


All About Mentoring

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Creating a Mentoring Culture

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Her workshops, lectures, consultations and retreats integrate adult development and learning theory with proven methods to improve and enhance board functioning and development, leadership development and organizational effectiveness. Her work also includes assisting educational institutions in the development of learned focus programs.

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Her publications include articles, monographs and books about adult development and learning, mentoring, leadership and board development, staff development, and the basics of establishing and maintaining a consulting practice.

Mentoring and Learning Organization

Mentoring is potentially one of the most powerful influences in a person's life. Whether it emerges out of an intimate relationship (grandparent, parent, sibling, a spouse or life partner), or a professional role (teacher, manager/supervisor, co-worker), it is likely that most people have been, or will be a protégé, a mentor or both at sometime during their life.

Mentoring not only fosters individual learning but also creates learning organizations. "Mentoring" and the "learning organization" are both hot topics of the decade (Senge 1990). However, Malcolm Knowles (1980) presciently claimed "...an organization is not simply instrumentally for providing organized learning activities to adults; it also provides an environment that either facilitates or inhibits learning." Creating a learning organization is the "way of being" among most successful organizations today, profit or nonprofit and mentoring is one of the most effective vehicles for promoting individual and collective learning that goes on with them.

The New Mentoring Paradigm

Many mentoring relationships today are rooted in the "old paradigm" of power, prestige and hierarchy, based on the assumption that one learned something from a

mentor (more often than not passively) and eventually separated from a mentor. Although this "transactional learning" is still operative in some institutional and organizational settings, it is no longer the prevailing paradigm.

The new mentoring paradigm is a partnership based on mutuality of learning, growth and satisfaction. Both partners actively engage in preparing, building and sustaining the relationship. Through active engagement the needs of both partners are met. "Wisdom is not passed from an authoritarian teacher to a supplicant student, but is discovered in a learning relationship in which both stand to gain a greater understanding of the workplace and the world" (Aubrey & Cohen, 1995, p. 161).

Mentoring is serious business with potential for significant returns in investment: opening lines of communication, identifying and developing organizational leadership, sculpting a learning organization (Watkins & Marsick, 1993), fostering self-directed learning and supporting organizational growth.

In my experience as an adult educator and leadership consultant, I have worked with a variety of organizations. I have observed situations in which mentoring facilitates a climb in the learning curve for orienting new employees and acclimate new group members to an organization's culture.

The examples below, drawn from a global and diverse corporation, a mentoring institute (sponsored by a regional consortium) and a large community based not-profit organization, illustrate how three organizations realized their goals by systematically developing a mentoring program and building an infrastructure to support the process. The scope, magnitude, forms and degree of the mentoring within these organizations varied.

Creating a Corporate Mentoring Culture

Kentucky based Brown-Forman, founded in 1870, is a diversified producer and marketer of the fine quality consumer products, including spirits, wine, luggage, china and crystal. Brown-Forman has approximately 7,400 employees worldwide. Its leadership believes that planful mentoring can develop leadership, increase communication, foster understanding of the new learning paradigm; and help employees function more effectively, productively and competitively in an increasingly global workforce.

The need for formalized mentoring at Brown-Forman Corporation was first identified by Brown-Forman's Leadership Development Council (a dozen senior executives from across the corporation) as a means to support leadership growth across the organization. In 1985, Brown-Forman embarked upon a global mentoring initiative. Its goals were: (1) to develop a process involving self-initiated pairing between employees from all levels and divisions of the company, regardless of corporate, division or subsidiary affiliation, (2) to foster

responsibilities, and (3) to have voluntary learning relationships based on specific and mutually agreed upon goals and outcomes.

In order to solicit broad input and support, an advisory team made up of members from across the corporation was created. The Mentoring Advisory Team (MAT), facilitated by a Human Resources Mentoring Coordinator was established to develop protocols, policies and procedures to guide the building of mentoring a culture. The MAT realized, early on, that in order to create a corporate culture of mentoring, it would need visible support from the highest levels of the organization. Brown-Forman's chairman and CEO, Owsley Brown II, articulated and voiced his commitment this way:

Mentoring is important work; I've done it over the years as both provider and recipient of advice. I've found that it works best when the program has a structure, but it is carried out in a natural comfortable environment. Development programs such as these should remind us to be conscious of learning and exposure opportunities at all times.

