Mentoring

By Heath Prince, Jobs for the Future

PART OF A SERIES OF REPORTS ON ENGAGING EMPLOYERS IN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

CREATING STRATEGIES
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WINs
Workforce Innovation Networks

Workforce Innovation Networks—WINs

WINs, a collaboration of Jobs for the Future, the Center for Workforce Preparation of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the Center for Workforce Success of the National Association of Manufacturers, addresses the workforce development needs of businesses and communities. Launched in 1997, WINs works with local employer organizations across the country that are on the cutting-edge of workforce development, testing the proposition that they can play a unique intermediary role in achieving a dual goal:

★ Improving the economic prospects of disadvantaged job-seekers and workers; and

★ Meeting the needs of their member firms for employees at the entry-level and above.

The Role of Employers in WINs

A basic principle of WINs is that efforts to help individuals succeed must provide education and training that meets employer needs for knowledge and high skills. Similarly, individuals—particularly those with low education and skill levels—will not succeed in gaining family-sustaining employment unless they gain the skills necessary to perform in today's complex work environment.

Yet the top challenge faced by the people and organizations whose mission is to serve either constituency—job seekers or employers—is the challenge of engaging effectively with employers. For example, in July 2002, WINs asked a group of workforce development professionals, "What is the primary workforce development challenge facing your community?" *Half* the respondents answered, "Employers are not connected to the system." WINs then asked, "What is the biggest challenge you face in implementing the Workforce Investment Act?" Over 40 percent of respondents said, "Engaging employers."

Jobs for the Future has prepared a series of resources on meeting the challenge of engaging employers in workforce development. These include:

★ *Employer-Led Organizations and Skill Supply Chains*

★ *From Stakeholders to Partners: Organizing Community Partnerships for Workforce Development*

★ *High-Leverage Governance Strategies for Workforce Development Systems*

★ *High-Leverage Human Resource Strategies for Employers*

★ *Mentoring*

★ *Working Together on Worker Training*

Mentoring

By Heath Prince

entoring of entry-level employees improves productivity, retention, and workplace morale. It can also increase the extent of employees' promotablity. This brief describes the design of mentoring programs that achieve these objectives. It provides a road map for employers concerned about program effectiveness. It also identifies value-added services that Chambers of Commerce, National Association of Manufacturers' affiliates, and other employer organizations can provide—especially to smaller employers—including training and technical assistance, program administration, and brokering services.

Why Mentoring?

Unemployment levels are at historic peacetime lows. As a result, employers face growing challenges in filling vacancies quickly and reducing turnover. In the current labor market, employers increasingly are hiring "new workers" who have weak work histories and face other barriers to employment.

New workers often lack:

- A clear understanding of their employer's expectations;
- A fit with the culture of their particular workplace;
- A sense of connection with and support from supervisors and co-workers; and
- A knowledge of how to handle work-life issues.

By addressing these concerns, mentoring increases retention, productivity, and morale among new workers.

What is Mentoring?

Mentoring of new, entry-level employees is a relationship-based method of assisting "mentees" to gain a sense of acceptance in and fit with their workplaces and jobs. Mentors provide crucial information and advice, facilitate skill development, and assist mentees to pursue career development.

Mentoring reduces turnover, improves productivity, and predicts employee promotability. In a study of 500 of the Welfare-to-Work Partnership's member firms, mentoring was shown to have a major impact. Among these firms:

- 68% report improved work performance;
- 65% show higher job retention;
- 53% see reduced absenteeism; and
- 45% report monetary savings for the company.

The availability of a formal mentoring program was found to be the greatest predictor of whether the employee will be promoted.

Objectives of a Mentoring Program

The objectives of a mentoring program are to facilitate a smooth transition into the workforce for new workers and to assist them in viewing their jobs as first steps in career development. Entry-level workers may lack work experience or, while having work experience, they may lack prolonged employment with a single employer. In both cases, mentoring provides valuable support.

A 1999 National Governor's Association (NGA) report identifies ways in which mentoring achieves objectives.

