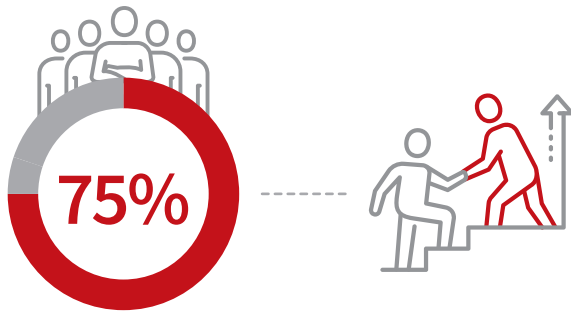


# Successful Mentoring Programs Strengthen Your Business, Talent Systems and Company Culture



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→ **The most successful companies have discovered the best strategy for business is aligning their talent systems to operational needs. These forward-thinking companies develop their business strategies with people in mind, understanding that their competitiveness and performance depends on the success of their employees. A key component to this success is establishing a sound and effective mentoring system.**

### **Why Mentoring Is Necessary to Attract Today's Talent**

Every day, 10,000 baby boomers reach the age of 65 and this trend will continue until 2029. This is causing a huge business leadership and talent gap that must be addressed. By 2025, millennials will comprise about 75 percent of the workforce, and they're demanding mentors. Once considered "nice to have," effective mentorships are now must-have programs for business. Millennials—and the Gen Z workers coming up behind them—want to work in a self-aware and engaged company culture that values the whole person, as well as the community, and not just the production of the individual. For businesses, creating and maintaining productive and vibrant work environments is critical to attracting and keeping the best employees. Without mentoring programs, this environment cannot be created for younger generations of workers.

Millennials value mentoring opportunities and consider this as a selling point for advancing their careers. They want constant feedback and are in a hurry to be successful, so formal development programs like mentoring are important.

### **The Benefits of Effective Mentoring**

Today, we're seeing more organizations create mentoring programs that contribute to the company's health. Effective mentoring—both formal and informal—increases morale and productivity and aids career development.

However, successful mentoring programs don't happen by accident. They begin with a strong business case to clearly demonstrate why the company should devote significant resources. Luckily, there are more studies done every day that provides the data you need to state your case for building a strong program.

Reasons for establishing a mentoring program must be linked to the organization's business goals. For example, a company forecasting tremendous growth in a specific job area needs to prepare employees with high potential, whether it is in management or significant field work. Mentoring greatly streamlines the continuity of company performance.

Listed below are some reasons why companies choose to establish mentoring programs:

- **As part of the onboarding process**—Mentoring helps new recruits, trainees or graduates settle into the organization and "hit the ground running"
- **Skills enhancement**—Mentoring enables experienced and highly knowledgeable staff to pass their expertise on to others who need to acquire specified skills

- **Professional identity**—When younger employees are starting their careers, they often want to learn what it means to be a “professional” and how a true professional embodies the best values of his or her occupation. Mentors can play a critical role in teaching younger employees how to establish their professional identity.
- **Career development**—Mentoring helps employees plan, develop and manage their careers. It makes them tougher during times of change and allows them to have more control of their careers. Having a good mentor accentuates the desire to become a more self-directed learner.
- **Leadership and management development**—Mentoring encourages the development of leadership competencies. These competencies are often more easily gained through example, guided practice or experience than by education and training.
- **Staff retention**—Mentoring provides an encouraging environment through ongoing interactions, coaching, teaching and role modeling that facilitates progression within the organization. Mentoring affects employee retention because it helps establish an organizational culture that is attractive to the top talent clamoring for growth opportunities. Mentoring is a tangible way to show employees they are valued, and the company’s future includes them.
- **Recruitment**—Mentoring enhances talent acquisition and recruitment goals by offering additional incentives to prospective employees
- **Knowledge management/knowledge transfer**—Mentoring provides for the interchange/exchange of information knowledge between members of different organizations

Mentors can play a **critical role**



in teaching younger employees how to establish their **professional identity.**

## The Talent System—Mentoring Programs



Companies that optimize and create a talent system see mentoring programs as a vital cog. But where does it fit in? A simple strategy is to include mentoring programs into your talent system after succession planning, allowing outgoing leaders to flow information into the mentoring program.

### How Mentoring Fits Into Your Business Strategy

A mentoring program is effective when it keeps employees engaged, productive and loyal to the company. It also streamlines talent acquisition to keep top talent coming in, and it ensures the employee pipeline remains full and leadership succession is strong. In turn, the health of the organization flourishes.

If you have a great approach to mentoring as an organization, you'll find it becomes a key lever of making your talent system work better. For example, mentoring becomes an important element in attracting talent and the whole recruiting cycle. It also can be a key point of looking at development of high potentials.

### What Makes a Good Mentoring Program?

While your mentoring program style depends on your unique situation, there are certain elements that exist in every successful mentoring program. Here is a list of the most important elements and actions.

- 1. Create clear business objectives and get the support of leadership**

You might be surprised at the number of mentoring programs that exist that don't have clear objectives or strong buy-in from management. These programs are doomed to struggle and eventually fail because no one can articulate what success looks like.

2. **Determine what a successful mentor/mentee relationship looks like**

You can't just pull names out of a hat and expect it to work. Putting in the work at the beginning to pre-select partnerships saves time, money and potential frustration and stress. Consider giving mentees a say in their development by allowing them to pick a particular mentor or listing their top three candidates.

3. **Build in flexibility**

Effective mentoring programs balance the paradoxical needs of structure and flexibility. There needs to be a level of formality, even in your informal programs, because you still need to train participants, track progress and communicate. However, mentoring is about individual growth, and participant needs are important. Encourage mentees to be proactive about what they need to grow their strengths and abilities; they have the most to gain from the experience.

