



**CORNERSTONE CONSULTING**

**Mentoring Matters:  
Briefings for Business Leaders**

**Topic:  
Mentoring and e-Learning**

**QUESTION: HOW CAN MENTORING ASSIST AN INDIVIDUAL IN HIS/HER E-LEARNING?**

There are many advantages to e-learning as a vehicle to assist individuals in their development. These include:

- offering just-in-time learning
- learning that is on a focused topic
- allowing individuals to attend the learning event on their own time schedule
- allowing individuals to attend the event wherever their computer can connect to the corporate intranet or internet, e.g. on the job, plane, home, etc.
- adding increased job satisfaction from using technology to enhance job skills and job knowledge.

Along with this we find that there are also some challenges. These include:

- If an individual is not computer literate, h/she may feel intimidated by technology.
- If an individual is not computer literate, h/she will have to learn additional software and/or technology.
- The design of the e-learning application may not be stimulating or interactive, leading to possible boredom or non-completion of e-learning course.
- An individual's learning style may require human interaction.
- There is a lack of opportunity to ask questions or clarify concerns/issues immediately during learning experience.

The learner may "skim" through subject matter, not read/absorb material thoroughly or completely, and therefore not obtain comprehensive knowledge.

Having a Mentor can address many of these challenges. These challenges fall into three main categories – technology, learning styles, and lack of *human* contact.

It is true that if an individual is not computer literate, he/she may have to learn some new technology in order to take advantage of a specific e-learning tool. But with a Mentor to assist in this endeavor, the individual will feel less intimidated and the Mentor can assist in learning the new software as well as the subject addressed within the e-learning tool. This speeds up learning and development.

Regarding learning styles, e-learning is not the best learning style for everyone, but due to many of its advantages it may be the only tool available to obtain development in a specific area. If this is not a good learning style for an individual, he/she still has the option of getting *reinforcement* in a learning style that is comfortable and appropriate, through his/her Mentor and a mentoring relationship. The Mentor and the learner can create different ways to reinforce the e-learning in a manner that best fits an individual's needs.

Probably the biggest challenge to e-learning is that many times when problems, questions or issues arise, an individual has no one to immediately contact, ask or make a clarification. The result can be that a module or learning segment may be skipped over or ignored. In addition, the learner may have all intentions of *asking/clarifying later*, but *later* never comes and this jeopardizes the total learning experience. Having a Mentor that can be available to the Mentor saves the organization in facilitator costs as well as giving the learner the advantage of working with someone who he/she has established a relationship with and feels comfortable in asking questions.

**BUSINESS ISSUE: OUR ORGANIZATION IS ONLY FOCUSING ON E-LEARNING INITIATIVES THIS YEAR.**

Just as there are many advantages to e-learning for an individual learner, there are also great advantages for an organization. These include:

- consistent learning of topic materials
- the ability to rapidly change or update the learning material based on market conditions or new product introductions
- more individuals can participate in the learning
- global learning can be done quickly, efficiently, and at less cost
- it minimizes the administration of the learning registration process
- it minimizes the loss of job time to attend a traditional learning event.

But as with the individual learner, there are also challenges that the organization must address. These include:

- network overload (Bandwidth)
- participants taking courses and not completing assigned job tasks
- difficulty in discerning if learning has really taken place
- making computer time available, especially without interruptions
- cost and time investments if there is a lack of internal talent available to create/ convert course(s) to an e-learning format
- an initial and/or ongoing investment in specific hardware and/or software.

Having a Mentoring Process in place cannot address some of the technical issues, e.g., bandwidth, hardware, technology, etc. Nor can it directly address the issue of a lack of internal talent to convert present training/ learning materials to an e-learning format, or create new e-learning content and materials. In addition, if this talent does not exist, the organization may have to purchase this talent and/or the e-learning tools/initiatives from an outside source/vendor.

What it can, and does, address is the human knowledge capital within the organization.

Organizations are making the *material* investment in e-learning and its accompanying technology for one main reason -- to find a more cost-effective, just-in-time learning tool to develop their people. In other words, to develop more people faster, better and for less money.

So after the organization has made this investment, the biggest concern is whether or not the initiative is effective and if the organization has received the return-on-investment that it desired. The question is, did the individual learner obtain the learning that he/she specifically needed for development and the organization needed in order to remain successful in today's market?

In reviewing the "challenges" listed previously for the individual learner, a Mentor and a mentoring initiative can ensure this desired outcome in the same manner promoted by e-learning -- in a cost-effective and just-in-time basis. Mentoring takes the best offered by e-learning and makes it even better.

**Questions or feedback - please contact us:**

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