

Mentoring Culture

Have happier people.



by Lois J. Zachary

EXECUTIVES WHO DO not learn and promote learning end up managing, not leading. Great leaders serve as role models of learning, mentoring emerging leaders and establishing a mentoring culture. It is a smart way to enhance personal connections and maintain vitality. Effective mentoring can improve retention, build morale, increase commitment, accelerate leadership development, provide career development, reduce stress, build teams, and facilitate learning.

Eight Hallmarks

A mentor culture has eight hallmarks:

- **Accountability.** The culture supports mentoring and supplies a means for providing feedback, evaluation, and benchmarking. Clarify roles, goals, and responsibilities; manage expectations; and encourage accountability.
- **Alignment.** When mentoring is aligned within a culture, it is not perceived as an add-on. A shared understanding and vocabulary of mentoring practice should be a natural fit with the values, mission, and goals.
- **Communication.** Identify stakeholders and the key messages that need to be communicated to them by certain people at certain times. Get feedback about what is working to ensure a constant flow of information for making process improvements.
- **Demand.** People are enthusiastic about participating in mentoring relationships. When partners complete learning goals, they seek mentoring relationships to work on new goals. Mentors become mentees, and mentees become mentors.
- **Education and training.** Integrate mentoring into the training and development agenda, and add "next-step" education and advanced skills training for mentors. Networking and support groups meet to exchange best practices and promote peer learning.
- **Multiple mentoring opportunities.** Encourage formal and informal mentoring: group mentoring, long-distance mentoring, cross-cultural mentoring, e-mentoring, one-on-one

mentoring, and mentoring networking sessions. Make chat rooms, web sites, and videoconferences accessible.

- **Safety net.** Counsel and support are available for mentors and mentees. Confidentiality is honored, and positive outcomes are reached, even when mentoring relationships don't work out.
- **Value and visibility.** Leaders raise the bar for themselves. They go first, share their stories and best practices, and encourage mentoring excellence. Champions seek resources and tools to increase their effectiveness.

Whether through e-mail, personal contact, role modeling, posters, or con-



versation, advocacy for mentoring happens all the time. Celebrating milestones or bringing closure to a relationship or a cycle of mentoring creates value. It's a chance to expand knowledge, share learning, align the culture, honor achievement, provide incentives, and reinforce the vision.

A mentoring culture requires an infrastructure to implement mentoring in a coherent, comprehensive, and conscientious way. Leaders put in place the resources, human and financial; ensure proper budgets and time; ensure mentoring "has a home" (someone "owns" it); guarantee sponsorship; and task certain individuals with communication, training, coaching, support, and administration, and they engage in mentoring relationships.

Sustainability: Key to Success

Mentoring cultures have four traits:

- **Flexibility.** Flexibility is built into mentoring processes to avoid gridlock caused by procedures and protocols.
- **Ownership.** Creating a home, providing scaffolding, and committing to mentoring fosters ownership. The

players may change, but the integrity of the process must remain intact. Mentoring cannot be the pet project of a few individuals. While an executive may "sponsor" mentoring, it must reside in a development function.

- **Clarity.** When everything gets called mentoring, the integrity of the concept is violated. Mental models drive how organizations design and implement mentoring. Clarify the concept—what it does and does not mean, and its underlying assumptions.

- **Feedback.** Requesting, receiving, providing, accepting, and acting on feedback are integral to the culture. Feedback provides appropriate support, challenge, and vision.

A mentoring culture promotes growth. It enhances the learning; leverages energy; better utilizes time, effort, and resources; and enriches vibrancy and productivity. The skills of mentoring strengthen relationships as people feel more connected.

A mentoring culture creates standards and best practices. Make mentoring a cultural competence so that it informs the way business is conducted.

Embedding mentoring in a culture:

- **Establishes ownership.** It assures that mentoring is vested in the many rather than the few. People feel a sense of ownership and responsibility and hold others accountable.

- **Promotes shared responsibility.** The success of mentoring is explicitly linked to the wider strategic agenda.

- **Maximizes resources.** Duplication of time, effort, and dollars are minimized.

- **Maintains integrity.** Cultural integration helps maintain the integrity of the mentoring by assuring readiness, opportunity, and support for mentoring.

- **Facilitates knowledge utilization.**

Integrate new learning and leverage knowledge gained from mentoring.

- **Supports integration of key processes.** Competencies, such as feedback and goal setting, improve performance.

- **Creates openness to learning through mentoring.** People trust mentoring because they know it is a valued practice and see it demonstrated daily.

- **Shortens ramp up time.** Cultural congruence facilitates the creation of a mentoring culture because there is always readiness in the culture.

Mentoring helps maximize knowledge to accelerate learning. It facilitates leadership development and builds relationships of head, heart, and soul. **LE**

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ACTION: Create a mentoring culture.