

WHAT IS MENTORING?

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Mentoring is a unique relationship. Ruth Bramson, Sr. Vice President of Shaw's Supermarkets, describes it as having personal as well as professional dimensions. "It's a partnership in which both members contribute equally. While the focus is on development, adjusting to the organization, and finding ways to grow in ability for the mentee, it brings a unique opportunity to the mentor to serve as a role model and confidante and make a real difference in someone's development."

Successful mentoring gets results from top to bottom. As a recruitment strategy, mentoring matches skills with those needed within your own company. It builds potential in your company, helps develop a versatile, multi-skilled workforce, and promotes leadership and vision for your company's future. As a leadership development program, mentoring partners experienced business people with enthusiastic and talented employees. The bottom line is that mentoring fosters skill development, promotes the exchange of ideas and knowledge, encourages independent initiative, and builds teamwork.

The terms coach, advisor, tutor, role model, and confidante are all used in similar ways. A mentor may perform one or more of the following:

- Act as a source of information on the mission and goals of the organization;
- Provide insight into the organization's philosophy of human resource development;
- Tutor specific skills, effective behaviour, and how to function in the organization;
- Give feedback;
- Coach activities that will add to experience and skills development;
- Serve as a confidant in times of crises or problems; and,
- Assist the mentee in plotting a career path.

(Margo Murray, *Beyond the Myths and Magic of Mentoring*)

Every organization has its own set of values, its own culture, and way of 'doing business.' Most people think of these as the intangible qualities of an organization. Not surprisingly, these qualities can only be learned from other people within the organization, as opposed to manuals and training courses. The mentor-mentee relationship promotes this learning process. This sets mentoring apart from other training and development programs.

Mentoring can be formal and structured or informal and spontaneous. But it does not have to be one or the other. The most effective programs are often a combination of the two approaches. Frequently, companies will allow the personal side of mentoring to develop informally while deliberately directing the professional benefits of mentoring through a more formal program.

Mentoring can take different forms. The business needs of the company, the skills of the individuals, and the nature of the assignment are each important considerations. Mentoring most often is organized as a one-on-one relationship between mentor and

mentee. A mentor may also be responsible for a team of mentees. Finally, one mentee may be trained and coached by several mentors. Each form has its own advantages.

Mentoring, in whatever form, is regarded best as a business solution with a human touch.

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