense of team spirit
- Increased productivity

Mentors also benefit from these relationships. In addition to the intrinsic satisfaction gained from making a, positive, long-lasting impact in another person's life, they also benefit by developing:

- An ability to impart skills & knowledge as well as enhancing analytical and interpersonal skills
- a greater understanding of issues and problems from another person's perspective
- A greater understanding of cultural differences, personal and professional values, and how these play out in a company setting

It is important to implement some guidelines and context so that the mentor, the mentee, and the overall organization derive benefit from the arrangement. The following information will help you create a structure for mentoring employees, especially in the areas of:

- Developing the Mentoring Relationship
- Managing the Mentoring Relationship
- Evaluating the Mentoring Relationship

Developing the Mentoring Relationship

One of the challenges in mentoring begins with the very perception of what it means to be a 'mentor'. Mentoring is perceived differently by different people. The following suggestions will help you set a foundation for establishing a successful mentoring relationship.

Your first step should be to discuss roles and expectations you both have of the mentoring relationship. Your first meeting should include a discussion of the following:

- ✓ What you both perceive is the role and responsibilities of mentor and the mentee.
- ✓ What outcomes you both want from this relationship.
- ✓ What each of you needs to do to make the mentoring relationship successful.
- ✓ How both mentor and mentee contributes to the mentoring relationship in order to drive maximum benefit?
- ✓ How you both will know if the mentoring relationship is working as expected

Your next step is to spend some time getting to know a little bit more about one another. To put your mentee at ease, you may wish to share information about yourself first. What information about yourself would you like the mentee to know? Consider talking about:

- ✓ Your career path since joining the company.
- ✓ Your major accomplishments and challenges you've faced along the way.
- ✓ What you have done for you personal and professional development.
- ✓ The one thing you wish someone had told you when you were a new employee.

You will also have a lot to learn about your mentee. Especially if your mentee is a skilled immigrant, try to gain an understanding of them as a person as well as an employee.

Try to gain a perspective on:

- ✓ Their culture, their preferred way of working and interacting with others.
- ✓ What made them decide to accept this position with your company.
- ✓ Their skills and prior experience, as well as future career aspirations.
- ✓ What type of information, help or support you can provide them.

Here is a sample agenda to help you structure a mentoring meeting:

Sample Agenda – Mentoring Meeting

- Basic introductions
- Obtain agreement on purpose of the meeting and desired outcomes
- Discuss the Mentoring Program at your company and its overall purpose
- Discuss expectations, roles, responsibilities and needs
- Agree on and document decisions and action items

- Debrief your initial meeting - what went well and what improvements can be made for future meetings.
- Schedule next meeting – should be no later than one month away to keep the partnership alive.

After your initial meeting, you'll want to make sure you keep the momentum going. You can do this by reviewing the following after your first and subsequent meetings:

- ✓ Review accomplished objectives
- ✓ Determine future meeting topics you'd like to explore
- ✓ Summarize your impression of the outcome of the meeting

As a mentor, you have a unique opportunity to help an employee integrate in your company's culture and contribute to the organization's success. If your mentee is a skilled immigrant, your role is heightened as you will also be helping them assimilate in Canadian culture. There are a number of ways in which you can contribute to an employee's growth and development. Following are examples of specific questions and ways in which you can help your employee succeed.

Being a role model – Employees often aren't sure what to say or do in unfamiliar situations. They will often resort to what they know. A new comer may display the behaviours that are the accepted norm in their culture. You can demonstrate (role model) behaviours that are acceptable in different situations. For example:

1. Demonstrate and encourage the communication styles generally accepted North American Culture – eye contact, asking questions, etc.
2. Share techniques for gaining respect from colleagues and superiors – encourage asking questions, and questioning the status quo in a respectful manner.
3. Coach mentee on the behaviours that help project confidence, and competence.

