Is Your Mentoring In Danger Of Fizzling Out?

by Ann Rolfe
Introduction

With more and more organisations expecting mentoring to achieve strategic outcomes, it’s never been more important to make sure you get it right.

Why, does mentoring fizzle out? Organisers leave, funds dry up, priorities change, people become too busy ... there’s a host of reasons.

I’ve been helping organisations design and implement mentoring programs since 1994. I have worked with mentors and those who are mentored in Australia and overseas. I have reviewed many mentoring programs and seen what works and what doesn’t.

I’m going to share with you 18 things you need to do well to ensure mentoring works. You’ll be able to assess your current mentoring strategy, or your planned mentoring strategy against these best practice benchmarks.

So, if you want the flame of mentoring to burn bright not fizzle out, read on!

Ann Rolfe

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Mentoring Success Stories

Some Programs I have been involved in recently have helped build safer workplaces, increased profitability in small businesses helped retain young recruits and helped equip mature workers to assist in their development, contributed to equity for Aboriginal employees and client services, provided career development and leadership skills and increased operational consistency. I train mentors and those who are mentored and provide consulting services and resources to support mentoring programs and relationships.

The 18 points described in this book are from the diagram on the next page that illustrates the factors that contributed to the award-winning mentoring strategy that I helped my client, the NSW Department of Community and Family Services develop for Aboriginal Managers.
Mentoring Strategy

Plan Mentoring
- Identify strategic objectives
- Analyse needs of target group
- Engage stakeholders
- Determine evaluation criteria and methods of monitoring and gathering feedback
- Produce a blueprint that clearly ties the strategy to important outcomes, details communication, training and evaluation and specifies activities, resources, logistics and schedule.
- Select a program coordinator and delegate responsibilities.

Promote Mentoring
- Two-way communication promoting the strategic and personal value of mentoring to all stakeholders.
- Attract and engage participants.
- Keep managers informed and supportive.

Prepare Participants
- Select and match participants.
- Provide information, guidelines and resources.
- Train and equip participants to succeed in mentoring.

Program Support
- A structured program to maintain engagement, including:
  - Ongoing communication
  - Resources and activities
  - Networking opportunities
  - Assistance and follow-up
  - Monitoring and feedback.
The Four “P”s

What you can see in the diagram is that there are four main areas to your mentoring strategy: you need to **plan** mentoring, **promote** mentoring, **prepare** people for mentoring and you need a **program** of support for mentoring. I call this the 4Ps.

This book allows you to analyse what you are doing, or what you need to do, to prevent your mentoring from fizzling out. There are 18 points and you can rate yourself on 18 questions as you go.

The rating scale is 0, 1, or 2.

- **0** = We don’t do this
- **1** = We do this to some degree
- **2** = We do this and do it really well.

At the end you can add up your scores and this will give you a good idea where your program’s strengths and weaknesses are.

Do the work as you go to get an immediate benefit. Be fairly strict with your rating, no one will know except you but if you are too generous with the scoring it will be a meaningless exercise. If you prefer, there is a summary sheet with the 18 questions and rating scale in the Mentoring Network Online Resource Centre (free to join if you are not already a member). Join here:

**http://mentoring-works.com/mentoringnetworkonline.html**
Identify Objectives

The first of six points under the heading of Plan Mentoring is: identify strategic objectives. This is the foundation of your mentoring strategy and to score a two on this you would have looked carefully at why you want mentoring. What issues, problems or needs does your organisation have that mentoring could help solve? In other words, how will mentoring add value? Then you would have focussed on your target group and how mentoring could serve them. Finally, to score a two you’d have listed realistic objectives – outcomes and ways to measure them.

For example, a common strategic aim for mentoring is staff retention. For mentoring to impact on staff turnover you need to identify who leaves and why, and whether mentoring will make a difference. Then focus on a target group and their specific needs. If you lose new employees, mentoring can be part of your on boarding. If you are not keeping graduates, their ongoing professional development may be the key. If the issue is equity for particular groups, mentoring may support a transition to management program, or career development. If succession planning is needed, you’ll target high potential people and link them with older workers in key positions.

