



CORNERSTONE CONSULTING

**Mentoring Matters:
Briefings for Business Leaders**

**Topic:
Mentoring and Diversity**

MENTORING AND DIVERSITY STRATEGIES – AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

Mentoring and Diversity Strategies have a long standing and proven track-record of success. They work! Many organizations view these strategies and interventions as business imperatives given today's challenge of managing a diverse workforce. Now imagine the results when you combine the power of both into a winning development strategy for employees.

EVERY EMPLOYEE, regardless of whether a Mentor or a Mentee, comes to the relationship with his/her own unique values, stereotypes, assumptions, biases and prejudices (“our stuff”). ***RULE #1: We all have our ‘stuff’.***

Applying the principles of diversity and inclusion to a mentoring relationship does not mean changing, ignoring or even promoting our ‘stuff’. It does mean however that we need to know and be aware of how and why we have the ‘stuff’ we do and what our ‘view’ of the world is so we can make informed choices and decisions based upon that knowledge. This diversity principle is called ***raising awareness***. ***RULE #2: Knowing about our own ‘stuff’ can improve the Mentoring process.***

For example, imagine the Mentor: a female, ‘Boomer’ who has risen to success because of long-hours, hard work and dedication to the organization. Now imagine her Mentee: a male, ‘Generation X’er, a high-performer who leaves at five and makes it clear this job is a stepping stone to something bigger. The potential for challenges in this relationship are tremendous ***UNLESS*** both individuals can apply and discuss the principles and concepts of diversity and inclusion. ***RULE #3: Solid Diversity Principles, when applied, reduce conflict and increase effectiveness.***

Now imagine a mentoring scenario in your own organization. A scenario where the ‘stuff’ at play may be ***less obvious and subtle*** or the other extreme when it may be even more ***direct and blatant***. Does the culture and environment make it safe for those individuals to communicate about their differences? Does the organization leverage those differences to generate even better results? What tools has the organization provided to employees that assist them in communicating effectively across lines of difference? Has the organization examined the systemic formal and informal process that will ensure that the Mentoring relationship will prosper? ***RULE #4: When applied to Mentoring – Diversity and Inclusion is both the responsibility of the individual AND the organization.***

Instead of putting individuals in the position of *guessing* what the behaviors are that model diversity principles, why not match and pair them with a qualified Mentor that can teach, practice and model these behaviors. For the individual learner – or Mentee – it’s like a walking, talking “picture” of what he/she should do. They don’t have to “guess” what these behaviors look like there is a clear, specific model that can be followed and duplicated. ***RULE #5: Mentor pairings are more effective when viewed through the lens of diversity.***

When presenting to organizations, we find that most everyone agrees with the following statement:

“Mentoring can be one of the most cost effective tools an organization has for the development of its people!”

There is a wealth of talent within every organization and the trick is to find the best way to tap into and utilize that talent to reinforce and support an environment of inclusion and high-performance.

MENTORING AND DIVERSITY – COMMON QUESTIONS

Several women in our company have requested mentoring. Can we just have a program that targets women?

Yes, of course, but we believe you will be missing a significant opportunity which may even cost you more dollars and resources in the future. The need for development is universal regardless of the dimension of diversity being considered. It is true that some individuals (perhaps men in this example) may have more access both formally and informally to development.

However, we believe that creating a process for **All Employees** that models a systemic means for development is preferred. Furthermore, we believe that targeting only one group, (even with the best intentions of ‘helping’ that group) can often lead to the “**Spotlight**” Effect. This can promote and/or create a culture where the area of difference becomes the focal point (often negatively) versus taking the whole individual, with all of their ‘diversities’, into account and then responding accordingly.

Should we only pair Mentors/Mentees based on their areas of ‘sameness’ i.e. like gender, race, age, etc.?

It depends. Using existing organizational data, asking potential participants for their input (often a novel approach) and aligning the process to the organization’s goals, typically leads to the best answer. However, as a rule we believe that Mentoring across lines of difference can build bridges, enhance communication, raise awareness and create strong and significant relationships. **NOTE:** Current organizational culture plays a critical role in this determination. It must be safe for both individuals and they must be equipped with the skills to communicate across differences. We can’t just assume it will occur because we paired them up.

We have two main initiatives this year – Diversity and Mentoring. Which should we roll out first?

Don’t implement these initiatives separately – **they support each other**. Both initiatives are important and both can dramatically affect the organization’s business results.

If an organization has 2,800 employees, it has a workforce of 2,800 **diverse** individuals. Each individual has a different background, skills, views and opinions, experiences, needs, etc., that make him/her unique. Participants in a Mentoring program are not any different – leverage that diversity!

I see the benefits for ‘diverse’ Mentees, but what are the benefits for the Mentors other than having something else on their plate?

First, diversity must be defined broadly (beyond EEO definitions) and therefore applies to **ALL**. Second, what assumptions are at play if we only talk about the Mentees being diverse? Are you addressing organizational barriers that resulted in a Mentoring Process being considered in the first place?

As for the benefit to the Mentor – learning is a two-way street and while the content of what is learned may be different – both parties can walk away with benefits that far outweigh their time commitment.

What Diversity skills do Mentors and Mentees need to have?

In our view there is not a set of special ‘diversity’ skills. There are however, a finite set of skills needed to be successful in the **role** of Mentor or Mentee. These include communication, listening, leadership, coaching and feedback, and relationship building skills (to name a few). When these skills are **taught and learned through the lens of diversity** both the Mentor and the Mentee achieve the greatest results

Questions or feedback - please contact us:

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