Sharing Information – Remember, your knowledge and experience has equipped you with a wealth of information. You can share information about any topic that you think will be beneficial to your mentee. For a new comer, sharing information about the general Canadian culture is a good place to start. All employees benefit receiving information on the sample following topics:

1. What skills does the mentee need to demonstrate to be successful?
2. How does the mentee's role contribute to the company's overall business direction?
3. How can the mentee become involved in supporting the company's goal to attract and retain skilled immigrants?
4. Does the company have a prevailing culture? If the company has multiple locations, how would you describe the culture and group norms of each location?

Creating Networking Opportunities – Think of how often we rely on other people for information, or to get something done. One of the most fundamental shortcomings of a new employee is that they don't know the people in the company, and therefore they lack this support system. Create opportunities for employees to build professional relationships by introducing them to other influential people in the company.

1. Suggest ways that the mentee can network internally to develop more contacts.
2. Discuss strategies for finding common ground in conversations.
3. If the employee is also new to the country, identify whether there are opportunities to network with other skilled immigrants within the company.
4. Get involved and encourage mentee to get involved in helping out and participating in company activities and initiatives.

Facilitating Career Development – Talk to others about the mentee's work accomplishments and successes. This will highlight contributions early and may lead to additional projects. This means that the company is more likely to have the resources it needs to get the job done, while the employee gets an opportunity to develop more skills and further their career.

1. Discuss specific actions and suggestion employees can implement to achieve higher levels of performance.
2. Point out assignments that can potentially lead to advancement and greater job fulfillment. Discuss opportunities take on new projects or job shadow.
3. Realistically discuss the sacrifices and rewards of moving up in the company, keeping in mind that not all employees aspire to move up. Also discuss options for lateral development opportunities.
4. Point out external activities that would help career progression. For example, joining a professional association, or taking additional training.

Managing the Mentoring Relationship

Mentoring comes with the challenge of understanding why people act the way they do, especially when it is different than the way you would act in any given situation. Understanding the underlying assumptions that drives behaviour will increase the trust and openness required for successful mentoring. Following are some ways to help you understand and manage differences, and build a successful mentoring relationship.

To improve understanding, you need to understand the many areas where differences actually exist. Talk about the following areas to gain a better understanding of differences; likewise, you may also find that you share a number of similarities in these areas!

Self Awareness

- ✓ A high degree of self awareness is required for effective communication, interpersonal relations, and a successful mentoring relationship. Self-awareness includes recognizing our own personalities, strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes. As a mentor, ask yourself the following:

- What life experiences have contributed to making me the person I am today?
- What values guide my decisions?
- What assumptions do I have about the world?
- How do my biases play out in the workplace?

Culture

- ✓ Keep in mind that Canadian culture is largely comprised of immigrants. The newer the person is to the country, the more likely that they will have close ties to the prevailing culture and customs of their homeland. The mentor should seek information about the culture of mentee, and likewise the mentee should seek to learn about the culture of the mentor. You can explore such topics as:
 - key cultural accomplishments
 - the religious system
 - the family structure
 - the social norms and expectations

Perceptions

- ✓ Culture, life experience, and upbringing all affect how we see the world. For a mentoring relationship to be successful, both parties must understand how each "sees" the world, especially in the context of work. The goal is not to change perceptions, but rather openly acknowledge and discuss different views. In the context of the workplace, discuss differing views about:
 - Organizational structure – hierarchies vs team based work (flat structure)
 - Organizational roles – responsibilities of leaders, managers, employees
 - Decision Making – made solely by managers or consensus based?
 - Reward and Recognition – earned on individual achievements or team outcomes

Listening

- ✓ Think about how many times you have had problems understanding someone or times someone may have had problems understanding you. Now add the language differences that we encounter in a multi-cultural society such as ours, and notice how the potential for misunderstandings increases. We can eliminate barriers to listening by 'testing' what we heard rather than simply accepting what was said. Try these strategies to help you actively listen:
 - **Use open-ended questions** – These are questions that can't be answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no', but require additional information
 - **Silence** – Resist the urge to finish the other person's sentence; you'll obtain more information if you remain quiet and let people figure out what they want to say
 - **Empathize** – Imagine yourself in your mentee's place, keeping in mind different cultural, racial, and gender-based assumptions.
 - **Paraphrase** – Repeating what you think you heard will give you an opportunity to discuss any misunderstandings before the conversation goes too far.

