Mentor/mentee relationships exist even in the highest echelons of business. One of the world's most successful and richest men, Bill Gates, benefits from having a mentor, Warren Buffett. "Warren isn't just a great friend. He is also an amazing mentor. I have been learning from him since the day we met in 1991. We discuss business, economics, politics, world events, and of course, philanthropy," said Gates in his Gates Notes blog. (Gates)

Mentoring Program Q&A: The Fundamentals to Know Before You Get Started

A thriving mentoring program is within your reach. But they don't just happen on their own. Before you get to work, you need to know why you're doing it and the benefits you expect to receive. Only when you understand these essentials can you build a well-executed program through thoughtful planning and a sustained commitment to guiding participants through the mentoring process.

Here, in Q&A format, are a few fundamentals to keep in mind before putting your mentoring program together.

- **What is mentoring, anyway?** It's a personal, helping relationship between a mentor and mentee that includes professional development and growth and varying degrees of support. A mentoring program based on mutual respect creates a supportive environment, fosters trust, and facilitates information-sharing. In this learning journey, effective mentoring encourages and nurtures mentees by enhancing their knowledge, expertise, and attitudes, enabling them to grow and develop.
- **Is there a difference between mentoring and coaching?** Yes! Mentoring facilitates broad development and career progress, whereas coaching addresses skills in some aspects of an individual's work. The time frame for

mentoring is for long-term growth, whereas coaching is typically for short-term performance. And, mentoring emphasizes counseling, supporting, and introducing, while coaching is more concerned with providing practical application and teaching skills.

- **What functions does the mentor provide?** Mentors provide role modeling, advice, and friendship to the mentee. They support the mentee in developing a sense of competence, confidence, and effectiveness. Mentors act as teachers, guides, exemplars, counselors, and supporters—but most importantly, they assist and facilitate the realization of the mentee's goals and dreams.

Three Mentor "Musts"

To make a positive impact, my research (Hartnett) shows that mentors must:

1. Display role model behavior and a willingness to share their expertise

2. Provide support and encouragement with sincerity, openness, and honesty

3. Deploy networking and relationship-building skills

Three Mentee "Musts"

For mentees to thrive in a mentorship program, they must have:

1. The motivation to succeed

2. The willingness to learn

3. A positive attitude

Bert's section of the book provides more insights into the role of mentors and mentees.

- **WIIFM? (So, what's in it for me?)** Let me ask you this: Do you want to better engage and drive up the performance of your employees? Would you like to make your workplace more attractive to potential job seekers? Are you anxious to retain and energize your high performers? If your answer is yes to any of those questions, a mentoring program will be an important part of your ongoing business plan.

  It's also worth noting that as the leader who establishes a mentoring program, you will get a good bit of credit for the outcomes the program provides, like creating more high performers and retaining talent. Also, if you serve as a mentor in the program, you get a lot of personal satisfaction from impacting another person's life in a positive way.

- **What are the most regularly mentioned positive outcomes for mentees?** The benefits to mentees include support, encouragement, help with subject knowledge resources, sharing ideas and advice, feedback/positive reinforcement, increased confidence, and career affirmation/commitment. Additionally, mentees develop positive and confident self-images. Mentorship aids them in learning the organizational ropes, developing a sense of competence and effectiveness, and learning how to behave in management roles with increasing responsibility.

  Working with a mentor also provides employees the opportunity to develop a network with a broad range of people, which means more resources and career opportunities. This can be significant in kick-starting a mentee's career.

"Having a mentor has been a great networking opportunity for me," says Gabriel Glaysher, mortgage loan officer at Emerald Mortgage Corporation and former mentee of the UWF Executive Mentor Program. "When a CEO of a company can meet with me

for an hour and focus entirely on helping me succeed in my career, it demonstrates how much my mentor cares."

Social Capital Pays Off for Mentors and Mentees

Think of networking as social capital, says mentoring expert and coauthor of *Strategic Relationships at Work*, Dr. Wendy Murphy, Babson College:

"Social capital doesn't exist within the individual; it exists in a network," she says. "It's how we build relationships that help us get our jobs done, because none of us work in a vacuum. Mentoring is one way of working through social capital. Participating in a program like the one at the University of West Florida is one step in accumulating that social capital you need.

"Make no mistake; it's work," continues Dr. Murphy. "It takes energy to sustain relationships. It takes energy to meet new people. It takes energy to stay in touch with them. But it is entirely worth it. Not only will your career be better, but you'll make others' careers better as well." (Murphy)

- **What factors help a mentoring program succeed?** Successful mentoring programs thrive with organizational support, clarity of purpose, the participants' commitment to the program, careful selection and matching procedures, and continuous monitoring and evaluation.
- **On the other hand, what are the main reasons mentoring programs fail?** There are many factors that can trip up mentoring programs and cause them to fail. For example:
  - Not enough buy-in at the top
  - The program thrown together by overextended and overwhelmed people who've never built a mentoring program
  - Relying too much on mentoring software and not enough on personal relationships

- Not promoting a program well internally
- Not training participants enough
- Underestimating the time and effort needed to make meaningful matches
- Too much structure
- Not enough structure
- Mandating that people participate

- **Can my company afford a mentoring program?** Too many organizations see the benefits of mentoring but tell themselves they can't afford it. But when you consider the benefits enumerated in this chapter, the real question is, *Can they afford not to?* You can start a mentoring program within your budget (even if that budget is zero). There are a lot of different options, and one of them is most likely right for your company.

  The recommended option is to hire a program manager and invest in the program expenses, but you don't have to go that route. You could hire an outside consultant for a set period of time to focus on implementing a new program. You could invest in online mentoring software; however, you still need someone on staff to manage the program. The zero-cost option is you can do it yourself or assign it to one of your superstar leaders. With this option, you must consider the person's mentoring expertise and the lost productivity time if someone is pulled away from other responsibilities. Regardless of which option you choose, the payoff is almost always well worth it.

Once you've taken the time to digest the above information, it's time to get to the nuts and bolts of starting a program that will strengthen your organization for years to come. The upcoming chapters provide you comprehensive assistance as you plan, establish, and grow a mentoring program. They are based on the seven vital steps to creating a robust mentoring program:

Step 1: Define Your "Why"

Step 2: Find Your Program Champion

Step 3: Set Goals and Metrics

Step 4: Build Your Program

Step 5: Recruit and Connect

Step 6: Nurture Your People and Your Program

Step 7: Measure to Improve

> ✓ *Success Secret: Use This Book as a Step-by-Step Practical Guide to Building Your Program*
>
> Within each section, examples from the University of West Florida's Executive Mentor Program are included for consideration for your mentoring program.

I have found these seven steps to be a great, workable framework for my clients and for me. The steps are easy to understand, step-by-step, not overwhelming, achievable, and practical. I invite you to read on…and it's my sincere hope that you put what you learn into practice inside your organization.

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