10 tips to make mentoring work

With only a third of people reporting they have a mentor, most organisations still have room to benefit from creating a more mentor-friendly environment — one that encourages employees to create mentoring relationships to help them become more technically competent, more motivated, and more amenable to sharing their knowledge.

Temps de lecture : minute

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I know from personal experience how influential mentors can be – I was lucky enough to have many brilliant mentors take me under their wing when I took a year off from college and dipped my toe into the fledgling computer industry. They taught me the practical application of knowledge, and in many cases, we learned together. As a result, I found a home in the IT industry, and never looked back.

As I wrote my book <u>Management by Design</u>, I suggested that all experiences required design. While this article doesn't lend itself to a deep design, these ten suggestions offering the fundamental design elements that any good mentoring program should include:

1. Ensure confidentiality. Make sure it is a safe space for discussing interpersonal relationships.
2. Include mentoring in the job description. In other words, make it a priority. If learning and gaining new capabilities, helping others reach their goals, isn't explicitly listed in the job description people will concentrate on what is in the job description. Without learning and growth roles can easily become very transactional.
3. Set appropriate expectations. Mentoring doesn't always produce

immediate results. Some mentoring must await a particular situation to prove meaningful, or to be applied. Sometimes those situations won't happen in this job, or even with this employer.

4. Be inclusive. Diversity is often implemented against narrow criteria around race or identity. Inclusion should also ensure that not only those perceived as "people managers" find mentoring opportunities but also those who have skills and experiences to share that will enrich the work lives of their peers.

5. Measure without making reporting a burden. Mentoring should not become a reporting effort, where the number of sessions or role ups to some strategic initiative drives the experience. Mentoring should be part of the regular discussions about career and performance, as a check-in for value. It supplements and complements performance management—but mentoring is about more than performance. If the mentor and mentee have a good, working relationship, that should be enough.

6. Encourage open, regular communication. Don't just make mentoring a series of three or six-month check-ins or evaluations. Build a relationship and use the channels and times in the way that prove most effective for those involved.

7. Let the participants define their mentoring relationships. Documented or not, formal or informal, ultimately the relationship between the mentor and mentee is for them, not directly for the organisation. Every mentoring relationship will find its own rhythm, define its own attributes.

8. Don't assign mentors. Today's millennials are actively identifying mentoring relationships on their own, subverting HR or a manager's traditional role in making matches between mentors and mentees. That said, those willing to mentor should be identified so that people know they are ready to participate. Once a mentoring relationship becomes formal, managers should be aware even if they don't know all the details because it should reflect positively on an employee that

they are actively involved in co-creating their future.

9. Reciprocal mentoring. Some organisations call it reverse mentoring, others mentoring up. Regardless of its name, reciprocal mentoring transforms those usually the target of mentoring into mentors—and their mentors, usually older employees, as the recipients of mentoring. Millennials bring skills around technology that their older peers often find difficult to adopt, let alone master. Millennials can help boomers and Xers tackle social media, NFTs, and other emerging concepts.

10. Find mentors who want to mentor. Mentors are very busy people. They can be juggling 20 or 30 tasks and a massive to-do list. Understandably, mentoring meetings may not always rise to the top of their list--but those who want to mentor make the time because they feel as accountable to their mentees as they do their other roles within the organisation.

Mentoring must become part of the fabric of the organisation. An expectation, not an option. It must be designed into the work experience or it runs the risk of become one of those nice to have management aspirations that no one ever gets around to.

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