



CORNERSTONE CONSULTING

**Mentoring Matters:
Briefings for Business Leaders**

**Topic:
Qualifying and Matching
Mentors and Mentees**

QUESTION: HOW DO WE QUALIFY AND MATCH MENTORS AND MENTEES?

When an organization rolls out a mentoring initiative, it is often so anxious to have individuals participate, that there is no specific criteria established as regards ***Mentor and Mentee qualifications***.

When this happens three major problems can occur:

1. Individuals in the role of Mentor may have targeted areas of expertise and competence, but may not have the specific skills necessary to “mentor”.
2. Individuals in the role of Mentee may have varying expectations concerning what they are responsible for and what is expected of them in the role.
3. Mis-matches are much more likely to occur when little or no upfront data is gathered about both potential Mentors and Mentees.

It is commonly understood that it is important not to place individuals in roles for which they are not qualified. It is positioning an individual to fail which may also be disastrous for the organization. Individuals either *apply* for a specific position in the organization or, based on observed performance by a manager or supervisor, are promoted into a specific position. In some cases, it may be necessary for an individual to take a series of assessment tests or meet performance requirements before h/she can move into a specific position.

An additional consideration is whether the individual involved even wants to take the position offered.

In summary, we compare an individual's qualifications to a specific set of criteria and make a determination regarding his/her ability and interest in assuming the new job role.

Why should the role of Mentor or Mentee be treated differently?

It shouldn't!

The role of Mentor is extremely important – this is an individual who is charged with assisting another individual, the Mentee, in his/her development in a given area.

Consider the following:

- Shouldn't there be a role profile/ description for the Mentor?
- Shouldn't there be specific skill requirements in order to ensure that the Mentor will be successful in this role?
- Shouldn't there be a way for an individual to be able to accept or decline the role without penalty, especially since in most cases this role requires execution above and beyond one's own regular job?

Yes, there should!

The same is true for the Mentee.

- Should it be assumed that this is an ideal way for someone to learn?
- Should it be assumed that this is a role that someone would love to have?
- Should it be assumed an individual understands what is expected from him/her in this role?
- Should it be assumed that an individual has the skills or the *desire* to participate in such a role?

...probably not.

THE SOLUTION

Make sure that you have a role profile that specifically outlines the tasks and responsibilities of each role and the skills required to carry out the role.

BUSINESS ISSUE: WE HAVE A MENTORING INITIATIVE IN PLACE NOW, BUT HOW CAN WE MAKE IT MORE SUCCESSFUL?

Three important elements come to mind.

1. Make sure you have **specified criteria outlined for both the roles** of Mentor and Mentee.
2. Make sure you **select and qualify your Mentors and Mentees** based on this criteria.
3. Make sure that you have a way to **accurately assess the expertise** of the Mentors **and the needs** of the Mentee **that will lead to a good matching and pairing combination.**

The success of an organization's mentoring initiative is highly dependent on the quality of the Mentors and Mentees! Don't shortchange this step!

Without criteria to select and qualify Mentors an organization has no way of knowing if bad habits or misinformation is being passed on, communicated or modeled by these Mentors. It is much harder to "un-learn" or "un-teach" bad habits that have already been instilled.

For a Mentee, choosing a Mentor because h/she is someone you *like* and *get along with*, may not always be the best criteria. **The main focus of a mentoring relationship should be *development*.** Whether this is focused on a specific skill/competency, an organizational knowledge area or networking and career pathing – development should be foremost.

All individuals – even adults – when they learn a new skill or any knowledge area learn in *Phases* or *Levels*.

In simple terms, in Level 1 learning, an individual learns the "basics" of a particular skill or knowledge area and this is where he/she also usually needs specific help, guidance and support to reinforce in practice what is learned and to ensure that he/she is learning the new skill or knowledge area correctly the first time.

During the achievement of Level 2 learning, the individual needs less help, guidance and support and begins to put what he/she has learned into more multifaceted situations.

In demonstrating achievement of Level 3 learning, this individual that is considered the subject-matter-expert in this skill or knowledge area.

Mis-matches may occur, when there is not a specific way in which to determine a Mentor's specific level of expertise in a given skill or knowledge area and a Mentee's specific level of need.

In mentoring relationships, there is a tendency to match a Mentee that is presently at Level 1 learning with a Mentor that is an Expert – or at Level 3 learning. The gap between these individuals is too large and many times confusing for both parties. The Mentor may use examples or terminology that the Mentee neither familiar with nor can associate with. The Mentee may feel intimidated in asking what could be interpreted as "stupid questions" to an *expert*.

The goal is to match Mentees presently at a Level 1 with Mentors presently at a Level 2; and Mentees presently at a Level 2 with Mentors presently at a Level 3. Other than much clearer communication and learning, an additional advantage is that the Mentors presently at Level 2 or 3 have much more empathy for the Mentees presently at Level 1 or 2 because there is a much more close association as to how it *feels* to be in that situation.

Questions or feedback - please contact us:

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