

MISSION-CRITICAL MENTORING

Key considerations for positive outcomes

This article originally appeared in September 2016 issue of Public Management By Patrick Ibarra



One of the e-mails I received after the June PM Career Track article "How Fit Are You to Advance?" was published came from Heather, a mid-career professional who works in local government in Colorado.

Her questions were how could she participate in a more formal mentoring partnership with a colleague in her organization and be a mentor to a younger professional who is seeking guidance and insight.

Mentoring programs have become extremely popular primarily because so many organizations are facing the retirement of a significant number of their workforce. The need to ensure that replacements have been prepared to fill key vacancies on short notice is mission-critical.

What's the Purpose?

The mentoring relationship has as its core purpose the professional development of the protégé through the counsel and guidance of the mentor; he or she is usually a senior, experienced employee who serves as a role model and provides support, direction, and feedback to a younger employee. This increases the visibility of the protégé to decision-makers in the organization who may influence career opportunities.

A successful mentoring relationship provides positive outcomes for both the protégé and mentor through the expansion of knowledge, skill, energy, and creativity.

The mentor provides career-advancing skills to guide the protégé in positioning and presenting themselves in a manner that results in professional development.

By providing feedback in such areas as job performance, relationships, technical information and role expectations, the mentor passes on lessons learned throughout his or her career. As a result, mentors come to feel they have had an opportunity to make a difference.

Your entire organization benefits from a mentoring program in these ways:

- Develops high-potential employees.
- Improves employee productivity and performance
- Improves succession planning as mentoring helps identify high-potential employees.
- Increases communication across departments.
- Shares knowledge across the organization.

In my own previous experience working in local government management and from many individuals I know who are currently serving, most of us have participated in an informal mentoring arrangement. One of the beautiful aspects of the profession is how willing people are to help others.

Types of Programs

There are four types of mentoring programs for you and your organization to consider:

- 1. One-to-One mentoring.** This is the traditional mentoring process where one person shares his or her expertise, knowledge, and experience to help guide another person.
- 2. Reverse mentoring.** A younger employee is matched to a senior executive to offer such skills and knowledge as effective use of social media to educate residents, or internal training through interactive Web-based learning.
- 3. Group mentoring and mentoring circles.** This is an effective method to help multiple protégées when organizational mentors are lacking. Within the circle, one mentor offers advice and guidance to a group of protégées.

4. Peer mentoring groups. Peer mentoring groups offer knowledge and guidance to each other and can occur with participants from one department or from many departments.

Mentoring Guidelines

I have consulted with a number of local government organizations helping establishing mentoring programs. Here are guidelines for organizations setting up programs, mentors working with protégées, and protégées seeking mentoring relationships.

Organizations:

- Obtain top-management support of the program.
- Make the mentoring program part of succession planning.
- Minimize the dropout rate by making the program voluntary and by establishing clear expectations.
- Give mentors and protégées an orientation and training program clarifying their respective roles, helping them establish boundaries, and encouraging them to jointly set goals.
- Provide timely training and learning workshops in which both the mentor and protégé would attend and then use the content and topic of the workshop for a discussion.

Often after the launch of a mentoring program, interest can wane, so organizing formal gatherings for the mentor and protégé are extremely beneficial. Topics may include managing employee performance, leadership 101, working with elected officials, and others.

Mentors:

- Expect to invest considerable time and effort.
- Be prepared to initiate the relationship; protégées often are apprehensive about approaching senior leaders.
- Have realistic expectations of the relationship.

Protégées:

- Look for a mentor among the ranks of middle and senior managers. Observe work and communication styles to select the kind of mentor who would be right for you.
- Know what you want from the relationship. Think about your competencies, the skills you would like to develop, and your long-range career plans.
- Know what is expected of you in the relationship.
- Have realistic expectations.

My mission in this article is to help calm the instability of disruptive change and translate the headwinds of change into a tailwind, enabling individuals to accelerate their career progress and organizational leaders to build an even stronger workforce, all resulting in improved performance.



Patrick Ibarra is an “entrepreneur of ideas” and architect of innovation who takes the headwinds governments are facing about the current climate of unprecedented changes and translates them into a tailwind with practical, tactical and impactful solutions that can be used immediately. A former city manager, Patrick owns and operates The Mejorando Group consulting practice (www.gettingbetterallthetime.com). Mejorando is Spanish for “getting better all the time” and Patrick’s firm partners with governments helping them increase employee performance and organizational effectiveness by providing consultation, facilitation, and training. Ibarra is an author, speaker, blogger and educator who brings fresh thinking, innovation, and new ideas to help public sector organizations succeed in the 21st century.

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