

# Fast-Track Mentoring

*Engage your top talent.*



by Beverly Kaye

**T**HE CASE FOR mentoring is now more compelling than ever. Mentoring supports the retention, development, and engagement of high performers. It is a direct link to productivity and profitability. It can upgrade employee skills and knowledge; promote diversity of thought and style; develop leadership talent; preserve institutional memory; create inclusion; develop successors; foster collaboration; ease the transition to new assignments; and strengthen competitive advantage. Dynamic mentoring can elevate corporate dialogue from the mundane to the transformational—if managers can learn the skills, find the time, and build the relationships.

Managers and leaders need to make mentoring a positive experience, part of their on-going responsibilities. Rather than take people offsite for extended training, provide an easy, self-study process or brief program that highlights the keys and gets mentors started.

## What Mentors Do

Allowing mentors to begin with their strengths gives them confidence and comfort with the process. Here are four ways mentors can work with partners:

- **Guide.** Shows partners different paths and warns of potential pitfalls. Shares strategic views. Helps partners reflect on their attitudes, skills and patterns of behaviors and whether these help or hinder their success. Asks questions that challenge partners to think.
- **Ally.** Provides a risk-free environment in which partners can vent frustrations, share difficulties, and seek perspectives. Appraises behaviors and helps partners see how others perceive them. Talks straight: neither critic nor judge, but a candid and honest partner. Provides feedback to spur growth.
- **Catalyst.** Motivates partners' enthu-

siasm and initiative. Helps partners see their future with a new insight. Sees possibilities that partners might make happen. Encourages partners to discuss ideas, visions, and concepts.

- **Advocate.** Champions the ideas and interests of partners to gain visibility and exposure for them. Opens opportunities for learning experiences. Captures the attention of those who can connect partners. Uses a powerful voice to bring partners' ideas to the people who have the authority to implement them.

## How Mentors Do What They Do

New or seasoned mentors need to master four simple steps.

**Step 1. Extend your reach.** Mentors share their knowledge, experiences and insight. Reaching beyond the daily responsibilities of their job and facilitating the growth and development of others brings managers immediate rewards and the organization long-lasting benefits.

**Step 2. Listen, don't preach.** The mentor's job doesn't start with giving advice—it begins with listening. Mentors need to hear what their partners want from the process, learn about their needs and expectations, explore the focus, and understand their goals.

**Step 3. Do more than teach.** The traditional mentor was a teacher, but today it takes four different conversation styles to stimulate learning and transmit knowledge quickly: 1) share stories, 2) encourage dialogue, 3) debrief your partner's experiences, and 4) help build network connections.

**Step 4. Define actions for each.** Mentoring partners have equal responsibilities in making the process work. They need specific action plans so that both mentor and partner can measure the progress, learning, and satisfaction. Find the right balance between doing too much and doing too little.

This process demystifies mentoring and develops the mentor as he or she works to develop others. Mentors and their partners need to know what to do, what to talk about, and how to take action. Mentoring in this fast-track format is a powerful way to engage and retain talented employees and managers. **EE**

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**ACTION: Mentor to build collaboration.**