

Seven Success Strategies for Mentoring Program Managers

BY LOIS J. ZACHARY

For those in charge of mentoring programs, their own development often gets short shrift.

CHECKLIST

How to Support Mentoring Program Managers

- Make it a requirement for MPMs to update their skills and knowledge on an annual basis.
- Provide financial support for MPMs' participation in mentoring conferences and workshops, and for their involvement in professional mentoring associations.
- Arrange forums for MPMs to share their new learning with leadership.
- Make sure a mentoring leadership succession plan is in place to ensure a smooth transition.
- Include regular mentoring updates on your leadership agenda.

Mentoring has become a strategic imperative for ensuring employee engagement and career success. While much time and attention have been given to training and supporting mentors and mentees, minimal attention has been paid to the unsung heroes of those efforts—the mentoring program managers (MPM). These individuals charged with the responsibility of managing, coordinating, overseeing, and steering organizational mentoring efforts often suffer from benign neglect of their own making—not making the time for their own development and learning.

Guidebooks are helpful in familiarizing MPMs with mentoring, its processes, and structure, but rarely do they address the strategic growth and development of the MPM in preparation for the role, while they are in the role, and planning for leadership succession. Ensuring that an MPM has a growth and development plan in place for himself benefits him as well as the entire organization.

Why it works

Whether MPMs are part time, attached to another function and responsibilities, or in fully dedicated positions, they will need to focus on developing themselves in their role. Implementing and growing a successful mentoring program requires a knowledgeable, capable, competent, skilled, and visionary manager.

Without a specific plan in place, what ends up happening is a little bit like the story of the shoemaker's children who have no shoes. The MPM is so busy managing and implementing a mentoring program for everyone else in the company that it leaves no time for him to address his own learning needs. When an MPM lacks adequate training and preparation for the role, it negatively affects the growth and development of the program and limits his effectiveness in the role.

Guidelines

If you are an MPM, what can you do to avoid putting your own learning and development on the back burner? Here are seven learning and development opportunities that are guaranteed to make you more successful in your role, followed by questions to consider relative to those opportunities.

Be prepared. *What professional memberships do you have in mentoring support organizations?*

Realistically assess how much you really know about mentoring. If you're not as up-to-date and knowledgeable as you should be, find both virtual and local networks to plug into. Once you do, network like crazy. It is a relatively easy way to tap into best practice models.

Let your commitment show. *What are you learning about mentoring from being in mentoring relationships?*

Be a role model. Engage as a mentor. Experiential learning is a quick teacher and it will help you fully understand the dynamics and challenges of being in a mentoring relationship.

Remember that the best mentors are mentees as well. Being able to walk in a mentee's shoes will accelerate your learning and put you in a better position to support your program's mentees.

Make your own growth and development a priority. *What growth have you seen in yourself during the past six months?*

Identify the skills and competencies you are going to need to take your mentoring program to the next level. Then assess your strengths and challenges. Create an individual development plan to help you get there, and review it often.

Challenge yourself. *What new resources can you tap into right now that would make the biggest difference in your performance as an MPM?*

Look in the mirror frequently and ask, "What more can I be doing to raise the bar on my mentoring program?" Once you figure that out, ask yourself, "What more do I need to learn?" And then get to work on acquiring the knowledge, information, and resources you will need to develop yourself in the role.

Keep your antennae up. *What have you learned recently by listening to your program participants?*

MPMS SHOULD BE ROLE MODELS OF THE VERY PROCESSES THEY ARE SUPPORTING.

Stay in contact with your program participants, ask questions, and gather feedback. Listen well and remain open when you get pushback.

Learning from your program's end users will help you stay ahead of the curve and gain important insights about what process improvements need to be made.

Think leadership succession. *What is one thing you can do right now to jump-start your successor's learning?*

In a mentoring culture, mentoring leadership replaces itself. Identify the next leader of your mentoring program well in advance of the time you leave, move on, or retire. Develop a transition plan.

Mentoring your successor can fast-track her learning and ease her transition into the MPM role. In the process, it will give you an opportunity to reflect on your own learning and identify how you can apply what you've learned and take it to the next level.

Don't go it alone. *Which leaders are the strongest advocates for mentoring in your organization and what have you learned from them?*

Learn how to leverage your political capital. When mentoring is a vested interest and commitment, ownership for it permeates every level of the organization.

Be on the lookout for opportunities to create value and visibility for mentoring. Make sure that your leaders are continuously updated on mentoring activities and successes.

Results

MPMs should be role models of the very processes they are supporting. If

RESOURCES

Center for Mentoring Excellence, 2013. "Mentoring Culture Check-In: Are You Minding Your P's and Q's?" www.centerformentoringexcellence.com/mentoring-culture-check-in-are-you-minding-your-ps-and-qs.

Zachary, L. 2005. *The Organization's Guide: Creating a Mentoring Culture*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Zachary, L. and L. Fischler. 2014. *Starting Strong: A Mentoring Fable. Strategies for Success in the First 90 Days*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

you are an MPM, you owe it to yourself and your organization to be the best one you can be. That means making a commitment to your own growth in your role.

It is only when you have garnered the experience, knowledge, and training that are needed that you will be successful at being an MPM. If you are well prepared and continue to grow your capacity, you will secure the organizational commitment and resources you need to take yourself and your organization to the next level with a mentoring culture.

■ **Lois J. Zachary** is president of Leadership Development Services. Her most recent book is *Starting Strong: A Mentoring Fable*, co-authored by Lory A. Fischler; lzachary@leadservs.com.



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