Mentoring relationships provide newly hired employees with valuable information about job performance expectations, company values, and ways to attain job security. The mentoring relationship provides a supportive mechanism for the development of interpersonal and communica-

tion skills for both parties. From their mentors, new workers typically acquire first-hand information on how to ask questions, where to go for help, and industry and occupational competence (Aring and Duncan 1999).

The NGA report describes four major skill areas that mentoring programs address. These skill areas are:

- *Pragmatic skills*—information that is task-specific, and the knowledge and skills to master the demands of the job;

- *Intrapersonal skills*—skills that facilitate job performance, self-discipline, initiative, analytical and problem solving skills, maturity, ability to perform under pressure, and ability to respond positively to critical feedback;

- *Interpersonal skills*—social and communication skills that facilitate adjustment to workplace demands and enable effective functioning as part of a team, communications, and presentation; and

- *Cultural skills*—information that enables job performance in conformity with formal management and informal employee expectations (Aring and Duncan 1999).

Guidelines for the U.S. Department of Labor's mentoring program describe two primary functions of the mentoring relationship:

- *Addressing new hires' need for a sense of acceptance in a new workplace.* Mentors remind mentees that they are valued employees, empower them by sharing advice

and information about the organization, and serve as a role model; and

- *Helping advance new hires further in their careers.* Mentors promote the mentees' achievements, provide challenging assignments, and warn mentees of potential pitfalls (U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration 1999).

Effective mentoring programs achieve employer benefits by addressing new workers' capacity to do their jobs well. Mentors play a key role in addressing immediate, job-specific skills and less specific "how to move in and move up" skills. This ensures that new hires understand both what is expected and what they can expect from their employer, and it encourages mentees to set long-term goals that will help them to plan next steps along a career path. Success in achieving these objectives is essential to reducing turnover and ensuring that the new hire sees a potential future with the company.

Elements of Exemplary Approaches

Successful mentoring programs meet a clearly defined need, have a commitment of sufficient resources and senior management support, are carefully designed, and are operated to carry out that design. Employers can address these elements on their own, or employer organizations can assist them.

Formal mentoring programs can leverage the natural and informal mentoring ("showing the ropes") that is typical in workplaces by increasing the quality of mentoring and maximizing its scale.

Deciding If a Mentoring Program Is Appropriate

There are several key steps to determining whether to establish a formal mentoring program.

Determine the need(s) for a mentoring program. A needs assessment can test for high turnover rates among entry-level workers, absenteeism problems, low levels of productivity, poor advancement of entry-level workers to higher positions within the company, low morale among entry-level workers, and employer-identified indicators (ASTD 1998).

Assess the level of organizational support. Gauge the level of organizational support in general, and from senior management in particular (an essential). Determine whether the business climate is such that the organization can support a mentoring program over the long term (ASTD 1998).

Employers are Expanding Mentoring Programs

United Airlines and FedEx have expanded mentoring programs initially developed for newly employed welfare recipients in order to make them available to all entry-level employees.

Employer Organizations Can Provide Training and Technical Assistance

Services of value, especially to smaller employers, are:

■ Assessment of needs, organizational support, and current practices to decide if a mentoring program is appropriate.

■ Assistance with program development by clarifying goals and developing a timeline to achieve them; instituting an advisory committee; determining program coordination roles; establishing processes for mentor screening, recruitment, and training; developing standards for the duration of mentorships; and creating incentives for success.

■ Training to develop the employer's capacity to operate a mentoring program, trouble-shooting initial program operations, and collaborating on implementation of continuous improvement processes.

Determine how much informal mentoring already takes place in the workplace. Essential elements to any successful program are frequently at work in informal mentoring arrangements, and successful programs often build upon informal arrangements and the lessons they offer.

▌ Designing the Program

Specify goals and a timeline for the mentoring program. Clearly identify the results expected from the program and the groups of employees who will benefit. Program developers should also formulate a timeline that allows for program design, mentor and staff recruitment, participant orientation, mentor training, mentor and mentee matching, program oversight, and program evaluation (Papadakis and Petter 1997).

Develop a program advisory team. Advisory teams should be composed of as representative a selection of employees as possible, with respect to age, gender, seniority, and title. The advisory team, when possible, should also include representatives from a relevant organized labor bargaining unit (ASTD 1998).

