

## **Mentoring: Not an Optional Extra**

**By Ann Rolfe**

Charles Darwin, was speaking of animals when he said that it is not the strongest nor the smartest that survive but those best able to adapt. The same is true in the evolution of organisations. Changes in society, technology, the economy and environment, as well as the political landscape, mean that only the most agile organisations thrive. Those that cannot adapt die.

It is not enough to keep pace with change, organisations must evolve, building new and different capabilities. That means that:

- Continual and effective learning and development must be an absolute priority;
- Managers and leaders must become better mentors; and
- A mentoring strategy that generates individual and organisational capacity is needed.

### **Learning and Development**

Ten per cent of the learning and development needed for the workplace happens in formal education and training settings. Twenty per cent comes from exposure - observing role models, reflection and conversations with others, and seventy percent comes from hands-on experience.

Mentoring is vital. It not only provides role models and opportunities for conversations and reflection, it also provides leverage to get more out of both learning from experience and formal education and training.

Without mentoring or coaching, less than twenty per cent of learning from training courses is transferred to the job. Participants need to have conversations and support before and after an off-job learning event otherwise it can be a waste of time and money!

### **Managers As Mentors**

Managers who are focussed and effective at developing their people have teams that out-perform those that don't by around twenty-five per cent. Yet, few managers use mentoring to get the best out of their people. They haven't been shown how to lead a conversation that inspires self-directed learning. They often don't know how to give positive and corrective feedback in constructive ways to shape performance. They may not realize it is their job to grow the talent on which the future depends. They not only need mentoring skills they need to value and engage in a mentoring strategy.

### **A Mentoring Strategy**

Mentoring can be used to attract, retain and develop employees. It can nurture and grow your current and future leaders. It builds skills, transfers knowledge, creates wellbeing and better perspective. Random mentoring happens informally but in an era of such rapid change you can't afford to leave it to chance. Using mentoring strategically means identifying organisational outcomes to be achieved, zeroing in on where mentoring can provide the most leverage, then planning a program that develops mentors and enables them to facilitate conversations and relationships that make a difference.

Mentoring is not an optional extra. It's time to get serious and put in place a strategy that delivers important outcomes for the organisation as well as tangible benefits for participants. That means planning and resourcing it properly so that the mentoring works.