Critical success components were identified by the MAT before it rolled out "mentoring at Brown-Forman" support and involvement from the highest levels of the sales organization, starting with small numbers and growing slowly, ongoing support to those involved in the mentoring process, continuous improvement and data collection at each and every phase.

An initial letter was sent to all groups operating executives introducing with mentoring concept and goals. Each executive was asked to identify one person as onsite point person. Each point person became a "mentoring facilitator" and coordinated at least one informational; briefing with his/her organization. Group executives volunteered to be mentors.

Interest in the program has grown steadily since it began two years ago. There are 100 mentoring pairs and two mentoring groups (one of which recently ended after a year of successful programming). Fifty one-hour mentoring briefings have been held in most departments throughout the company to orient employees about the mentoring process. These briefings, presented by members of the MAT, describe available opportunities and resources and provide a forum to ask questions about the mentoring process. The briefings cover generic information about what mentoring is, why mentoring is important in today's business world and to Brown-Forman, how the mentoring program was developed, and how to get involved. In addition, a seven-minute video program is shown, featuring Brown-Forman employees at all levels talking about their views on mentoring.

The emerging mentoring culture today is characterized by regular intra-corporate, bulletins featuring success stories about mentoring, updates on the program,

information about workshops, opportunities or face-to-face counsel, and a growing infrastructure.

Currently there are 24 mentoring facilitators representing all divisions and 13 mentoring Resource Centers located at multiple sites. Each site has materials and information about mentoring available in plastic file folders attached to walls in public thoroughfares and is updated regularly.

The role of the mentoring coordinator, as corporate point person, is critical. The mentoring coordinator is available for counsel and information referral. Workshops and training for mentoring participants are held periodically to help employees develop new skills and enhance the quality of their relationships. The content of the workshops is based on feedback derived from the continuous evaluation process. Individual mentoring pairs are encouraged to engage in continuous evaluation throughout their relationship and are given tools to help make their experience a positive one. The words of this protégé are typical:

Mentoring has been very a challenging step in developing my future it has helped me gain more confidence. I rediscovered myself and my goals.

The value-added dimension is two ways. Mentors say they truly enjoy providing guidance and support and the opportunity to learn about another persons perspective of the company.

I can prove my protégé with some guidance. But I have also gotten a lot out of it. It makes you look at your own life and what you have done. It makes you feel better about your life when you can provide guidance to people.

Key features of mentoring at Brown-Forman are visible and continuous support from senior management, ongoing communications, emphasis on the global nature of the business, built in support resources (human, informational and process), ongoing evaluation by partners and the system, training, and integration and alignment corporate-wide.

The role of everyone involved in the program is defined, including the MAT, the mentoring coordinator, supervisor, mentor and protégé. In each definition the notion of a collaborative learning partnership is emphasized. Responsibility for selecting and recruiting a mentor lies with the protégé (although assistance is available from the mentoring coordinator, upon request). It is learner-driven. Each protégé is encouraged to identify his or her goals early on in the relationship.

Mentors and proteges are encouraged as active learners. For some proteges the learning has resulted in acquisition of corporate knowledge – the "how to's" around specific issues and problems as well as the achievement of targeted employees development objectives. They state they are making steady progress in meeting their goals and are becoming learning leaders. Among the learning's for

mentors is the gaining of yet other kinds of corporate knowledge: the value-added awareness that comes from seeing the company from another perspective, self-knowledge from being a new role and honing one's skills.

Creating Regional Mentoring Culture

"Adult learning is best understood when the context is considered with the same attention as the teaching and learning interactions occurring within it" (Marriam & Cafferella. 1991 p. 306). Context, in this instance, has to do with variability of the culture the environment, the resources (human and financial) and the individuals within a specific organization or site. This philosophy contextualized learning led of the central New York's Staff Development Consortium to bring together Project Managers and staff from a range of adult education practice contexts to learn how to establish mentoring processes with their own institutional frameworks. The consortium (one of ten established by the New York State Education Department which serves primarily practitioners, teachers, job developers and administrators) offer a mentoring institute (called "Building a Mentoring Process") in the winter of 1996.

