

Mentoring: Put Your Program to the Test

By Ann Rolfe

Is mentoring just something that you have because everyone else does? Or, is it a strategy that produces important outcomes for people and the organization? Put your program to the test.

On a scale of zero, one or two, rate your mentoring strategy on each of the following:

1. Specific Objectives

Objectives are the foundation of your mentoring strategy and to score a two you must have looked carefully at *why* you want mentoring. You've identified organisational issues, problems or needs that mentoring helps solve. You know exactly how mentoring adds value, why the target group have been chosen and how mentoring makes a difference to them. Finally, to score a two you have specific, realistic objectives and ways to measure them. So score a two only if your mentoring strategy has very clear and measurable objectives, linked to important organisational outcomes

A rating of zero, means mentoring doesn'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. However, it can become a problem and lead to funds and enthusiasm for mentoring drying up.

Score a one if you're somewhere in between. Your best guess on this is fine for now, just so you have a number.

Rate 0, 1 or 2

2. Real Needs, Able To Be Addressed By Mentoring, Identified

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

Score two only if you are very confident you have analysed organisational and individual needs and identified ways that mentoring will make a difference. Score zero, if you have not done a needs analysis. Score one if you've had a bit of a look and think mentoring will help.

Rate 0, 1 or 2

3. Engaged stakeholders in the planning process

This is something I find many organisations skip and it has far reaching implications.

Score two only if you had the key stakeholders involved in planning. Score zero if your program was planned in isolation, or had little real pre-program planning. Score one if your planning was somewhere in between.

Rate 0, 1 or 2

4. Evaluation Criteria and Methods

You need to plan evaluation from the outset. If you identified strategic objectives 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.

Score two if you have qualitative and quantitative measures of mentoring outcomes. Score zero if you don't have a plan for evaluation that list success indicators and how you'll measure them. Score one if you collect feedback from participants in a survey at the end

Rate 0, 1 or 2

5. Responsibility and Authority

To implement a mentoring strategy you need a person or a team who has the delegated authority and resources, as well as responsibility to coordinate and manage mentoring, and an adequate budget to implement the plan.

Score two if there is a person or team with the responsibility, the authority and adequate time and budget. Score zero if you don't have a coordinator or budget. Score one if someone is designated but it's an add-on to their job with no extra time allocation.

Rate 0, 1 or 2

6. Communication Plan

Not everyone will be instantly committed to giving mentoring priority over conflicting demands. So you need to get and keep senior and mid-managers, the supervisors of participants, as well as mentors and mentorees, convinced of the value of mentoring.

Score two if the mentoring program is widely known, well regarded and supported. Score zero if, other than the participants, few people know or care about your mentoring program. Score one if it's somewhere in between

Rate 0, 1 or 2

7. Attracting and Engaging Participants

If you've done your communication well, attracting and engaging participants, should not be difficult - unless there are obstacles in the way. However, often 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.

Score two if you have a waiting list of mentors and mentorees. Score zero if you struggle to get the people you'd like. Score one if it's somewhere in between.

Rate 0, 1 or 2

8. Supportive 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!

Score two if you have actively engaged the participant's managers and they are really on-board. Score zero if you have not included them in your plan or they are actively resistant. Score one if it's somewhere in between

Rate 0, 1 or 2

9. Selection and Matching

What qualities do you want in your mentors? Who is eligible to be mentored? How do you match them?

Score two if you are very satisfied that this is done well. Score zero if you have no systematic approach. Score one if it's somewhere in between

Rate 0, 1 or 2

10 Information, Guidelines and Resources

Preparing people for mentoring means more than selecting, matching and training. Right from the get-go people need information, guidelines and resources. These might include written guidelines, audio-visually, books, FAQs, a Mentoring Code, and reference material, to help them stay on track.

Score two if you have a comprehensive range of participant resources. Score zero if you don't have any. Score one if it's somewhere in between.

Rate 0, 1 or 2

11. Training and Education

Every reference you'll read on mentoring best practice is emphatic - training mentors is critical to success. Mentorees also need to know what's expected of them and how to get the most from the relationship.

How well are participants trained for their roles?

Rate 0, 1 or 2

12. 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 to support people and keep them engaged.

Score two, if two-way communication is maintained, resources and activities are provided for the duration of mentoring, participants have opportunities to network, assistance is available, and they are monitored and followed up regularly. Score zero if there is little or no follow-up and support. Score one if it's somewhere in between.

Rate 0, 1 or 2

13. A Documented Plan

There should be a written blueprint that spells out all aspects of the mentoring strategy. I've seen plenty of situations where someone was running a successful mentoring program but when they left it fell over because there was no written plan for how the scheme worked. That could mean reinventing the wheel in order to start again.

How well documented are the details that make mentoring work in your organisation?

Score two if you have a coherent plan that could be handed over, understood and implemented by a new team. Score zero if it's all in someone's head or just their file with a few notes. Score one for something in between.

Rate 0, 1 or 2

Scoring

The idea of this quick quiz is to see where the strengths and weaknesses of your mentoring strategy are.

Items 1-5, plus 13 are all to do with **Planning**. If you scored low on these you need a well thought-out blueprint that clearly ties mentoring to important outcomes and maps out how they will be achieved and evaluated.

Items 6,7 & 8 come under the heading of **Promoting Mentoring**. Low ratings impinge on your ability to communicate so that mentoring is recognised and welcomed by stakeholders.

9, 10 & 11 focus on **Preparation of People**. This determines how well mentors and mentorees are recruited, selected, trained and equipped to succeed in mentoring.

Item 12 is about **Program Support** - a structured program that includes ongoing assistance, follow-up and feedback. A low score here increases the risk mentoring will fizzle out.

So out of a maximum of 26 how did mentoring in your organisation rate?

Perhaps you've identified some areas for improvement?