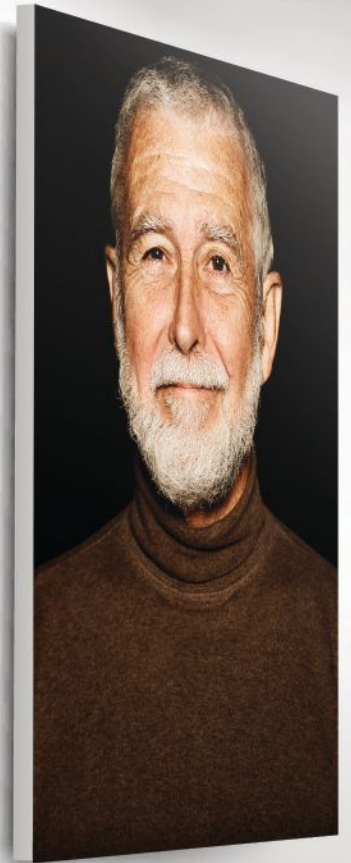




Mentor Option A



Mentor Option B

# Mentoring

## WITHOUT BARRIERS

BY RANDY EMELO

Traditional mentoring was one older expert grooming a younger one for a specific role. Today's version is more of a collaboration and learning strategy that can help people gain skills and information they need in real time to do their jobs better.

**W**hether it's called modern, social, online or e-mentoring, mentoring as practiced in companies today is not the same as what was used a generation ago.

Technological influences, millennials and a global workforce have all left their mark on the practice, helping to create a new mindset about what mentoring is today.

While traditionalists view mentoring as an obligation, and baby boomers view it as a way to get ahead, Gen Xers view it as collaboration, and millennials view it as learning connections (See "Generational Views on Mentoring," page 29).

Despite these differences, at its heart mentoring is learning from others' experience. Once viewed as a one-to-one, face-to-face practice where an older mentor took on a younger employee as a protégé, mentoring today can happen anywhere, at any time, with anyone, about anything. People meet online, in groups and possibly never in person. They ignore age, titles, geography and other barriers, and they let anyone be a mentee or a mentor.

While traditional mentoring would have been used to groom someone for a specific job over the course of several years, modern mentoring is a collaboration and learning strategy that can help people gain skills and information they need in real-time so they can do their jobs better. "Career development is not defined the same way it was 10 years ago. Employees want access to those who have the skills and knowledge they need now," said Betsy Brennan, learning and development lead at agricultural firm Monsanto.

With this understanding in mind, Monsanto created a modern approach to mentoring to address emerging workforce needs. Brennan said mentoring has been an important part of the company's culture for many years. It has a number of traditional programs going



Mentor Option C

### ON THE WEB

How do you connect employees across ages, titles and experiences to ensure they learn from each other? Join the CLO LinkedIn group to share: [tinyurl.com/ln9ykzk](http://tinyurl.com/ln9ykzk).

on at any given time of the year within specific leadership, diversity and career programs. However, as it grew and expanded globally, traditional mentoring alone could not keep pace with a need to accelerate development and connect people.

Like many other companies, Monsanto looked at social media as a way to bring people together, but leaders were concerned by a lack of connection back to learning and development. To circumvent that problem, it chose a specific collaboration tool focused on competency and skill development.

“Through specific engagements the learner creates or chooses to join, they get connected to one person or many people who match to their skills, needs or career interests,” Brennan said. “We, in turn, are able to see where we have competency skills gaps and strengths, as well as how much learning is being transferred across functions and regions.”

This deliberate tie-in with competencies is a growing trend, according to Stacey Harris, vice presi-

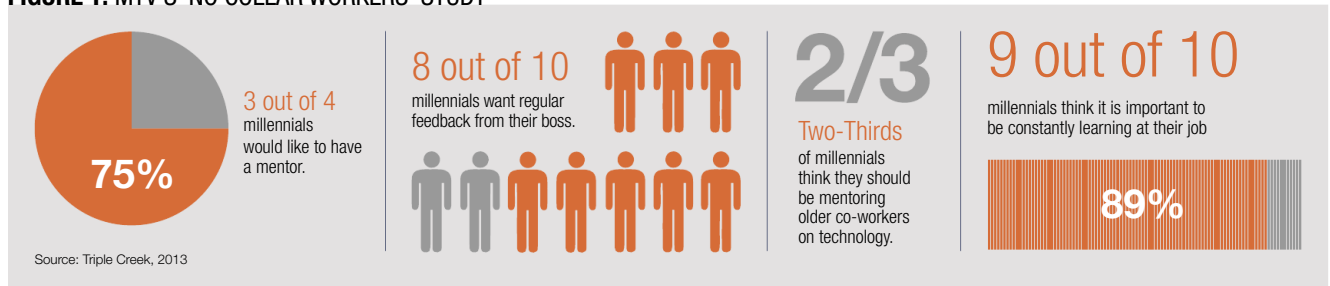
vironments that integrate technology, workflow and processes. She said these environments will enable a workforce to adapt and quickly gain the information needed to accomplish business goals.