Designate a program coordinator. Larger firms may consider establishing the program within the human resources department. In smaller firms, it can be the responsibility of the person with greatest involvement in human resources issues. Program coordination may also be an employer organization's responsibility, supported by a company liaison.

Establish a process for screening potential mentors. Criteria for selection include: advancement beyond entry-level employment, demonstration of relevant expertise, and personal qualities. These qualities are the capacity to engender respect among their mentees, to be seen as role models, to be easy for mentees to identify with in significant ways, and to be easy for mentees to connect with in a mentoring relationship (Papadakis and Petter 1997).

Establish systems for recruitment that use existing networks within the company. For example, consult division directors or high-level managers to help find potential mentors in their units. Send the prospective mentors information describing the program, accompanied by, if applicable, a cover letter from the directors or managers who recommended them (Papadakis and Petter 1997).

Formal mentoring programs can leverage the natural and informal mentoring that is typical in workplaces by increasing the quality of mentoring and maximizing its scale.

Establish orientation and training programs for mentors. Training should assure that myths and stigmatizing attitudes are not inadvertently incorporated into the mentor/mentee relationship by providing information on the challenges mentees typically face, their strengths, and successes. Training should also develop potential mentors' problem-solving skills, listening skills, and their ability to provide proper guidance to individuals whose familiarity with the world of work may be less than normally expected. In addition, training should provide clarity regarding the boundaries of the mentoring relationship. Mentors should expect to be asked to assist their mentees in coping with problems associated with their work history, and they should know when to respond and when not to do so. Even cursory knowledge of the social welfare system on the part of mentors may mean the difference between mentees advancing in their current job and unemployment.

Develop policies and work schedules to encourage frequent contact in the initial phase of the relationship. The first four to six weeks after a new employee's hiring is essential to his or her job-retention prospects. Meetings between a mentor and mentee should be frequent during this period.

Employer Organizations Can Administer Mentoring Programs

Program administration services can offer economies of scale, especially for smaller employers. Depending on the other human resources services the employer organization offers, economies of scope may also be available. Employer organizations can:

- Organize groups of employers to participate in a mentoring program serving multiple employers;
- Coordinate activities with companies' mentorship advisory committees and liaisons;
- Recruit, train, and supervise mentors;
- Recruit mentees and make mentor-mentee matches;
- Monitor the effect of mentoring on productivity, retention, workplace culture, and other criteria determined by employers and/or mentorship advisory committees; and
- Manage continuous improvement processes.

All companies with effective mentoring programs share a common understanding of the importance of properly introducing new hires, especially in entry-level positions, to a supportive work environment.

Establish standards that encourage mentors to make long-term commitments to mentees. Ensure that mentors are aware of the significant time commitment required for developing a successful mentoring relationship with a new employee. The relationship between mentor and mentee should develop over the course of months, with the frequency of contacts diminishing over time (Brown, et al. 1998).

Provide incentives for mentors and mentees. Cash bonuses, time off, and favorable citation in a personnel file are examples. Incentives may be structured to reflect the duration of the mentee's job retention or other indicators of success in achieving the program's goals. A men-

Profile of a Successful Program
ILLINOIS SCHOOL BUS

Motivated by a need to do "whatever it took" to recruit and retain bus drivers, the Illinois School Bus company developed a welfare-to-work program two years ago that relies heavily on the mentoring relationships between its training staff and its new hires. This program has recruited over 25 former welfare recipients to train as bus drivers over the past two years. At present, ten of its 130 drivers are former welfare recipients. The heart of the program is its mentoring component. For the first several weeks after they are hired, new hires are contacted on a daily basis by staff from the company's training department. The program also provides transportation and child care assistance to participants. Illinois School Bus General Manager John Benish noted, "The mentoring relationships have definitely been vital (to the success of the program). We've realized that there's more to keeping new folks than just their wage."

