



CREATING A NEW Mindset

Guidelines for Mentorship in Today's Workplace

By Randy Emelo

Mentoring has proven again and again to be an effective workforce development tool. A 2009 study by Triple Creek looked at the impact of e-mentoring (specifically “open mentoring”) on productivity and effectiveness. Eighty-eight percent of open mentoring users agreed that their productivity increased due to mentoring, and 97 percent of users who spent at least one hour per month on mentoring were satisfied with their experience. Participants rated “expanding my network,” “interpersonal effectiveness,” and “confidence in role” as the top three areas in which they improved the most as a result of mentoring.

Five shifts in mentoring

The practice of mentoring has changed during the last decade, expanding into the world of virtual relationships and multiparticipant interactions. Those who lead mentoring programs need to help reposition the user mindset around what mentoring is, what it can be, and how it can affect participants.

Today's definition of mentoring allows for a richer experience and more utility than mentoring of the past. Understanding five significant shifts in the practice of mentoring can help lay the groundwork for creating a new mentoring mindset.



Mentorship looks very different now than it did 10 years ago. Understanding these changes will help you communicate the value of mentoring in today's workplace.



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Mentoring can occur in one-to-one, group, and situational interactions.

Too often people only think of mentoring as one-to-one encounters where senior leaders groom their successors through relationships that last for years. While this is undoubtedly an effective use of mentoring, it is not the only use.

One-to-one interactions can occur that are not as intensive or as long lasting as a grooming or succession-planning relationship. These shorter engagements can form around one person's learning needs and another person's ability to help meet those needs. The relationship can last several weeks or months and end when learning needs are fulfilled. Although

not a lifelong relationship focused on career advancement, this type of engagement certainly achieves each individual's goals.

In addition to one-to-one interactions, mentoring can also take place in group and situational engagements. Group mentoring describes a number of people coming together to learn about a particular topic—typically one to two leaders or advisors and several mentees or learners. People join these groups because they have an immediate need around a specific topic. Participants practice how to apply their newfound knowledge in a group setting, receiving feedback from the advisors as well as the other learners. They can apply their learning from the

group events immediately to their jobs to address their needs.

Typically driven group mentoring proves powerful in the transition of knowledge to productivity, as seen from research conducted by Triple Creek. This form of mentoring is a great alternative to classroom training and provides the option for people to learn about something without having to feel exposed as they might in a one-to-one relationship.

Situational engagements are structured to allow learners to receive quick answers to their immediate needs from one or more advisors who can help with shorter-term issues. This is the newest form of mentoring evolving over the past few years. Due to the emergence and growth of social networking, people are now much more comfortable with posting an issue online and looking for several responses from others whom they most likely don't know and may never meet in person.

Situational mentoring takes this process and formalizes the learning by ensuring that there is a competency focus, defined objectives, and desired outcomes for every situational engagement. Several people can offer answers at once, and the individual learner can synthesize this knowledge into a solution that fits her needs. It is a unique process in that the learning focuses on just one individual, with several simultaneous advisors offering insight.

The terms “learner” and “advisor” have a broader reach than “mentee” and “mentor.” For years, mentor and protégé were the accepted terms to describe who was involved in a mentoring relationship. Yet, through their very definitions, these terms only offered a limited view of the participants, because protégé is often associated with a person who is being groomed for a specific role by the mentor. To broaden this idea, the terms mentor and mentee found their way into our lexicon. While traditionalists balked at mentee

Sidebar 1 | The Group Mentality

While group mentoring has been a corporate practice for a number of years, utilizing a web-based process to form and manage mentoring groups is relatively new. Triple Creek introduced group mentoring management as a capability in “open mentoring” in 2009 and conducted research later that same year on some of our early adopters to examine the impact of web-based group mentoring on individuals and organizations.

Results from these early adopters have been encouraging:

- 90 percent of open mentoring participants were satisfied with the group mentoring experience.
- 93 percent say that their group's topic was relevant to their role in the organization.
- 96 percent report that they could apply the information gained from the group mentoring experience directly to their role in the organization.
- 95 percent would recommend the group mentoring approach to others.
- 85 percent agree that the group mentoring environment was a safe learning environment.

While groups could meet virtually or face-to-face (or a combination of the two), only one sub-segment conducted all groups face-to-face. Triple Creek compared the data from this group against the norms established as a whole through a research study and found no statistically significant difference between responses from face-to-face groups and virtual groups. Virtual groups were as effective as face-to-face groups.

