



CORNERSTONE CONSULTING

**Mentoring Matters:
Briefings for Business Leaders**

**Topic:
Ensuring Quality Mentors**

QUESTION: AS WE ARE ROLLING OUT MENTORING, WE HAVE MORE INDIVIDUALS THAT WANT TO BE MENTEES THAN MENTORS. HOW DO WE GET INDIVIDUALS TO PARTICIPATE AS MENTORS?

This is not an unusual situation. It happens for two major reasons.

#1: Individuals do not really *know* what it takes to be a good Mentor – but since they feel that everyone should know how to execute this role, they are hesitant to reveal such. It is easier to give excuses such as “I just don’t have time.” or “I’m involved in a big project right now – I’ll get involved later”.

#2: There is an historical *misperception* regarding what it takes to be a Mentor and more specifically what level within the organization should take on that role.

When implementing a Mentoring Process within an organization, it is very important to have a clearly defined “*Role Profile*” of what is expected of an individual if he/she desires to be a Mentor. It is also important to indicate within that profile, the specific skills/ competencies that are required.

Normally, when we ask someone to take on a specific job within an organization, we supply him/her with the “criteria” of what is expected. In addition, defining and identifying this criteria allows an individual to make an *informed* decision regarding his/her ability to carry out that job. This also allows individuals to identify those areas of the new job that are similar to what they are already performing (or have indeed performed in the past). There is much more of a comfort level – or venturing into the “*known*” instead of the “*unknown*”.

Within any job description or title, individuals play many “*roles*”. By identifying the expectations of the *role* of Mentor, and reinforcing this during “Information Sessions” and “Training Programs”, individuals can realize that they are not now going to be expected to perform two jobs, but still one job with a new *role* that may, or may not, be similar to roles presently implemented.

Individuals can compare what they are now expected to *do* with what is required of being a Mentor. They can readily see which tasks or responsibilities they are now “performing already in their own job” and which tasks or responsibilities are “new”.

Regarding those tasks/ responsibilities that are now presently being performed on the Mentor’s job, a plan can be implemented to include the Mentee in regular activities. Within this plan the Mentor doesn’t work harder, he/she works *smarter!*

A second major reason why there may be a lack of Mentors (or individuals volunteering to be Mentors) is based on a historical *misperception* that only those individuals that are within certain or senior ranks of an organization are qualified to be Mentors.

A **Mentor** is defined as ***an individual with the experience, knowledge, and/or skills of a specific content area who is able, willing, and available to share this information with another individual.***

There is nothing in this definition that indicates that the Mentor must be older, must have been with the organization for a long period of time, or that the Mentor must be at a higher job grade/title level than the Mentee. It simply states that the Mentor has more *knowledge* or *experience* in a given area than the Mentee, or individual that needs/requires that knowledge or experience. It also states that the Mentor is *willing and available to share this information*.

There are probably many individuals within the organization that meet the criteria stated to be a good Mentor, but it never dawned on them that they could fill that role because of this historical misperception. These individuals would sincerely like to assist others and are probably doing so now within their own job.

So much more could be made of their talent, knowledge, skills and most of all, interest and desire, if there was a focused *plan* in place and an Mentee that could benefit from this focused *plan* and experience.

BUSINESS ISSUE: RECENTLY OUR CEO MANDATED THAT MENTORING MUST BE A ROLE CARRIED OUT BY ALL SENIOR MANAGEMENT. I FEEL THIS IS A CONCERN.

The following quote was recently submitted by an individual regarding business issue stated above:

“Recently at a senior management meeting, our CEO announced that all of the senior management were required to be Mentors. I looked around the room and had two thoughts: (1) some of the individuals did not look very happy about such an announcement – I don’t think that they were interested in doing this; (2) I don’t think that some of the individuals are qualified to be Mentors – although they are in rather high ranking positions, they are not known for their communication or coaching skills. What can I do?”

Based on some historical misperceptions – indicated in the “**Questions**” portion of this newsletter, many individuals within an organization still believe that the role of Mentor is based on “ranking”, “job grade” or “job title”.

In addition, many individuals believe that it is the *duty/requirement* of an individual within a senior position to mentor others. This can have a disastrous effect if the individual required to be a Mentor does not have the prerequisite skills/competencies to carry out this role or even worse, the desire and willingness to take the time required.

During a recent training session an individual gave the following example:

“I had a Mentor that was forced into his role. He didn’t want to be a Mentor and we both knew it. It was really uncomfortable and nothing really got accomplished during the time we spent together – which was very little since he always had some kind of excuse as to why we couldn’t meet.”

This example has been illustrated many times over. You cannot *force* individuals to take on a specific role. In this case the individual in the role of “Mentor” is miserable and, especially, the individual in the role of “Mentee” is miserable.

In most cases the Mentee doesn’t feel that he/she has any recourse or way to get out of the situation and feels “stuck”. Nothing gets accomplished except negative feelings around any concept of “mentoring” for both individuals.

Within any organization, you would not ask someone to take on a role for which they were not qualified. If an individual, no matter his/her rank, job grade or job title, is not qualified to be a Mentor than he/she should not be required to do so. You are setting someone up to *fail* under these circumstances. Just because someone is successful in a particular role does not automatically mean that he/she would be successful in the role of Mentor – the skills/competencies required may be very different.

Along with the required skills/competencies is the criteria of being **willing and available**. An individual may have the prerequisite skills/competencies to be a Mentor, but does not really feel comfortable in that role – it’s just not something

that he/she *likes* to do.

We all possess skills/competencies that could be used in roles other than the one that we are now holding, but we like what we are doing and we wouldn't be happy in another role. The same is true of Mentoring and it is just as important that some have the *desire* to be a Mentor as that they have the skills/ competencies to be a successful Mentor.

Questions or feedback - please contact us:

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