The purposes of an mentoring institute were to guide diverse organizational teams in developing and implementing ongoing site specific mentoring processes and to create a learning and mentoring resource network among educational practitioners throughout central New York. The assumptions concerning the six month, three season programs were: (1) fertile ground to grow a mentoring program must exist, (2) at least several (ideally a tam of) individuals within the organization should attend to assure a likelihood that the process is integrated into the organizational framework, and (3) gathering site-specific information is critical to building an effective customized mentoring process.

Desired outcomes varied among participant team. Some project managers were looking for ways to orient their new hires. Others wanted to assist experienced practitioners and studies and integrated learning into practice. Several had mentoring pairs already in place, some more successful than others. Thus, as the institutional contents varied, so did the goals and purposes which drove them.

Seven teams (many of which were school based partnerships) participated in the mentoring institute. The registration form asked each team to define its goals for the program and to list specific questions and wanted answers. Participants were informed that in between the three sessions (which spanned a six-month period), they were expected to gather data from which to build a plan. Enrolling meant they were willing to meet this commitment.

Prior to the first the session the participants received reading materials and specific questions to help focus the their reading. The first session included a presentation of generic frame works, examples of best mentoring practice,

and commonly held assumptions about mentoring. Participants explored roles and characteristics of mentors, expectations and potential benefits to their organizations and developed familiarity with a variety of data gathering techniques.

Participants became acutely aware of the contextual nature of mentoring. The key lesson learned from that session was the importance of understanding the "ground" (organizational culture or climate) in which a mentoring program takes root.

Prior to the second session, each team collected site-specific data regarding organizational learning needs. The "charge" place to identify who within their organizations needs to know something that can best be learned other than in a traditional classroom situation. They were also asked to consider how the learning needs could best be met and to define the gaps between need and knowing. In some organizations, skill learning was identified as the priority were those at the supervisory level needed to make sure that their employees support have to speed on specific skills. In other organizations the focus was on developing veteran staff where group mentoring was the desired mode of learning. In another, the priority was expedient face to face orientation of new hires. In yet another the need was to orient corporate employees in their roles and mentors in the public schools.

Session two included the stages and phases of the mentoring partnership, adult development and learning theory, and application of knowledge about adult development and learning to the mentoring process. Considerable time was spent examining and processing institutional data and then applying principles of adult learning accordingly. Variation among adult learners was emphasized. In order to help the teams synthesize their learning; each team explored answers to specific questions about their organizational context. The answers helped identify the essential elements for preparing the relationship, collection of the mentoring pool, and the establishment of critical success factors.

Celebration, commitment and community were the focus of the third, and final session. The entire mentoring partnership cycle was re-visited with special emphasis on commitment, implementation, evaluation and training. Participants developed specific customized tools after familiarizing themselves with techniques and strategies, such is using job description to outline specific roles, responsibility and relationships. A "mentoring marketplace" was created to encourage to communal sharing and provide feedback on how to market programs. Each team is drafted site-specific action plans and received feedback from colleagues. Emphasis placed on celebration and its importance in building morale and supporting continuous learning.

At the close of each session participants were asked to journal and complete a session evaluation. The session evaluations were used to inform the following session. The evaluation following the third session revealed the

following process outcomes had been achieved: Participants (1) realize the importance of checking out assumptions prior to mounting a mentoring initiation, (2) recognize the importance of training of the successful outcome and the need for constant vigilance through continuous evaluation, and (3) realize that there must be shared understanding of the mentoring concept before a can be embedded in a context and that building a mentoring process takes structure, planning and good organization. Several participants commended:

I thought I knew what mentoring was until I came to the workshop. I found myself constantly comparing "mentor" to counselor and adviser to. More specifically, I found myself becoming more analytical in terms of what I understand about the mentoring process.

I'm now aware of the important of communication during all phases -- from setting up the program to implementation and participation.

The most important thing I learned is that there is a vast difference between the general conception of being a mentor and what an organization would view as a mentoring process.

Organizational self-study and in understanding of the individual learners within it were foundational for building a mentoring process and promoting organizational learning. Creating common ground through mutual understanding conscientious communication and continuous learning work (and are) the bedrock.

Creating a Board Mentoring Culture

Mentoring in an effective way to orient new trustee, hasten organizational learning and transmit organizational norms. The Loretto Board of Trustees is an example of how one not-for-profit organization of busy, committed volunteers facing tough decision in a rapidly changing health care environment, choose to better prepare and engage new trustees, shortened the learning curve, maximize precious human resources increased board member satisfaction.