Retention outcomes are pretty easy to measure by counting rates before and after mentoring is introduced.
How well have you ...

1. Identified strategic objectives?

Rate yourself.

0, means you don’t have objectives clearly linked to organisational needs. And, please know that you are not alone, if this is the case! Many, many mentoring initiatives don’t do this. It can become a problem and lead to funds and enthusiasm for mentoring drying up.

Score a 2 only if your mentoring strategy has very clear and measurable objectives, linked to important organisational outcomes.

Score 1 if you’re somewhere in between. Your best guess on this is fine for now, just so you have a number.
How well have you ...

2. Analysed needs able to be addressed by mentoring?

It is important to realise that mentoring is not a magic bullet that can fix everything!

So the next question is, how well have you analysed the needs that can be addressed by mentoring? To score a two here you need to have real reasons to believe that mentoring will make a difference. Have surveyed the target group or talked to them about what they need? To use the retention example, you need to know why people leave and be confident mentoring can change the situation.

Rate:
0, if you have not done a needs analysis,
2 if you are very confident you have accurately identified needs and know that mentoring will make a difference.
1 is, well we’ve had a bit of a look and we think mentoring will help.
How well have you ...

3. Engaged stakeholders in the planning process?

The next point I find many organisations skip, is getting stakeholders engaged in the planning process. The best way to start is with a planning workshop where you bring people together to discuss what's required. You need senior decision-makers, on board so they understand what's really involved and are willing allocate resources. The most common comment I get from senior managers after a planning workshop is: “there’s a lot more to this than I thought” and 100% of my clients who have engaged in a planning workshop agree that it is time and money well spent.

It's not just senior people who should be involved in the planning, mid-managers can easily derail your program so get some mid-level leaders involved at the planning stage and listen to their concerns and suggestions. And, having a couple of your intended mentors and mentorees involved will help you plan a program that works.

Rate:
O means that your program was planned in isolation, or had little real pre-program planning;
2 means you got the key stakeholders involved in planning;
1 is in between.
Evaluation Criteria and Methods

Point four is to determine evaluation criteria and methods. You need to plan evaluation from the outset. If you identified strategic objectives question 1) you are half way there because you already have the overall aims of mentoring and measures all you have to do is decide on methods.

You should use your planning team to brainstorm as many success indicators as you can. Identify which ones you can quantify for before and after comparisons.

Your evaluation might include group reviews, personal interviews and questionnaires.

So how well have you done on determining evaluation criteria and methods, during the planning phase? Give it a 0, 1 or 2.
Document A Blueprint

It is really important to document your mentoring strategy plan. I've seen mentoring fall over when a detailed plan was not written, and the organiser left. I've seen people waste time and struggle to reinvent the wheel and I've seen plans go awry because they were just ideas in someone's head that were forgotten.

Decision-makers want a project plan. Activities need to be scheduled and allocated. Your blueprint records all of the things we’ve covered so far plus the details of the eleven activities we’ve yet to cover. The blueprint is created in the planning stage. It is #5 on our list but you need to come back to it when you’ve looked at everything else in this book, so that you can rate it accurately.
How well have you ...

6. Delegated authority and responsibility to a coordinator?

The last point in the planning process is, you need a person or a team who has the delegated authority as well as responsibility to coordinate and manage mentoring, to implement the plan.

As a consultant, I often help plan and set up the mentoring strategy but you still need an in-house person or team who is there as a “go-to person” for participants. He or she organises events, venues and resources, monitors progress and reports results. I often support that person or team but they must be assigned enough time to do the job properly.

Rate:

0 = you don’t have a coordinator;
1 = you’ve got someone designated but it’s an add-on to their job with no extra time allocation.
2 = There is a person or team with the responsibility, the authority and an adequate amount of time dedicated to this role.
Promote Mentoring

Once you have planned mentoring strategy, you need to promote it. Although most people agree that mentoring is a good idea, not everyone will be instantly committed to giving it priority over conflicting demands.