Profile of a Successful Program:
CAL INSURANCE

Cal Insurance is an example of a small business that has partnered with a community-based organization to help move former welfare recipients into the labor market. Cal Insurance developed the "Placement Partnership Initiative," a partnership between area small businesses and Juma Ventures, a local non-profit. Juma Ventures coordinates a 3-6 month hard and soft skills training program in a real job setting. It also provides post-employment retention services, serving as a broker to area small businesses who have committed to hire welfare recipients. Small businesses in this collaborative effort work to resolve their child care and transportation issues, and mentoring is also provided for their new hires.

toring program benefits a company's bottom line; some of this saving could be passed on to the mentors in the form of compensation. This may produce a self-sustaining program that continuously decreases a company's recruitment costs.

■ Operating a Mentoring Program

Pair mentors and mentees carefully. Successful mentoring depends on both the ability of the mentor and mentee to communicate openly with one another, as well as the ability of the mentor to assist the mentee with his or her career development. While self-initiated pairings may satisfy the former requirement, mentor/mentee pairings should ensure that the mentor is also the person best suited to introduce his or her mentee to workplace norms and internal career ladders. For this reason, mentors should be selected from among those individuals who demonstrate an understanding of implicit, as well as explicit, company cultures and values. In addition, effort should be made to match mentees with mentors who have advanced through similar employment paths within the company as the mentee will.

Encourage mentors and mentees to take mutual responsibility for developing their relationship. In its guide, Mentoring—A Valuable Alternative, the government agency Environment Canada proposes steps to building lasting and effective relationships between mentor and mentee.

• Mentor and mentee should share responsibility for developing and maintaining rapport. They should develop mutual awareness of objectives, strategies, and problems, as well as agree to share responsibility for arranging and preparing for meetings.

• There should be a commitment to frequent, structured, and honest communication. Mentor and mentee should ensure ongoing support/availability, and structure meetings to ensure clear and practical decision making. Allowance should also be made for additional/unscheduled meetings in periods of crisis.

• Clear contracting between mentor and mentee should exist. Mentor and mentee should, at the outset, agree to guidelines and expectations for the relationship (Environment Canada 1999).

A clear sense of expectations on the part of the mentor and mentee will help to guide the relationship. Mentees should be encouraged to define, as specifi-

cally as possible, their short and long-term career goals. Mentors should provide the guidance needed, to the extent possible, to achieve these goals. These goals and the steps necessary in their achievement should form the basis of a "career development plan." This plan may serve as a guide for a pairing's activities. The plan should be referenced at each meeting between the mentor and mentee, and should be flexible enough to adjust to changing expectations.

Challenges to Establishing Mentoring Programs

The benefits of a formal mentoring program for new employees who have poor work histories or who might face difficulties in retaining employment should be weighed against the anticipated costs of developing a program and maintaining it over the long term. The major cost of mentoring programs is the time commitment required of program managers, mentors, and mentees. This cost should be weighed against company-specific benefits.

Small companies may lack the capacity to develop mentoring programs and/or administer them. In this case, employers can contract for program development and administration services. Potential providers include employer organizations and mentorship service providers.

Small companies often expect that it will be difficult to recruit staff as mentors. However, experience in mid-sized firms demonstrates that the ratio of incumbent staff to new hires is sufficient to recruit qualified mentors. Unless a small company has a higher ratio of new hires to incumbent staff than is typical of mid-sized firms, it is likely to find that it is possible to recruit mentors internally, especially if it takes advantage of its typically more flexible job responsibilities and staff workloads. Alternately, small employers can contract with programs that recruit mentors from outside the workplace. However, there are benefits that accrue to an organization from an internal mentoring program that cannot be duplicated by "outside" mentors, such as knowledge of the particular culture of a workplace.

Finally, to the extent that the program is perceived as a social service for new entrants to the labor market, employers may be reluctant to agree to a formal mentoring program. Dispelling this perception is often the highest hurdle faced by advocates of formal mentoring programs. The level of service provided by a mentoring program should reflect the needs of the employees who will benefit from the program. A more comprehensive mentoring program will respond to the needs of new hires for social services when they arise, and will assist them in accessing the support services needed for job-retention. However, it will focus on the workplace, and on the four skill areas identified above in particular. Systems to measure outcomes such as retention rates and absenteeism can also clarify the intent of programs.