### Social, Global, Open and Diverse

Modern mentoring centers around connecting people so they can share critical knowledge and skills. Everyone has something to learn and something to teach — regardless of age, title, experience and the like — and people can be both mentees and mentors simultaneously.

Virtual relationships and multi-participant engagements form the basis for modern mentoring, which incorporates a more inclusive mindset about who should participate, a broader scope for making meaningful learning connections and an open flow of knowledge among participants. No longer about one-to-one relationships between senior leaders and potential successors, today’s mentoring removes bar-

**FIGURE 1: MTV'S 'NO COLLAR WORKERS' STUDY**



dent of research at Brandon Hall Group. In Brandon Hall’s 2012 Effective Employee Development Survey, more than 72 percent of organizations that felt competency assessments were important development tools also had a majority of their key performance indicators moving upward. “The power lies in the algorithms that match the competency data to individuals or communities through learning engagements for coaching and mentoring purposes,” Harris said.

The same Brandon Hall Group study found that one of the most highly valued development tools was the ability to match mentors and coaches to specific development needs (42.2 percent), coming in second only to tools that recommended specific on-the-job experiences based on the same needs (49.8 percent). “We’re seeing a shift toward adaptive learning models that center on scalable approaches to social collaboration, knowledge sharing and relationship building,” Harris said.

To achieve these goals, organizations must think beyond learning strategies that focus on courses and programs, and instead build a vision for learning en-

vironments that engage them in rich learning and teaching opportunities in a broad, networked manner so that knowledge can flow to the point of need.

Much of this came about as technology improved to support the evolving practice, but the millennials’ influence also played a role in this new mindset. A 2012 “No Collar Workers” study by MTV revealed:

- Three-fourths of millennials would like to have a mentor.
- Eight out of 10 want regular feedback from their boss.
- Two-thirds think they should be mentoring older co-workers on technology.
- 89 percent think it is important to constantly learn at their job (Figure 1).

Monsanto embraces this drive for a more social, global, open and diverse mentoring experience. With more than 22,000 employees in 70 countries, Brennan said keeping everyone connected, developed and engaged is a major factor in the company’s success. Its people strategy focuses on improving employee engagement and ensuring retention, a critical combina-

tion given rapid growth in the past five years.

“We wanted to reach and develop our talent quickly, so we needed additional ways to connect our people and advance their job proficiencies,” Brennan said.

The company uses mentoring and social learning software to achieve this.

“We launched our collaboration tool a year ago and have seen a lot of energy in how it is being used. It fits nicely into how we talk about how development best occurs on the job and how critical coaching and mentoring are as part of that process. With this technology, we can now provide instant access to anyone across the company who has knowledge to share or a desire to learn more,” Brennan said.

Monsanto’s program is used by nearly 16 percent of its employees. First launched in the U.S., leaders have been rolling it out globally by regions. “This gave us a chance to improve on our implementation as we learned more about how it was being received,” Brennan said. “We are now targeting groups that have a higher need for this tool and will lead facilitated engagements in order to generate higher interest, such as with our new hires, the young professionals network and new managers.”

When creating a modern mentoring program, consider including the following concepts and characteristics:

**Open and egalitarian:** For uninhibited and meaningful learning to take place, allow mentoring to occur in an open environment where people have equal access to one another. Modern mentoring is a great equalizer because it is built on the idea that everyone has something to learn and something to teach.

**Diverse:** Diversity can help mentoring thrive because different perspectives within mentoring communities and relationships help novel ideas and approaches arise in answer to organizational problems or issues people are facing. Cross-functional, cross-geographical and cross-generational participation in modern mentoring relationships is key to this practice.

**Flexible:** People should be allowed and encouraged to shift in and out of the mentoring program, and of the mentee/mentor roles themselves, as learning needs and knowledge strengths evolve. This adaptability and flexibility allows insights to be shared and applied on the job in a just-in-time manner, with people seeing real work results from their mentoring activities.

**Self-directed and personal:** Adults want to drive their own learning. Give them technology to use or a mechanism where they can reach out to anyone at any time for any learning need. This empowers individuals to be in control of their learning and removes some of the burden from learning professionals.

When Monsanto first started using modern men-

## GENERATIONAL VIEWS ON MENTORING

Each individual will mentor and receive mentoring in different ways, but certain generations may share specific ideas on the subject.

**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 payoff to their job. They need more help 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, multi-tasking 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 needed to be effective in the organizational culture. Because of their exposure and ready access to information and resources as they have been educated, they don’t have patience for learning processes that take too long.

— Randy Emelo

mentoring technology, it only used the system for initial connections between two people as a way to match people in traditional relationships. “We couldn’t see the possibilities beyond one-to-one mentoring at that time. We just kept signing up and saying we just aren’t ready to expand how we approach mentoring,” Brennan said. “Then bam, social media hit, and all of the sudden we were in the enviable position of having something ready to go for broader learning and collaboration when our organization looked to us for a solution. It was really an idea before its time.”

As a development tool, modern mentoring bridges generations, departments, functions, locations and hierarchy. “We have many employees that have the strong desire to feel better connected with people they might never meet here,” Brennan said.

Modern mentoring gives them a way to achieve that. **CEO**

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