4. **Get employees excited**

Ensure everyone in your company knows that you have a mentorship program by kicking it off with a launch event, lunch or other activity. Take the opportunity to explain the nuts and bolts of mentoring—both for getting future mentors and mentees—and emphasize how it benefits them and the company. Employees who feel ownership in their work want their companies to succeed.

5. **Monitor and manage**

How will you know if your mentoring program is a success? You won't until you start tracking progress. Identify participants who have not yet communicated or are lacking engagement and find out why. If you are using mentoring software, leverage pulse surveys and program reports to receive goal-setting and satisfaction updates.

6. **Life happens**

If the situation of a mentor or mentee changes (available time, personal issues, etc.), feel free to remove that person from the program and match the other person with another partner.

7. **Identify mile markers and closure points**

Set several points during the process to stop and assess where the mentoring relationship stands, as well as a time when the assessment ends. Without a concrete end point, the mentor or mentee association can start to wander aimlessly. Having said that, many iconic business professionals maintain a relationship with their mentors outside the structured company program and openly discuss what that relationship means to them.

8. **Celebrate success**

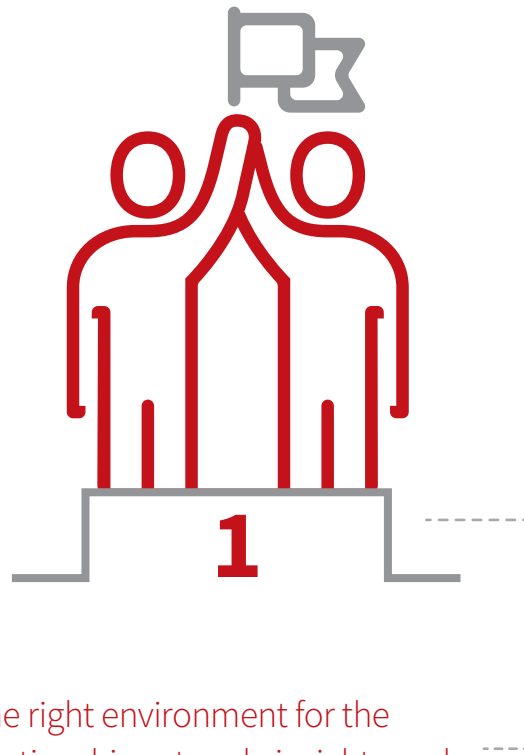
You owe it to yourself to continually demonstrate the value of your mentorship program by recognizing participants' contributions and spotlighting their triumphs. Update your corporate Web site and social media with highlights of effective mentor/mentee partnerships. This brings extra pride and energy to your program, expands participation and increases overall support from management.

# How to Measure the Success of Your Mentoring Program

Mentoring programs require planning and preparation on the part of mentors and mentees. The best mentoring programs have a strong balance between:

- A carefully planned and managed set of objectives, expectations, activities and milestones
- The right environment for the relationship artwork, insights and development “magic” that can happen in a great mentoring relationship

How do you know if your mentoring program is successful? Here are some ideas for measuring results.



## Before and After Metrics

To determine the general quality of your mentoring program, establish metrics within the organization that you can test before and after the program kicks off. Metrics can be measured through:

- Employee survey questions, such as the organization’s commitment and success with employee development, coaching, employee engagement, leadership and culture
- The retention of high potential employees
- Annual 360-degree surveys on program participants’ performance, leadership and teamwork

The right environment for the relationship artwork, insights and development “magic” that can happen in a **great mentoring relationship**

### **Pre-program survey questions**

Before the mentoring program begins, document the motivation and expectations of each participant to identify key understandings.

- What would you like to get out of this program?
- What types of recognition are important to each of you and from whom?
- What benefits or returns are you each anticipating from this relationship?
- What roles and responsibilities will each participant have?
- What do you think a mentor/mentee should do?
- How much time, effort and enthusiasm can you devote to this relationship?
- What do you expect in terms of confidentiality?

### **Post-program survey questions**

- Did you get satisfaction from the program?
- Did you receive the types of recognition that you find important?
- Did your mentoring experience assist with or address your professional goals?
- Were your strengths used to help drive the mentoring experience?
- Were your development needs accounted for in the mentoring experience?
- Were your abilities enhanced? How?
- Were the mutually agreed-to expectations met?
- Did you accomplish what you set out to do?

## Improve Your Mentoring, Improve Your Culture

It's no surprise that organizations with effective mentoring programs see positive benefits on their company culture. The effect mentorship has on the workforce ultimately speaks to who the company is, how it does business and what the culture is about. It is a powerful connection that management cannot afford to ignore.

For more information about the successful mentoring programs, download our FREE white paper, *Establish a Workplace Mentoring Program That Pays Off* at [skillpath.com/resources](https://skillpath.com/resources)

## About the Author



**Dave Fogleman, SPHR**, is the Chief Learning Officer for SkillPath, leading and providing the vision for the instructional design department. Dave is a chief learning officer known for leading award-winning, best-in-class learning and development programs and functions that nurture top talent and maximize organizational effectiveness and performance. He is a collaborative, engaging leader who creates positive working environments where high performers continually innovate and thrive.

Prior to joining SkillPath, Dave had a 25-year career at Sprint, where he created dramatic improvements in performance, improved sales and employee satisfaction, and reduced employee attrition. He also led the award-winning Sprint corporate university that has received national recognition from the Association of Talent Development, the International Society for Performance Improvement, *Training* magazine, the Masie Learning Institute and the Conference Executive Board.