

What Makes a Great Mentor in the Hybrid Workplace?

📅 APRIL 27, 2023 | 📄 ARTICLES



A great mentor is someone you can rely on, who uplifts you during challenging times, helps you develop in your career. Mentorship can be a valuable tool for talent recruitment, development, and retention. Mentees and mentors have much higher retention rates than those not in a mentorship program (72% and 69% vs. 49%), and mentors are promoted up to 6 times more often than non-mentors (Gartner and Capital Analytics). In today's hybrid environment, workplace relationships have limited in-person time. Companies must develop new models for mentorship that reach across the virtual divide.

Counteracting Loneliness, Boosting Engagement

According to Gallup, since the Covid pandemic 85% of employees report feeling disengaged at work, and 65% of young people have increased loneliness. Bringing mentors and mentees together on a regular basis for well-planned in person and/or virtual sessions can establish rapport, deepen human connection, and create positive feelings about work.

Successful mentorship creates a safe space for sharing. By the end of the program, colleagues know about each other's backgrounds, families, goals, successes, and disappointments. The impact is significant. Employees participating in mentorship programs report a more positive work experience: they are twice as likely to be engaged and 98% more likely to recommend their company as a great place to work. (hbr.org 3/9/2023)

Traits of a Great Mentor

Mentors must be great communicators both in person and on video conference. A great mentor will:

- Create a safe space for open, honest communication, while fostering inclusion and a feeling of belonging
- Be transparent and trust-worthy and understanding of human emotion
- Acknowledge the intersection of personal and professional life and encourage conversation about it
- Offer feedback that is constructive and encouraging rather than deflating or debilitating
- Encourage a 2-way street so they are learning from their mentees as well as teaching them
- Have deep knowledge and experience about the business/industry/company, but also about "life"
- Be passionate about leading and teaching
- Invest the time and energy needed

Many Types of Mentorships

There is no one-size-fits-all. Companies establish goals and create formalized mentorship programs to achieve them. Forbes.com (3/27/2023) describes several types of mentor-mentee relationships:

Traditional – More experienced employees are paired with those who need support or want to learn a new skill

Reverse – Less experienced employees are partnered with a manager or leader who wants to learn about new technologies and business processes, which in turn can lead to innovation

Group – An experienced worker mentors a group of less experienced employees, which allows for broader participation and program cost efficiency

Virtual – Mentors and mentees are connected via online communication/conferencing tools, which allows for partnering of employees in different locations

Peer-to-Peer – Workers of similar levels mentor each other, which builds camaraderie and strengthens a collaborative work culture

Sponsorship – Employees from underrepresented or marginalized groups are mentored for long-term career growth, which can improve DEI efforts

Onboarding – More experienced workers train new employees as part of company onboarding

Creating a Successful Program

Successful mentorship ensures mentors and mentees benefit professionally and personally. Companies benefit from improved employee engagement while strengthening their internal talent pipeline. Here are some key considerations for establishing an outstanding mentorship program:

- Clearly define program goals, timing, and roles and responsibilities of mentors and mentees
- Set expectations for communication, feedback, and outcomes
- Establish ways to create both one on one and group relationships for individualized and team growth
- Match goals and interests of mentors and mentees to maximize connection and benefit
- Provide discussion guides with sample questions and activities to jumpstart conversations and relationship-building
- Consider time zones to make meeting easier and define regular check-ins
- Ensure equal opportunities for participation to create an inclusive and diverse workplace
- Within a team model, gather the team regularly so mentor/mentee pairs can share goals/progress
- Be flexible to meet the needs of each specific mentor/mentee pair/group
- Support success – program managers should do regular check-ins and offer support and resources where needed

Mentorship and the Talent Pipeline

Petra Johnsson, Managing Partner of IMSA Search Global Partners Sweden and FXL/Findexecutives asserts, "Mentorship is a powerful strategic tool for companies to develop their internal and external talent pipelines. Internally, it provides opportunities for career growth through professional education, support, and exposure of individuals to senior managers."

In today's tight labor market, attracting skilled workers can be difficult. Petra Johnsson continues, "Mentorship creates strong human connections, which in turn strengthens culture and a sense of belonging. Employees will be more likely to recommend their company to others, and outside talent will be attracted to the positive "culture of learning" and opportunities for long-term professional growth."

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