



Is your mentoring in danger of fizzling out?

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If it is to deliver individual benefits and organisational value, a mentoring strategy must be thoroughly planned and promoted. Participants need to be prepared and supported. This article explains how.

You have made mentoring a reality in your organisation. Yet, as the fanfare of the initial launch fades, enthusiasm may wane and mentoring relationships can fizzle out.

With more and more organisations expecting mentoring to achieve strategic

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outcomes, it's never been more important to make sure you get it right. Why—when there is an established need for mentoring, keen participants and senior management agreement—can mentoring fail to thrive?

Mentoring is popular because it is a cost-effective strategy for attracting, retaining and developing staff. However, it is not enough to announce a program, select and match participants. If the mentoring strategy is not fully developed before a mentoring program is launched, appropriate resources cannot be allocated and the budget may be inadequate. Therefore, though some individual mentoring relationships will do well, overall, mentoring cannot deliver its full strategic potential.

Successful delivery of workplace mentoring depends on a plan that:

- clearly ties the strategy to organisational objectives
- relies on your ability to promote the program so that it is recognised at all levels of the organisation
- adequately prepares participants for mentoring
- has a supportive, structured program.

Figure one: mentoring strategy



Planning your mentoring strategy

If there is a rush to get mentoring up and running, planning and documenting the strategy may be neglected. If you have put together a business case for mentoring, you may have identified strategic organisational outcomes to which mentoring will contribute. This is the foundation of your mentoring strategy, but to take it further, you must specify realistic objectives that mentoring will achieve.

Figure two: specify objectives



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 onboarding. 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 a 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. Once the target group and focus has been identified you can work out program success criteria and how you will measure outcomes. Plan your evaluation process from the outset.

During the planning phase you also need to consider the activities needed to keep mentoring alive, a schedule and logistics. A structured program will be critical because people are busy so mentoring slips as a priority if it is not kept in the front of their minds. Remember, a twelve-month program

	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Management	Briefing		Mention at regular management meeting	Represented at launch	Report				Report			Promote next program	Mention at regular management meeting			Final Report
Supervisors of participants	Briefing Q&A	Email	Mention at regular management meeting	Invite to launch	Phone or personal contact			Phone or personal contact	Report			Promote next program	Mention at regular management meeting			Report Summary
Participants	Information Session Information Kit	Email	Email	Present at launch	Email Mentoring Tip	Email Mentoring Tip	Phone or personal follow-up	Mid-point review workshop	Email Mentoring Tip	Email Mentoring Tip	Email Mentoring Tip	Email Mentoring Tip	Email Mentoring Tip	Email Mentoring Tip	Final Event Evaluation Survey	Report Summary
All Staff	Staff Newsletter				Staff Newsletter				Staff Newsletter			Promote next program	Staff Newsletter	Invitation to next program	Invitation to next program	Staff Newsletter
Personal																
email																
Written																
Newsetter																

Figure four: sample communication schedule

will inevitably be interrupted when people take annual leave, by urgent projects and other demands. So you need to plan ways to keep in touch with participants, keep them motivated and engaged.

Promoting mentoring

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, and an intranet page, online or audio-visual presentations that communicate the value of mentoring.

Once you have convinced senior decision makers that mentoring adds value and you have enthusiastic participants, your challenge is to maintain their commitment over the long term. And, there's a third

group often forgotten and that you can't afford to ignore: middle managers and supervisors, who are not supportive, can derail mentoring. Non-participants who are disgruntled can be a problem too. So your promotion of mentoring must not be confined to pre-launch. A steady stream of communication is needed throughout the program. 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 (see figure four).

Preparing participants for mentoring

Promotion of mentoring will attract participants who have a general idea of the value of mentoring. Your job now is to help

Figure three: sample of mentoring strategy



them understand specifically what is involved so that they have realistic expectations.

Because mentoring is a developmental relationship outside normal lines of authority, both mentors and mentorees need to be trained. They will need skills and strategies for managing the relationship, roles and responsibilities and achieving outcomes.

Mentors need to understand that mentoring is different from managing and coaching. They need to know how to facilitate conversations that create insight and ways to guide, without prescribing, actions. Mentorees must learn to drive the relationship. They must understand the commitment and discipline required to get the most out of mentoring. Both mentors and mentorees need an orientation to the objectives of the program and it is useful for

all participants to meet and become part of a mentoring network.

There is no substitute for the face-to-face learning experience that workshops provide. However, they can be complemented with interactive, online learning, written material and audio-visual presentations. Ideally, some preliminary information is followed by sessions for mentors and mentorees separately, then a workshop that brings partners together and facilitates their first meeting.

Program support

All your planning, promotion and preparation may be wasted if there is no programmed follow-through, and this is why many mentoring relationships fizzle out.

A well-designed support program provides a forum 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. As well as developing their capabilities, the support program keeps them engaged.

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-on-one or in groups with mentor mastermind sessions or a mentors' network, face-to-face or online.

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 L&D initiatives. Proper planning, promotion, preparation and program support is essential. ■

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