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# The Spirit of **Mentoring** at Sodexo

**Mentoring has proven again and again to be a powerful workforce development tool and an effective way to cultivate talent within organizations. With the help of technology, the age-old practice of mentoring is broadening beyond one-to-one, face-to-face relationships between senior leaders and potential successors.**



Today's modernized practice connects numerous people from across levels, functions and locations so that they can share critical knowledge and skills with their colleagues and peers in their company. Virtual relationships and multi-participant groups 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.

Sodexo, the global food services and facilities management company known for their award-winning diversity initiatives, brings this practice to life with their Spirit of Mentoring initiative that offers both formal and informal mentoring options. Powered by software from River, employees throughout Sodexo engage with one another as learners and advisors; transfer knowledge related to their experience, competencies, and needs; and collaborate with colleagues around training, career development, on-the-job productivity, learning groups, and more.

### **Their Spirit of Mentoring initiative contains three programs:**

#### **Impact:**

This acclaimed formal mentoring program connects individuals cross-culturally and across business lines in paired relationships that last 12 months. In addition to the one-to-one experience, participants engage in a virtual community with the entire IMPACT group to share resources that hone their leadership competencies. Program metrics based on



a longitudinal study show that 42 percent of women involved in IMPACT received a promotion, and several Return on Investment studies show a \$2 to \$1 benefits-to-cost ratio for this program.

#### **Peer2Peer Mentoring:**

This informal mentoring program is made available through Sodexo's nine Employee Business Resource Groups (EBRGs). Examples include:

- **iGen** – an intergenerational roundtable group that brings together peers from various generations to share with and learn from one another.
- **HONOR** – a military network group that uses a buddy-system approach through mentoring to help transition former military personnel into civilian and corporate life.
- **PRIDE** – an LGBT and allies group that connects partners for professional development and reverse mentoring.
- **WiNG** – a women's network group that uses topical mentoring in mentoring circles to share, learn, collaborate, and grow with colleagues.

#### **Expertise in Action:**

These collaborative learning groups are formed based on trends associated with the development needs of managers. Leveraging a web-based platform, employees join groups at-will and direct their own learning and development. Topics of mutual interest include communication, strategic leadership, and networking, to name a few. During the first three months of the Expertise in Action program, there was a 62 percent increase in utilization of the Spirit of Mentoring platform. In addition, 85 percent of participants said they can use the learning they gained through the Expertise in Action experience back on the job.



Beyond Expertise in Action, employees are encouraged to initiate their own learning networks based on their individual development needs. This

allows participants to hone their talents and follow their passions, while pursuing excellence in their daily work. Ideal networks have these characteristics:

- 5-15 people
- Learners and advisors come from across functions, locations, generations, etc.
- People shift in and out of the network and in and out of the learner and advisor roles as learning needs and knowledge strengths evolve, creating a diverse, fluid and dynamic network.

To fully leverage modern mentoring and learning networks, employees are provided tools that enable their ability to reach out to colleagues across locations, generations and functions. The diverse networks that are formed help participants generate creative solutions, novel ideas and unique approaches to organizational problems or issues they are facing. In fact, researchers Christoph Lechner, Karolin Frankenberger, and Steven W. Floyd found that among

colleagues who are collaborating for work, the more diverse the networks were in terms of values and viewpoints, the more they increased their performance.

The richness of diverse views and understandings often grows more abundant when people reach outside of their typical like-minded networks. For example, when individuals connect across generations, they gain insights into how people of various age

groups tend to think and behave; by connecting across cultures, they can better understand colleagues and clients, while increasing their creativity and effectiveness; and by connecting cross-functionally best practices emerge that can be replicated to enhance efficiencies and streamline rather than duplicating efforts.

Moving into its 11th year, Sodexo's Spirit of Mentoring continues to grow and evolve in ways that continue to connect people and broaden learning opportunities for employees. Beyond the business-based impacts associated with Spirit of Mentoring, perhaps most important is the anecdotal evidence that demonstrates how mentoring has raised the confidence and engagement level of its participants.

Organizations looking to cultivate talent, encourage creative solutions and thinking among employees, and foster innovative practices would do well to encourage more diversity in individual learning networks and support them with broad mentoring practices. This type of inclusive knowledge sharing thrives at Sodexo and permeates their culture.

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