These research results show that group mentoring can offer unique learning opportunities that address the needs of a large group of people simultaneously, making for an impactful, cost-effective, and beneficial practice that organizations can leverage to encourage the spread of knowledge across the enterprise.

To read the full study, please see the research paper on Triple Creek's website at <http://www.3creek.com/research/Group-Mentoring-Research.pdf>.

as a replacement for protégé, it fit, because it helped to support the expanded idea of what one-to-one mentoring relationships could be.

Today, the language is shifting again to adjust for the growth of group and situational mentoring, as well as to make room for the notion that people can be in multiple engagements at one time and fill various roles. Instead of mentees and mentors, today's participants are learners and advisors. This distinction is important, because it helps lay the proper foundation for understanding the various types of mentoring engagements. By using the term "learner" to describe anyone who is seeking knowledge, we can help participants set appropriate expectations for what they will gain from mentoring.

Conversely, by using "advisor" to describe anyone who shares his knowledge, we broaden the scope of who can be a mentor. We remove the barriers that surround the traditional ideas of mentoring by expanding the concept that everyone has something they can teach. We all have talents, skills, and knowledge from which someone else could benefit.

The broader term advisor allows participants to easily slip into the role of expert. It also helps set expectations around what role they will play in the mentoring engagements. They are not there to advance someone's career or become her sole source of advice for years to come; they are simply available for a moment in time to offer expert knowledge on a specific topic.

Lastly, the use of learner and advisor helps open up people's views of who can be a mentee or mentor. Too often, people see a seasoned employee and assume that person is the mentor in the relationship; yet, that person could be the mentee. In fact, reverse mentoring is gaining ground in organizations as more senior employees seek knowledge and skills from newer and

younger employees. Using the terms learner and advisor helps to eradicate the assumption that a person who has a longer tenure or more organizational power is the mentee.

Advancement can be a benefit of mentoring, but it is not its purpose.

The sole purpose of mentoring was once career advancement and promotion, which explains why mentoring was often seen as merely an activity to groom the next generation of leaders. The goal of mentoring today has shifted to focus on helping anyone gain new insights and abilities.

This is not to say that mentoring can't assist one in getting a promotion. Once the learner has closed his skill gap or incorporated new knowledge into his work, advancement could very well occur, because he has met his particular learning needs. To help people create a new mindset around mentoring, it is important to communicate that advancement is sometimes a benefit of mentoring, but not necessarily the goal.

Mentoring should be used to learn across the hierarchy of an organization. Spanning mentoring engagements across the hierarchy of the organization can result in many benefits, such as exposure to new points of view, experience with different methods for accomplishing work, and interactions across the organization. To make the most of these opportunities, it's best to look for mentoring engagements that are outside one's organizational level.

Peer-level mentoring is the fastest growing type of mentoring today. When people engage in peer mentoring, they may be in different functional areas of the organization, but they have the same level of authority and responsibility. As a result, peers can be a great source of social support and encouragement. They understand and experience the same organizational pressures and can provide breakthrough insight and advice.

Subordinates can also offer unique advice, particularly around technical areas and emerging practices. Those in subordinate roles can be great advisors in reverse mentoring scenarios where learners are looking for fresh perspectives. They can also help those with higher levels of authority to understand how decisions affect people who are lower in the power structure.

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Finally, engaging superiors as advisors in a mentoring relationship can help learners understand the big picture and stretch their ability to see into the future. People who are higher in the organization's hierarchy are typically used to handling more complex issues and looking into the future by three to five years. These factors can help people lower in the organizational hierarchy to prepare for larger responsibilities and gain skills that can set them apart.

Mentoring does not need to be time consuming or face-to-face.

