

Why Mentoring?

Put talent front and center.



by Beverly Kaye and Bette Krakau

SAVVY LEADERS SEIZE OPPORTUNITIES TO build bench strength through the experience of managing recovery.

Structuring work assignments to learn on the spot, aligning mission-critical projects with development needs, and providing forums for leaders to share experiences are valuable means. The current scenario also demands a *new set of core leadership competencies*, including managing uncertainty, dealing with ambiguity, and leading with strategic agility. Promising talent can best develop these competencies when they are part of a *collaborative learning experience*.

The business case for mentoring is compelling. In a weakened economy, leaders need to engage and retain strong talent for recovery and growth. If talented employees are engaged during the downturn, *they'll likely stay when the economy recovers.*

Mentoring partnerships play a vital role in building loyalty and commitment.

They ensure that *employees understand the business strategy and meaningfully contribute to recovery.* Mentors help identify *challenging learning assignments* that broaden knowledge and develop skills that contribute to an upturn. Mentors aid in extending connections and networks of employees, providing a crucial link to competitive advantage—people—and increasing *productivity and, ultimately, profitability.*

A *viable strategy for transferring knowledge* is through *peer or reciprocal mentoring.* Working collaboratively, mentoring partners can mutually learn different facets of each other's projects or roles. Older workers can share expertise, history, and lessons learned, thus transferring and retaining critical information.

Four Key Roles

The emerging landscape requires a *dynamic mentoring process*—with *on-the-spot* and *just-in-time* approaches that create *inclusion and diversity* and support

quick transitions to different assignments as *new skills and knowledge* are acquired.

Employees are encouraged to seek mentors up, down and across the organization. *Group, multiple, peer, reciprocal, reverse, cross-cultural and generational, new hire, virtual/remote, and one-on-one* mentoring processes will replace the traditional *high potential only* paradigm. Mentors bring their unique experiences and expertise to the partnership.

Four key roles and associated behaviors are critical to the partnership:

- **Guide:** Like a Sherpa guide on Mt. Everest, mentors *warn their partners of pitfalls ahead and share their hard-earned lessons and experience.* They: model different paths; share strategic perspective; help partners reflect on their attitudes, skills, style and behavior and whether these facilitate or hinder their success; ask thought-provoking questions that challenge partners to think and probe.

- **Ally:** Everyone needs someone on their side who can *see issues from their perspective and offer relevant guidance.* This role is critical when change is rampant. They: create a risk-free climate in which partners can safely confide, vent frustrations, share difficulties, and seek



insight; assess behaviors and help partners seek feedback on reputation; talk straight with partners—in a neutral, non-judgmental, candid manner; and provide *genuine feedback* to spur personal development.

- **Catalyst:** The best mentors are *enablers* who spark *ideas, discussions and insights* that would be absent without them.

They engage partners in learning and help them see their future with a new insight and vision; help seize unanticipated opportunities for learning; and listen and encourage discussion of ideas, perspectives and concepts.

- **Advocate:** Because organizations are *politically complex*, mentors can promote the work and ideas of their partners to help them garner attention and support from others. They: bring partners' ideas to others for implementation.

When mentoring is closely aligned with strategies, fits systemically, and drives results, it facilitates multifaceted learning, holds a vital place in TM, and *merits the commitment of senior leaders.* LE

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ACTION: Align mentoring with key roles and goals.