

Corporate Mentoring Programs – Downsides and Pitfalls of Poorly Executed Programs

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The corporate world enjoys significant benefits by fostering mentoring relationships. Research shows that mentoring relationships reduce job burnout. Role stress and workplace exhaustion are prevented through mentoring relationships. In 2004, a study found mentoring to be the most robust factor in determining career success. It was also a key factor in career satisfaction. Mentoring builds deeper organizational bench strength and it increases the retention of a company's talent and high potentials. It increases productivity and improves customer satisfaction. The ability to recruit and retain employees from diverse backgrounds is improved through formal mentoring programs. An organization's cultural competence is enhanced through mentoring relationships. All of these benefits positively and directly impact bottom-line performance.

The organizational definition of a mentor is "a tool that organizations use to nurture and grow their talent." In the workplace mentoring involves the following:

- Opportunity to learn from others
- Ability to develop new relationships
- Transfer of knowledge and skills
- A new outlook or fresh perspective
- Increases one's stature as a leader in the company

The success of a corporate mentoring program is dependent on specific factors. Many companies have attempted to incorporate formal mentoring programs but report outcomes that failed to meet expectations.

When organizations do not experience the desired outcomes associated with mentoring the following reasons are contributing factors:

- A lack of clear expectations for the mentor and mentee role
- Failure to establish competency and outcome based programs
- Lack of accurate selection criteria and selection process of mentees
- Inadequate feedback and clear communication between mentor and mentee
- Failure in selection process of mentors (lack of traits, knowledge, and skills required to be an effective mentor)
- Not leveraging appropriate assessments and tools to understand the mentee's gaps and developmental opportunities
- Failure of mentor group to establish a consistent process for all mentees

Selection is a key success factor of a corporate mentoring program. Effective mentors possess specific personality traits. If mentors are not carefully selected, certain personality issues (jealousy, power

struggles, over dependence, etc.) can emerge and impede the program's success. Therefore, mentor selection should involve a formal process with specific criteria.

The mentees must also be carefully selected. The personal fit between mentor and mentee should be considered and personalities should be appropriately matched. A bad fit can derail the process before it gets off the ground.

Tools and processes are needed to support formal mentoring programs. 360-degree evaluations and other assessment tools make mentoring programs more effective. However, failure to properly train mentors on how to use the tools can be another problem in the process.

The following suggestions will ensure success and realization of the many benefits that can be achieved through corporate mentoring programs:

1. Proper program design at the outset of the process which includes:
 - Clearly defining competencies to be developed through mentoring program
 - Establishing appropriate selection criteria for both mentors and mentees
 - Appropriate selection of development tools to be used

2. Proper training of mentors at the outset
 - Train the trainer programs
 - Clear expectations and commitment established

3. Using TQ to do all of the above!!