Depending on your resources, promotion could include management briefings and staff information sessions, posters, brochures, information kits, an intranet page, online or audio-visual presentations that communicate the value of mentoring.

Your promotion of mentoring must not be confined to pre-launch. A steady stream of communication is needed throughout the program (see diagram next page).

Senior and mid-management need high-level messages reinforcing the strategic value. Supervisors of participants must be kept in the loop. Participants need regular contact and two-way information to feel supported. Non-participants need to know that their development is not being ignored.
Promote Mentoring

Program Launch

Training

Mentoring 1 - 1 Meetings

Group Debriefing Session

Evaluation

Report to Management

Communication Aims

Gain Support

Announce Program

General Information

Invite enquiries

Respond to enquiries

Maintain Commitment

Communication Strategies

Involve key stake holders in planning phase

Information sessions (2 way)

Champions

Email, Intra-net site, blog, video testimonials

Posters, brochures, Newsletter

Information Kits

Launch event

Follow-up - Tips, Tools, Masterclasses

Personal contact, feedback results
How well Have you ...

7. Communicated the strategic value?

How well do you currently, or have you planned, your communication of the strategic and personal value of mentoring? 0, 1, 2?
How well have you ...

8. Attracted and engaged mentors and mentorees?

There are two parts to question eight: attracting and engaging participants. In other words, recruiting them and maintaining their enthusiasm.

If you’ve done your communication well, attracting and engaging participants, should not be difficult - unless there are obstacles in the way. I know that many times there are problems recruiting mentors and sometimes it’s hard to get mentorees to join. So you wouldn’t be alone if this is a challenge for you.

There is a whole webinar devoted to the topic of recruiting mentors and the recording and flashbook is available. There are details at the end of this book.

Rate your current mentoring strategy or plan:

0 = you struggle to get the people you’d like,
2 = no problem, maybe you have a waiting list of mentors and mentorees.
1 is somewhere in between.
Gain The Support Of Managers

Gaining the support of the participant’s managers is often overlooked. You may have support from the top and enthusiastic participants ready to go, but look out if you haven’t got the their managers on board! I’ve heard participants tell me too many times, that their managers make it difficult for them to take the time out for mentoring, or they feel guilty about it. You want managers to actively encourage their people to participate and maintain their commitment.

You may do gain the support of managers with:

• Visible support from the CEO and senior managers
• Champions – influential leaders who promote mentoring
• Requiring sign-off from managers on their subordinate’s application
• Management briefings
• Personally meeting them to ensure they understand how developing their staff will help them
• Keeping them in the loop with regular updates
• Success stories in the staff newsletter
• Find them a mentor or get them to mentor others

Rate the commitment of managers:

If you have actively engaged them and they are really on-board that’s a score of 2.
If you have not included them in your plan it’s a 0, and
1 is somewhere in between
Selection and Matching

Now it's time to prepare people for mentoring. You may attract participants, but not everyone is suitable to be a mentor, or indeed to be mentored. So, just as if you were recruiting staff, you want to have selection criteria. What qualities do you want in your mentors? Likewise, think carefully about the eligibility of those you want mentored. Choose candidates most likely to succeed in achieving the goals of mentoring.

Once you’ve selected your mentor pool and the mentorees, you need a way of matching them. In small programs you can do this manually, with the coordinator or coordinating team making matches based on pre-determined criteria. Often the needs and goals the mentoree lists on their application form are matched to the experience and interests of a mentor.

I have run a fun activity called “speed dating” in workshops and then gathered input from mentorees about their preferred match. And, sometimes for in-house mentoring, the profiles of mentors is made available online for mentorees to choose.

There are also a number of software systems that can be used to match and manage mentoring.

Rate the selection and matching of participants in your mentoring:

0 = you have no plan,
2 = you are very satisfied that it’s done very well,
1 = somewhere in between.
Preparing people for mentoring means more than selecting, matching and training. Right from the get-go people need information, guidelines and resources.