Some final thoughts on managing an effective mentoring relationship....

- ❖ An attitude of openness to learning and growing on the part of both mentee and mentor is crucial to the long-term success of the mentorship relationship
- ❖ Mentoring relationships acknowledge different ideas and styles for achieving success—the objective is not to create clones, but encourage diversity.
- ❖ An effective mentoring relationship is based upon mutual respect for each other's ideas—a mentor is not superior, simply more experienced.
- ❖ A mentor is someone who can pass along organizational values, culture and knowledge, act as a soundboard for ideas, and shares professional wisdom and experience.

Evaluating the Mentoring Relationship

It is important that you and your mentee evaluate the mentoring relationship from time to time to ensure that you are both deriving maximum benefit from mentoring. You can evaluate the relationship for goal completion, what worked and what didn't, what was done well and what could have been done differently, what each partner brought to the process, and anything else you would like to discuss.

This evaluation process will help you both identify what is going well and what could be done differently to build a more effective partnership. It will also help you decide whether you want to continue the relationship on a formal basis, or informally where the mentor is available in future on an as needed basis.

Mentor Self-Assessment

As your relationship progresses, you will want to continually enhance your ability to help mentees develop greater insight, identify needed knowledge, and expand skills. Review the following list of questions from time to time to help you reflect on how your behaviours are contributing to the mentoring relationship.

Questions for Reflection....

- I allow my mentee to set the goals and direction for our relationship.
- I am an active listener, encouraging my mentee to share opinions.
- I ask open-ended questions that enable me to understand my mentee's situation.
- I show my commitment to the relationship by sharing my successes and failures.
- I tell my mentee when I see behaviors that could negatively impact his/her career.
- I make myself available for meetings and consider them a top priority.
- I help my mentee find his / her own answers rather than tell him / her what to do.
- I am willing to introduce my mentee to others and share my network.
- I keep confidential the information my mentee shares.
- I ask for feedback from my mentee.
- I provide honest feedback, keeping in mind cultural views and perceptions.

Mentee Self-Assessment

Mentees play an equally important role in building the mentoring relationship. It is beneficial for mentees to self assess how their behaviours are contributing to the relationship. You may wish to share this evaluation form with your mentee when you decide how you will go about evaluating your progress.

Questions for Reflection....

- I assume responsibility for managing the mentoring relationship.
- I share both long-term and immediate goals with my mentor.
- I evaluate my progress periodically and modify my goals if necessary.
- I keep in touch between meetings to update my mentor on progress.
- I complete action items that my mentor and I have agreed to.
- I do not expect my mentor to make decisions for me.
- I keep confidential information my mentor shares.
- I am realistic about what my mentor can do for me.
- I give my mentor honest feedback, both positive and negative.
- I ask my mentor for honest feedback, both positive and negative.

Mentoring Relationship Assessment

The self-assessment questions are certain to help you both see what is going well and areas that can be improved. Even if everything is going well and you have both been doing all the right things to keep the momentum going, there may come a point when the mentoring relationship ends because its goals have been reached, if it has run out of steam, or is terminated due to other unforeseen circumstances. Whatever the reasons, a formal review and clear end to a mentoring relationship can make it a more positive learning experience for both mentor and mentee.

Mentor and mentee can jointly discuss the following questions....

- Did we make progress on the goals and objectives we established at the onset?
- In what ways could we have made this mentoring partnership more effective?
- What insights did we each gain from the relationship?
- How did we each contribute to the relationship?
- How did logistics help or hinder the progress (meeting venues; time allocated; frequency; mode of contact; etc.)
- Do we plan to continue and establish new goals and objectives, or will we celebrate our accomplishments and wrap-up our relationship?