Many people hear the word mentoring and picture those grooming relationships that last for years, when in fact engagements can be quite effective and worthwhile over the course of merely

Sidebar 2 | Generational Views on Mentoring

- **Traditionalists (born between 1922 and 1945)** are hardworking, loyal to their organization, and respectful of those in authority. They want learning that is predictable, practical, and delivered by experts. They also need to share their experience and expertise with others to feel valuable.
- **Baby Boomers (born between 1945 and 1964)** believe in participative management and work hard for personal gain. They want to be involved in learning that has an immediate pay-off to their job. They need more help in developing the complex relational skills involved in leadership.
- **Gen Xers (born between 1965 and 1980)** tend to be skeptical of those in authority and seek a better work-life balance. They are also often fiercely independent and have more of an entrepreneurial spirit. They want learning that is collaborative, peer driven, and relationally balanced. They need help settling on a career path that is both challenging to them and fits the needs of the organization.
- **Millennials (born between 1981 and 2000)** are hopeful, multitasking web-surfers. They want learning that is on-demand but highly social and network oriented. They need help learning the foundational skills and social awareness necessary to be effective in the organizational culture. Due to their exposure and ready access to information and resources during their formal education years, they don't have patience for learning processes that take too long.

a few weeks or months. Helping the workforce understand that mentoring is not going to be a lifelong commitment to one individual goes a long way toward building the right mentoring mindset.

The other major shift for mentoring today is the reality that engagements can take place online. People are employing mentoring in the same way that they work, which is often virtually. Face-to-face is great for those who can manage it, but with dispersed organizations and employee populations, mentoring connections are taking place more often via email and the Internet. Triple Creek's research has shown no significant difference in the quality of learning or overall satisfaction when people engage virtually versus in person.

Strategies for educating the enterprise

Bringing these concepts to the enterprise at-large to change your organization's mentoring mindset can seem daunting. To assist with this initiative, consider these tips:

1. Conduct webinars or e-briefings that not only promote current mentoring programs, but also inform people how to get the most out of their informal mentoring engagements. Help people understand that they are involved in informal mentoring every day, and encourage them to formalize their learning so others can benefit from shared knowledge resources.

2. Use various media (for example, podcasts, webinars, and newsletters) with target audiences to show how the vision for mentoring can extend beyond current programs. By using different messaging with targeted audiences, you can address participants' unique concerns and use terminology that will resonate with them.

3. Present brief "commercials" at other training events to highlight the benefits of discussing learning with advisors. Methods can include

showing a video in which people share how mentoring has benefitted them, or asking a single presenter to discuss a few stories that help bring the practice of mentoring to life.

4. Sponsor road shows or "lunch and learns" where mentoring participants share their experiences. Offering a venue for mentoring participants to meet and mingle can help energize your program and provides another opportunity for people to network and make learning connections.

5. Organize town hall meetings where a brief presentation could be followed by a question-and-answer session about how mentoring has affected participants. Use this time to communicate to the audience what mentoring is, what it can be, and how it can benefit participants. Sharing testimonials can be a powerful way to show the process in action.

These are only a few strategies to consider when educating your organization about mentoring. However, the possibilities for communicating with your potential mentoring participants are endless. Deliver a message that they'll identify with, to ensure greater success as you create a new mentoring mindset.

Randy Emelo is president and CEO of Triple Creek (www.3creek.com). With more than 20 years of experience in management, training, and leadership development, Emelo has worked with hundreds of clients to show them how to blend formal and informal learning into an interactive, relational, and measurable process with enterprise mentoring; remelo@3creek.com.

Sidebar 3 | Three Types of Mentoring

- **One-to-one mentoring** embodies the traditional idea of mentoring. One learner and one advisor meet for targeted mentoring engagements, often in support of processes such as high-potential development, entry-level onboarding, and large self-directed programs that assist with new manager or new leader transitions.
- **Group mentoring** leverages internal experts and facilitators for collaborative learning experiences for multiple learners at one time. The power of group mentoring comes from group leaders sharing expert knowledge with participants and from participants sharing information and experience on a peer level. The focus of group mentoring can vary significantly, ranging from supporting topical learning (such as project management basics), to implementing new processes (for example, a new consultative sales model or how to have difficult management conversations), to ongoing relational peer support groups (a new parents' group focused on achieving work-life balance).
- **Situational mentoring**, the newest mode of mentoring, gives people a way to address more immediate learning needs with one or more collaborators. These engagements tend to be much more focused and shorter in duration than traditional one-to-one engagements. They allow for targeted learning around a high-impact issue within a short amount of time. For example, one might engage in a situational engagement to solve a particular problem or get up to speed on a new concept.

Those in subordinate roles can be great advisors in reverse mentoring scenarios where learners are looking for fresh perspectives. They can also help those with higher levels of authority to understand how decisions affect people who are lower in the power structure.



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