Resources might include written guidelines, audio-visuals, books, FAQs, a Mentoring Code, and reference material, to help them stay on track.

You can provide it online and/or in hard copy. I recommend that you make information available to all staff, not just participants and encourage managers in particular to access these resources.

Rate: information, guidelines and resources.

0 = you don’t have any,
2 = you have a comprehensive range,
1 = somewhere in between.
Training and Education

The most obvious aspect of preparing people for mentoring is training and education. Education really begins as you promote the mentoring strategy. It is critical once you match mentors and mentorees and continues as part of your program support (see diagram, next page).

It’s good to provide a workshop each for mentors and mentorees, separately, then bring them together to get them off to a good start. Follow-up group sessions are a feature of best practice programs. If it is not feasible to get people together regularly, webinars can be very effective.

Every reference you’ll read on mentoring best practice is emphatic, training mentors is critical to success.

Both mentors and mentorees need education if mentoring is to be successful. People have very different ideas of what mentoring is and how to go about it. If their roles and expectations are not made explicit and if you don’t give them a framework for the kind of mentoring that will achieve the outcomes you’re aiming for, then you risk failure.
Mentoring Strategy

**Plan**
- Design Blueprint
  - Specify outcomes and success indicators and evaluation
  - Determine activities
  - Logistics and scheduling
- Communication Plan
  - Promote the program
  - Explain strategic value and personal benefits
  - Invite participation
  - Keep managers informed and engaged
- Education and Training
  - Select and match participants
  - Develop mentoring skills with live workshops and online learning.
  - Provide participant materials
- Mentoring
  - One-to-one meetings
- Ongoing Support Program
  - Individual follow-up face-to-face, phone or web-based
  - Audio-visual and/or printed resources
  - Monitoring and feedback
  - Mentoring Network
  - Mentor-the-Mentor
  - Group follow-up sessions:
    - Network-forums
    - Mid-point
    - Final Event
    - Evaluation

**Promote**

**Prepare**

**Program Support**
The biggest reason to train mentors is that although people understand, intellectually, the value of mentoring, they don’t know its real power until they experience an actual mentoring conversation. I often say: “they don’t get it until the get it”. You can tell them and they can read about the process and techniques. However, until they experience being listened to without being judged or told what to do, see for themselves the amazing ability of people to find their own answers when given the space and support to do so, and feel the synergy that can occur when people are attuned to one another, they may not have the wherewithal to be the mentor they could be.

How well are participants trained and equipped to succeed?
Rate 0, 1 or 2
Program Support

A lot of mentoring fizzles out because there is no structured program of support. People are busy, and after the fanfare of a mentoring launch dies away, enthusiasm can wane. So it is critical that in your plan, you have thought out how you will:

• Maintain two-way communication to keep everyone engaged
• Provide resources and activities over the life of the program
• Arrange networking opportunities for participants
• Ensure assistance is available for participants
• Follow up participants, monitor their progress and gather their feedback
Program Support

Communication

A well-designed support program provides a forum, online or face-to-face, for participants to ask questions, interact with their peers and get feedback. It continues their education and development by giving them tips, tools and techniques. I like to set up an automated email system that sends either a Mentoring Tip or a reminder of an upcoming event or resources available with an invitation to ask a question or make a comment on alternate weeks as part of the support program. As well as developing their capabilities, two-way communication keeps them engaged.

Resources

Participant will need guidelines, information and reference materials that are easily accessible over the life of the program. You can provide them with hard-copy books when they begin and additional resources online for downloading. Remind them regularly what is available and how to access it. I set up an online Resource Centre containing articles, checklists, worksheets and the Mentoring Code.
Program Support

Networking

Separate gatherings for mentors and mentorees are welcomed by participants. A mid-point review session that allows people to get together can re-energise mentoring and help participants to resolve issues or challenges. More frequent networking events can combine social support with practical activities. Lunch n’Learn sessions with a guest speaker, or informal gatherings organised by participants themselves can be useful. Where face-to-face networking is impractical I use webinars and/or an online community.

