



CORNERSTONE CONSULTING

**Mentoring Matters:
Briefings for Business Leaders**

**Topic:
How Do We Mentor Across the
Generation Gap?**

QUESTION: HOW DO WE MENTOR ACROSS GENERATIONS?

The term “mentoring” has always conjured up pictures of *wise, older* sages acting in the role of “Mentor” as they imparted wisdom and knowledge to the *younger, less experienced* Mentee or Protégé.

How does that translate in today’s world?

Does it still work?

- How about the young graduate who has learned the newest technology or techniques in school that many individuals within a given organization have not had the time or opportunity to learn?
- How do you ensure that leadership skills, competencies and behaviors that have built a solid, stable organization and are vital to its future growth are instilled in new learners?
- How do Baby Boomers, Generation “Xers”, Generation “Y’s” and those that don’t even belong to a *category* yet named, function all on the same team or in the same working environment?

A NEW GENERATION OF MENTORING

The *new generation* of Mentors and Mentees has a different role than their counterparts of the past. **The new generation of Mentor** must not only be able to “teach”, “coach” and “impart knowledge”, but he/she must be open to the “exchange of ideas” that the new generation of Mentees brings to the relationship.

The new generation of Mentee can no longer look to the Mentor to *lead* the relationship. The Mentee must drive the relationship and become responsible for the outcome of the development that takes place in the relationship.

UPDATING OUTDATED MYTHS REGARDING MENTORING

There is an exciting and new focus for mentoring that can meet everyone’s needs, but it means throwing off our old and outdated perceptions and mis-perceptions regarding the concepts of mentoring.

A **Mentor** is 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.

A **Mentee** is an individual who seeks experience, knowledge and/or skills in a specific area and who looks to another individual(s) to gain that which is lacking.

Mentoring is the use of an experienced individual (Mentor) to teach and train someone with less knowledge or experience (Mentee) in a given area. Mentoring is a dynamic association between an individual who needs to learn and another who is willing to help and guide the learner.

Note that there is nothing in any of those definitions that indicate that the Mentor must be older than the Mentee; must be at a higher job grade level or title than the Mentee; must have been with the organization longer than the Mentee; or must have a higher academic degree or certification title than the Mentee.

It simply states that the Mentor has an area of knowledge and/or experience to share with the individual – Mentee – who needs this knowledge or experience.

Traditionally Mentor-Mentee pairs were created on the “top → down” theory. The Mentor was always at a higher job grade level or title than the Mentee. The Mentee felt secure that he/she was gaining exposure to those individuals that would/could have a positive influence in his/her career and upward movement within the organization. This focus, although still valuable, is now a small segment of how the concept of mentoring can and should be used.

LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER

There is a wealth of knowledge to be gained from all individuals, ages, and levels within the organization. Having multiple generations not only working together but *listening* and *communicating* with each other and working to *develop each other* is a boon in many areas including creativity in problem solving.

Many times the younger staff member is not invited to be a part of a brainstorming process – the thought is that he/she just doesn't have enough experience, knowledge, or organizational savvy to be of value. The same thing happens when the mentoring initiative within the organization only focuses on the “networking and career pathing” or “top → down” style of mentoring relationships.

Example #1: Kevin is the Director of Operations for the Southwest District of Caldwell Distribution and a Mentor to Frank who is a Manager in Finance. As a Mentee, Frank's major goal was to obtain more exposure to senior management.

Early in the mentoring relationship, Kevin indicated that one of the ways Frank could obtain the exposure he desired was to become more involved in major, strategic presentations that would spotlight the accomplishments of the IT Division. Kevin was a seasoned communicator, had given presentations throughout his long career with the organization and felt this was an area of expertise -- he felt he could be of benefit to Frank. Frank felt that he was doing just fine in this area of communication, but didn't want to upset Kevin since Kevin was in a much higher position within the organization and could influence his career.

As Kevin tried to impart the pointers he had learned through years of experience, Frank kept interrupting and questioning his approach and advice – it was different than what he had learned a couple of years earlier in a presentation course. Kevin felt Frank was ignoring time-tested strategies for delivering an impressive presentation. Equally frustrated, Frank wondered why Kevin was so dismissive of the new ideas he had learned that he felt made presentations much more interesting.

In the beginning, not much progress was made. Kevin felt that in the role of “Mentor”, he was more qualified to give advice and Frank should listen. Frank felt that the new techniques that he had learned were better. Frank listened to what Kevin had to say, but didn't incorporate any changes in his presentations.

The Kevin changed how he worked with Frank. As Kevin began listening to Frank's ideas and making him feel that what he had to say had value, Frank became more open to the tried and true advice that Kevin had to offer. They began learning from each other.

Kevin as the older, more seasoned veteran learned that there were new and creative ways in which to make his presentations more innovative and interesting. Frank, a younger, newer staff member learned the importance of understanding the audience and culture of the organization and how he needed to focus his presentations so that they were well received.

They *mentored* and learned from each other – age, seniority and title were not the issue – knowledge sharing was the issue.

Example #2: Karen and George are Mentor and Mentee respectively. George's development need is in the area of project management. This is Karen's area of expertise. Although they work in different divisions within the organization – Karen in manufacturing and George in IT - and have different job titles, both Karen and George are at the same job grade level.

Karen is about to plan and implement a major project. This is a great mentoring opportunity for George to learn and obtain practical experience. They design a Mentoring Learning Plan and include activities that match George's learning style. As the relationship continues, George obtains great knowledge and development working with Karen – the mentoring experience is very beneficial.

Throughout the experience, George feels that there is a better way to handle the manpower planning portion of the process than what is now being used by Karen and her team. George, based on his area of expertise, provides suggestions for an enhancement to the present technology that will make this part of the project planning process easier and more efficient. George not only designs this enhancement, but teaches Karen how to use it and how to incorporate with her expertise of project management to obtain the best results.

They learn from each other.

Questions or feedback - please contact us:

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