



**CORNERSTONE CONSULTING**

**Mentoring Matters:  
Briefings for Business Leaders**

**Topic:  
What is Distance Mentoring?**

**QUESTION: WHAT IS DISTANCE MENTORING?**

Whatever the focus or objectives of your mentoring initiative, there may be situations when the Mentor and Mentee are separated by great distances. As organizations become global, face-to-face communications, interactions and sharing of knowledge and expertise may become more difficult. This will require special treatment in order to maximize the relationship and ensure a successful outcome for both the Mentor and the Mentee. Thus, the need for Distance Mentoring as an option to execute the mentoring relationship.

With the integration of this element into a mentoring initiative, an organization is able to work with both Mentors and Mentees that employ traditional, face-to-face mentoring relationships, but encounter situations where they cannot always meet face-to-face, pure Distance Mentoring relationships (where the Mentor and Mentee never meet face-to-face) and those with a mixture of both.

We emphasize the concept of Distance Mentoring as a specific delivery method of mentoring. Although many times specific "technologies" are involved with this type of mentoring, it is important not to lose the main point that the focus is Distance Mentoring and the technology involved is the **tool** to implement that focus.

Distance Mentoring within one organization may mean that a Mentor and Mentee are in separate parts of the world and the closest they may come to *seeing* each other is through video conferencing. Or it may be that the Mentor and Mentee are in separate states, meet each other on an occasional basis and communicate other ways during absences. Most often, in today's business environment, Distance Mentoring means that the Mentee and Mentor are as close as the same city or within the same location, but different buildings.

Whatever the distances involved, these circumstances require special attention and special consideration.

Specifically, communication between the Mentor and Mentee must be a prime consideration. As an example, if the Mentee is a "visual" type of learner, when the Mentee and Mentor communicate, they must take special care to ensure that each "sees" the same picture.

If technology is involved as a tool for communication, it is important that each individual not only has the same or similar technology and software to use, but each must have a clear understanding of how to use it.

There must also be ways in which the Mentor can "observe" the Mentee's performance. Providing valid feedback without direct observation is difficult. In addition, when individuals are not facing each other, it is often difficult to tell if the message has been understood, if it has been received in the manner it was intended, or if it has even been received at all.

Potential cross-cultural relationships may offer some unique challenges that will need to be monitored. As Mentors and Mentees are paired across greater distances, challenges will occur as differences between cultures are noted. Diversity training and training to help individuals understand basic cultural differences may be needed in order for Distance Mentoring to be effective.

**BUSINESS ISSUE: CAN MENTORING BE EFFECTIVE IF MENTORS AND MENTEES ARE NOT IN THE SAME OFFICE – OR EVEN IN THE SAME CITY OR STATE?**

Yes, through the concept of Distance Mentoring! There are many benefits of Distance Mentoring for the Mentor and Mentee as well as the organization.

One benefit is that it gives both the Mentor and the Mentee an increased chance for reflection and therefore the ability to create a *quality* response. In many cases, the use of e-mail or the internet will be a key mode of communication between a Mentor and a Mentee. Important questions, information, and contacts can be made. This provides the opportunity for an individual to sit, ponder, and reflect on the possible questions to pose and the answers to give. In most standard mentoring relationships, answers are given immediately during a meeting. In the Distance Mentoring situation, additional time and thought can go into any response that is given.

It also allows for meeting flexibility. With the use of e-mail, voicemail or the internet for example, a Mentor could give advice early in the morning from his/her home computer, late in the afternoon from the office, or on a plane as he/she flies to an out of town assignment.

With busy schedules, Distance Mentors (and the receiving Mentees) often find that this flexibility allows them to participate to a greater degree.

Likewise, this flexibility allows individuals who have not previously been selected as mentors to participate. Think, for example, about individuals who travel 90% of their time. They may have a huge amount of expertise that is needed, but cannot be used in the standard mentoring relationship. Viewed from a Distance Mentoring standpoint, this limitation may now be overcome. This also opens up and increases the “*pool*” of Mentor candidates.

It can also open communication and lessen inhibitions. It has been shown that in some cases, Mentees find it difficult (especially at the beginning of a mentoring relationship) to discuss their problems and difficulties with their Mentors. This problem is accentuated when individuals work closely together and see each other on a regular basis. In some situations, a Mentor who lives miles away and who may not be personally known by the Mentee may actually facilitate the communication process.

By being able to send a message electronically, or through a telephone conversation, some problems may be more thoroughly described and more thoroughly analyzed and diagnosed.

It provides a written record of the mentoring experience. When using media such as electronic mail to send messages between Mentors and Mentees, it provides those participants with a written record and history of what has been communicated. This can be very helpful to individuals who desire to look back and recall the important information that was provided, to clarify a misconception, or to expound on a given topic. Within mentoring relationships, key principles and helpful tips for the Mentees often need to be presented on a number of occasions. Having such a record should facilitate this learning process. Likewise, it is nice to have a record that indicates to the Mentor what has transpired within the relationship. If additional Mentees are later encountered, Mentors can review what worked and what could be improved through various stages of the mentoring experience.

Distance Mentoring increases access to a number of different individuals simultaneously. In some cases, a particular Mentor may have several individual Mentees who need to receive similar instructions, feedback, help, etc. These messages could potentially be sent to a number of individuals with no added workload for the Mentor. Likewise, the Team Mentoring approach may be possible over great distances by tying together numerous individuals via conference calls and/or e-mail lists.

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

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