

PLAN FOR THE MOST: THE BENEFIT OF EXPERIENCE

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Mentoring is a business tool for small, medium and large companies alike. But how could your company benefit from mentoring?

One reason for starting a mentoring program is to attract and retain the best candidates. In a recent survey of independent businesses, 45 per cent said they had trouble finding qualified people for the jobs they had available. A mentoring program attracts good, young graduates looking for a company willing to invest in them.

The reality is that even the 'qualified' candidates need mentoring. Studies in the U.S. show that "a significant gap exists between the skills required for successful management performance and the skills taught in a traditional business school (*The Myths and Magic of Mentoring*, p. 20). Skills in decisiveness, creativity, written and oral communication, tolerance of uncertainty, and resistance to stress are not taught. Once hired, mentoring counters this situation, it can focus on employee qualities and build upon a good working relationship to develop these skills.

Specific projects and tasks assigned to mentees vary from company to company. The size of your company is an important consideration. For a smaller company, without an information technology department for example, a mentee may bring valuable computer skills. This was the reason why the Empire Financial Group recruited wanted to hire a young graduate. They were looking for someone with the latest technical skills.

In a larger company a mentee may be assigned to undertake specific research. A company's marketing department may be considering launching a new product or looking at new markets overseas. Exploring the potential of new markets is an excellent opportunity for a business graduate to use their knowledge for your company's benefit. Additionally, many young graduates know more than one language. This is increasingly important to company's competing in a global economy.

It is important to clarify what you want before taking on a mentee. The easiest way to do is to describe what skills and knowledge you want your mentee to bring to the job.

For example,

What are the company's goals for the position? What benefit does the company expect?

What will the mentee do (duties, projects, job, tasks)?

What will be the mentee's opportunities for learning?

An active mentoring program affects more than the new employee. The mentoring relationship puts the experienced person in a unique position. The best way to learn something yourself, everyone knows, is to teach someone else. For the mentor, transferring knowledge and wisdom to a mentee may be the greatest and most rewarding challenge of their career. This, in turn, creates enthusiasm for the mentor in his or her own job.

The potential benefits to your company, to the mentor, and to the mentee are significant. When planning a mentoring program, be sure that top-level managers are prepared to support this initiative. Gather information about how mentoring might be used and discuss this with others. When thinking about the scope of the mentoring experience, consider suitable candidates willing to act as mentors. Most of all, encourage your key managers to learn more about mentoring before the program begins.

The bottom line is that mentoring fosters skills development of both the mentor and mentee. It is also a two-way exchange of ideas and knowledge that benefits the people involved as well as your company.

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