Assistance

You definitely need a “go-to person” that participants can talk to if they have difficulties. This person should be readily accessible by phone or online, for quick answers, reassurance or an in-depth discussion.

Consider mentoring your mentors. Provide them with the support you want them to give to others. Ensuring that they experience expert mentoring for themselves will produce better outcomes. Mentoring of mentors can be done one-to-one or in groups with mentor mastermind sessions or a mentors’ network, face-to-face or online.
Program Support

Follow-up

The coordinator or manager of your mentoring should regularly check in with participants. I recommend a phone call to see that pairs have had their first meeting within a month of initial match-up. More formal reviews, at six and twelve months, should be interspersed with personal contact at regular intervals. The coordinator should have his or her finger on the pulse of mentoring. They should be alert to potential issues and help resolve them, quickly. They can also facilitate a graceful exit from any mentoring partnership that doesn’t work out.

Allowing mentoring to fizzle out is dangerous. A failed mentoring program is worse than no program at all. It results in disenchanted and therefore disengaged staff. It reduces management’s confidence and the likelihood of investment in subsequent HR initiatives. When proper planning, promotion, preparation and program support is in place, mentoring works.
How well have you ...

13. Maintained two-way communication

14. Provided resources and activities

15. Arranged networking opportunities

16. Ensured assistance is available

17. Followed-up, monitored, gathered feedback
Evaluation

With ever-increasing demands on resources, it is critical that mentoring is shown to have a positive impact on the organisation that invests in it and the people involved.

Without evaluation your mentoring program is likely to wither and die. It will be preempted by new demands and other priorities. Budget will dry up and people won’t have time. Show that mentoring makes a difference. Demonstrate the value-add. Prove that not doing it will cost dearly, if you want mentoring to be endorsed.

If you have committed to mentoring, you need to know and be able to show:

1. How effective the mentoring program is;
2. Just what people are getting out of it; and
3. Whether there are ways to improve.
How well have you ...

18. Evaluated and used the findings to improve outcomes?

And remember, you must document all aspects of your plan, so finally, rate how well you have:

5. Documented a blueprint for all aspects of mentoring?

Now that you have rated your mentoring strategy on all eighteen questions, you’ll be able to see where your strengths and weaknesses are. On the next page you can add up your scores.
Add up your scores

Planning Mentoring /12
Promoting Mentoring /6
Preparing People /6
Program Support /12
Strengths and Weaknesses

The further to the right your score is, the stronger it is. Scores towards the left are opportunities to improve.

**Planning Mentoring**

| 0-1 | 2-3 | 4-5 | 6 | 7-8 | 9-10 | 11-12 |

**Promoting Mentoring**

| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

**Preparing People For Mentoring**

| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

**Program Support**

| 0-1 | 2-3 | 4-5 | 6 | 7-8 | 9-10 | 11-12 |
Next Steps ...

So, now that you know the opportunities to improve your mentoring strategy, what will you do?

Here are some suggestions:

Write your self an action plan with priorities, based on the insights you’ve gained;

Join the Mentoring Network Online (it’s free) and connect with colleagues around the world involved in mentoring, by using the forums to ask and answer questions. Join here: http://mentoring-works.com/mentoringnetworkonline.html

You may also wish to purchase:

*How To Design and Run Your Own Mentoring Program* (DIY manual)
*How To Get The Mentoring Message Across* (webinar & flashbook)
*Recruiting Mentoring* (webinar & flashbook)
*Evaluating Mentoring* (webinar & flashbook)

Purchase for immediate download or view our complete range of mentoring resources here: http://mentoring-works.com/mentoring_tools.html

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• **Audio-visuals** available on iPhone, iPods, iPads and computers;
• **Podcasts** - recorded audio accessed via mp3 players or burned to CDs;
• **Ebooks and email courses** that put written materials in front of people quickly and efficiently.

We have extensive experience and a comprehensive range of resources.

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