
9 Best Practices for Creating Powerful Mentoring Programs

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Implementing a corporate mentoring program can be your wildly successful legacy or your administrative nightmare. The difference lies in creating a powerful, employee-inspired, effective program.

As an employee benefit, a powerful mentoring program can serve to develop your current team and attract new talent. A mentoring program is the perfect opportunity to leverage the skills and strengths of your employees in order to train and develop each other. And when designed properly, a mentoring program can enhance leadership skills, soften departmental barriers, increase employee effectiveness, and boost morale.

Alternatively, a poorly planned mentoring program can become an administrative nightmare. The burden of designing, implementing and maintaining a mentoring program often falls on the already-full plate of an HR director or diversity manager. And an ineffective mentoring program runs the risk of frustrating the employees (and you!) and negatively impacting morale.

The following are nine best practices for creating a powerful, employee-inspired, effective mentoring program:

1. Define Your Success

As early as possible, define your program's success factors in measurable ways and then design your program to achieve that success. For example, one of LifeMoxie's clients created a mentoring program to increase membership in its company-sponsored affinity groups. Another LifeMoxie client is using the program to decrease attrition in the workforce and develop its mid-tier managers.

2. Give them a Reason to Participate

Time is precious, especially on the job. If you want your employees to participate in your mentoring program, give them an incentive to participate or obligate them to identify their own reasons for participating. For example, encourage participation in the program by making it a factor in annual performance reviews.

3. Blow up Mentoring Myths

Mentoring often connotes "a guide for your whole life," similar to the character Obi-Wan Kenobi from the movie *Star Wars*. As a result, employees often expect to find that one special lifetime mentor in someone of the highest ranks of the company. In reality, everyone on your team can be a Mentor and everyone, regardless of level, can benefit from a mentoring program. Encourage employees to participate as both a Mentor and a Mentee in your program so they learn from as well as develop each other.



4. Think like a Dating Service

As the catalyst of your mentoring program, consider yourself a dating service for the professional development of your employees. As such you need to provide a way for people to find each other (think *Match.com*) while providing them the structure in which to make good matches (think matchmaker). Teaching people how to participate in their own matching will create more effective mentoring relationships while giving them lifetime mentoring skills, but will also require your employees to be proactive in the finding and creating of their mentoring relationships. Your challenge is to implement a program that combines the best of all successful dating services.

5. Teach them How to Mentor

To create an effective mentoring program, you must teach the participants how to be effective Mentors and Mentees. Incorporate ongoing Mentor/Mentee training and educational opportunities, and provide your participants with tools for creating structure in their relationships. Your goal is to teach them how to create their own mentoring relationships so that your mentoring program becomes an employee-inspired, employee-generated program year after year.

6. Make them Commit

Make it a requirement that everyone that enters into a mentoring relationship must sign a mentoring agreement. In addition, require your participants to commit to the relationship for a certain period of time, preferably three to six months, while providing each party the opportunity to obtain a no-fault split should the relationship not be working.

7. Mentor around Specific Goals

As your participants start creating mentoring relationships, encourage them to work on specific goals that the Mentor and Mentee generate together. Having goals will create focus and contribute to the effectiveness of their relationship.

8. Make it Easy to Play

There is nothing worse than an interested, inspired employee that becomes frustrated with the process. Make it easy to participate in your mentoring program, easy to access the mentoring tools and information, and easy for you to administer.

9. Track Everyone's Progress

Encourage your participants to track their progress in the program and their progress on their goals. Incorporate a mechanism for participants to provide their feedback on their relationship and on the mentoring program.

About LifeMoxie!

LifeMoxie! Corporate Solutions offers innovative solutions to train and develop your up-and-coming talent. The LifeMoxie Corporate Mentoring Program combines a customized, on-line mentor-matching mechanism with hands-on personalized introductions and Mentor/Mentee trainings and education to sharpen mentoring skills. As a result your mentoring initiative creates powerful, effective mentoring relationships among your employees.