Loretto, founded in 1926, is the largest provider of care for older adults in Central New York, and currently operates 25 local facilities and programs. Its various programs are intended to meet the diverse health, social and housing needs of older adults. Loretto serves over 3,000 clients and employs more than 2,000 senior care professionals. It has expanded to include the management of other nursing homes in New York State.

Increasingly the capacity of its trustees to make well informed and timely divisions were at on trustee intelligence: becoming more fully conversant with an array of issues as quickly as possible, before relevant information becomes obsolete. Loretto trustees are sophisticated, high

prestige each community leaders. They include a former state senator, as state Supreme Court Justice, and dean of nursing a bank president, physicians, attorneys and health-care providers. These individuals are used for sifting through reams of data to make quick educated decisions, and yet in the role of individual trustee,... "What trustees have to understand about regulations... is an amazing amount of material. It is like getting a graduate degree."

There is much the learned about the structure and operation at Loretto. Previous experience has taught us that it takes at least a year to get up to speed. Given the complexity of our growing organization and the fast-pace of change, we recognize that learning the Loretto system is a daunting task.

No matter how much material in sent, it is still difficult to grasp the full complexity of our operation without a personal interaction with individuals more familiar an experienced with the system.

In response to the express needs of its trustees to grasp the full complexity of Loretto's operation, the Board Development Committee (BDC) wanted to provide personal interaction and meet its trustee's burgeoning information needs. Recognizing the already extended responsibility of the board, the BDC rate and that Loretto staff mentor its new trustees.

Job description detailing their roles and responsibilities were developed by the BDC in collaboration with staff. The primary role of the staff mentor was to provide learning opportunities and support for new trustees as they familiarized themselves and became oriented to the challenging inherent in their roles. Staff committed to seek out their trustee mentee at board meetings or call them after board meetings to see if they had questions.

Staff members were oriented to their roles by the external consultants. They agree to periodically review progress and assess the needs of their mentors as part of the regular senior management team agenda.

A welcome letter is sent out under the signature of the board share to all new trustees. Each staff member follows that contact with a personal letter introducing him or her to their mentee. The BDC (as well as staff) regularly monitors the process by seeking feedback from new trustees.

We appreciate the fact that each of us has different information needs and learning styles. At the same time, everyone has their own timeframe for installation of new information. Question often surface during the learning process. Frequently needs for more concrete information becomes apparent.

As trustee is process information, they often find a curiosity piqued about a specific area of the operation of one of the corporate entities.

It's been a learning process. It's not just policymaking and decision making, but really a lot of learning.

Mentoring is value added for Loretto trustees and for

the organization based on. From their first experience, trustees feel an integral part of the learning organization at Loretto. The board reinforces this value by constantly engaging itself in continuous learning and assuring its new members are well prepared to serve.

The New Mentoring Culture

The old paradigm of mentoring as transactional learning no longer serves individuals or their organizations particularly well. More than the new skill development, information exchange and feedback are required for today's learning leaders. Mentoring must be rooted in partnership; based on mutual understanding and agreement of goals, roles and responsibilities, and outcomes. Clear and honest communication is essential. Both parties must derive satisfaction from it.

A mentoring culture -- be it a corporation, a regional Consortium, or a board of trustees -- and must be added in an organizational culture which "walks the talk" and values learning, not just for why it might become but what it is today.

The proliferation of newspaper articles, monthly magazine articles, both trade and professional and intracorporate newsletters, is testimony that mentoring enhances personal and professional learning and development.

Mentors are persons who leave us stronger, more confident, clearer thinking and better able to cope after they have met with us. They help us grow in wisdom, not so much by inviting us to adopt their wisdom as by the way they ask questions which move us to deeper places of insight and perception... some now we end up feeling more powerful ourselves (Broholm and Johnson, 1994, p. 8).

The three organizational examples demonstrate that creating a mentoring culture is not for the faint hearted. It takes careful preparation. It takes commitment, introspection, patience and understanding the process of relationship building on an organizational and personal basis. Organizations, too, can become stronger in clearer thinking. They can also turn to deeper places of insight and perspective, empowered because they have empowered their people.

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