Conclusion

Companies with effective mentoring programs have incorporated the strategies noted in this brief. While some have developed organically, others have been deliberately constructed to improve retention rates among entry-level employees. Some programs are highly structured and administered through a company's human resources office, while others, due to the size of the company, are less structured and rely on the goodwill of a few long-term employees and middle managers. However, they all share a common understanding of the importance of properly introducing new hires, especially in entry-level positions, to a supportive work environment.

Properly constructed, and carefully maintained, mentoring programs provide bottom line benefits to businesses, strengthen the skills and morale of incumbent workers, and assist new hires to keep and advance in employment.

"SMART" Goal-Setting for Mentees and How to Achieve Them

Mentoring materials provided by Environment Canada recommend a useful tool for goal-setting for mentees known as SMART. SMART is an acronym for "Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Trackable."

· Mentors should encourage their mentees to write their goals down as specifically as possible.

· Time limits on achieving the goals should be set, and the progress toward goal attainment should be measured against these time limits.

· The attainment of the goal should be relevant to the mentee's life goals.

· Milestones toward achieving a goal should be set and tracked against goal attainment.

Mentees should seek out creative means of achieving their own developmental needs by seeking out assignments that permit them to:

· Understand broader issues;

· Practice new behaviors when relating to others;

· Develop new skills and competencies; and

· Foster new career goals.

Employer Organizations as Brokers of Mentoring Services

Employer organizations can assist their members by providing a short list of resources for assistance with program assessment, design, and operation. This brief provides some information on some of those resources. Brokering opportunities exist to connect employers with:

- Other employers that are running mentoring programs;

- Consulting firms that can assist employers to establish mentoring programs; and

- Service providers that can recruit, train, and supervise mentors who do not work for a company.

Profile of a Successful Program
UNITED AIRLINES

United has developed a mentoring program to support retention of welfare recipients. The program was designed by a cross-functional team that included union members, international employees, senior-level executives, and welfare recipients. The team designed a peer mentor model that wouldn't interfere with employee-supervisor relationships. "Locational champions" oversee the program and assist both mentors and employees. Mentors are volunteers and are expected to perform that role on their own time. Mentors range from co-workers to senior vice presidents and are assigned to new hires within the first 60 days of employment. United's mentoring program has been so successful that United adopted it for all new hires in 1998 to improve long-standing turnover problems. Subsequent surveys of the mentors demonstrated improved morale among them, as well (JFF 1999).

Resources Cited

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Heath Prince brings his experience in state and federal workforce development policy analysis to Jobs for the Future's work on building economic opportunity for low-wage workers. Prior to coming to JFF, Mr. Prince was a planner at the Texas Workforce Commission, where he was part of a team that developed and managed post-employment job-retention programs for former TANF recipients in numerous communities. Mr. Prince has authored JFF Issue Briefs on workplace mentoring for new employees and on career ladders for low-wage workers. He leads JFF's research on several components of Workforce Innovation Networks—WINs.

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U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. 1999. *Worker Trainee Assistance Program; Meet Your Mentor Workshop Lesson Plan.*

Useful Web Sites

http://www.cybf.ca/insight/mentoring/resources/listing/internet.htm This highly useful Canadian Government page has links to multiple mentoring resources.

Academy of Human Resource Development
http://www.ahrd.org/publications.shtml

HR Integrated Solutions, Inc.
http://www.hrisolutions.com/links.html
This page provides a great deal of useful human resource information, including practical mentoring tips.

International Mentoring Association
http://www.indiana.edu/~rugsdev/ ima.html
This link connects to the homepage of the International Mentoring Association, which provides an abundance of information on mentoring.

Mentors Forum
http://www.mentorsforum.co.uk/
This is the homepage for the British Mentors Forum. It contains a good deal of useful information and links to numerous mentoring resources.

Mentoring Resouces
http://www.mentoring-resources.com/
This homepage for a mentoring consulting group includes several useful links to tips and research.

National Mentoring Partnership
http://www.mentoring.org/
Primarily focussed on youth mentoring, this page includes several useful links to a wider range of mentoring options.

Peer Resources
http://www.peer.ca/peer.html
Good link to extensive list of mentoring resources either in print or on the Web.

Other Resources

State Human Service Mentoring Programs. 1997. American Public Welfare Association.

Education Consumer Guide. Vol. 7. 1993. United States Office of Education, Office of Research.