Reverse Mentoring defined

The gap between neophyte and experienced employees has been around as long as people have been reporting to places of work. Reverse Mentoring asks younger employees to, in effect, take older workers under their wings. In a reverse mentoring relationship the mentoring is shared between the two mentoring partners. A senior leader is given the opportunity to be mentored by a more junior colleague who, is different from him or her, and who has a different experience of the organization as a result. Reverse mentoring shifts the responsibility for organizing mentoring to front line employees, who learn from senior leaders by mentoring them.

What’s in it for you?

While the idea is that managers can learn a thing or two about life outside the corner office, reverse mentoring offers many benefits

Reverse mentoring...

...empowers emerging and established leaders. ...begins to close the knowledge gap.

..."shrinks" big organizations. ...offers the “maverick view” or the “other” view.

...promotes loyalty and generates trust. ...grows technical expertise.

...helps to engage, retain and promote younger talent. ...brings different generations closer together.

...challenges the status quo.

Why it works

The key to success in reverse mentoring is the ability to create and maintain an attitude of openness to the experience and dissolve the barriers of status, power and position.

For a reverse mentoring relationship to work, several factors must be in place:

✓ Define expectations – each partner needs to be very clear on what they want to accomplish
✓ Agree upon rules – each partner must be fully committed to the mentoring relationship
✓ Be willing to learn – in a reverse mentoring relationship both parties must “genuinely want to learn from and share with the other.”
✓ Trust your partner – reverse mentoring requires the trust of each partner. The goal is to “push one another outside of their comfort zones and try new ways of thinking, working and being.”
✓ Be transparent – both partners must be open with their feelings and with what they are thinking.

Why it fails

Reverse mentoring fails when any of the following factors are present:

✓ No goal
✓ No game plan
✓ Closed thinking
✓ No time to meet
Reverse Mentoring

5 Steps to a Successful Reverse Mentoring Initiative

- **Purpose**
- **Pairings**
- **Prepare**
- **Pulse Checks**
- **Performance**

**Step 1 Purpose**

Define the goals and roles of reverse mentoring.

**Goals**

**Roles**

- Identify essential knowledge and skills
- Identify knowledge gaps
- Identify talent gaps

**Step 2 Pairings: Selecting and Matching Mentors and Partners**

To a large extent, selection or pairing depends on your specific goals and the needs of the individual and the company.

Be aware that “chemistry” is often overrated. The best matches are often mismatches. The selection process for this pairing should aim to achieve the best mix of diversity in backgrounds and experience; connecting people from different parts of the business with different backgrounds and life experiences.

- Similar / diverse skills, knowledge sets
- Similar / diverse job, function or department
- Similar / diverse personality, work style or job approaches
- Potential role models of capabilities and skills
- Not direct supervisor

**Step 3 Prepare**

Preparation is essential to launching a successful initiative:

- Educate everyone involved.
- Communicate logistics and details.
- Plan a hands-on orientation to launch the initiative.
- Provide partners tools to teach and learn.

Ask Yourself: What actions will help accomplish a reverse mentoring initiative for your organization?
**Step 4 Pulse Checks**

Plan to check in with partners periodically.
- During the first two months check in every 2-3 weeks then monthly.
- Confirm guidelines and ground rules are in place and course correct early.
- Show your support and celebrate successes.

**Step 5 Performance**

How will you evaluate the results and outcomes of your Reverse Mentoring initiative?

Measure attitude, behavior and accomplishments:

- Employee survey results
- Feedback on participant effectiveness
- Self-reported feedback
- Anecdotal information about knowledge transfer across the company

**Launch**

Launch the initiative by bringing everyone together to create momentum, clarify purpose, and to create a culture that recognizes teaching and learning.

Launch topics might include:
- Why reverse mentoring
- Goal and expectation setting
- Affiliation and team building
- Tools to teach and learn
- Describe the ‘typical’ first meeting

**ADVICE**

41% of younger partners advise older partners: “Have an open mind and attitude.”

28% of older partners advise younger partners: “Have patience and be open to your partner.”
Reverse Mentoring

The Personal Learning Model

*Mentoring is a learning partnership.*

Every day, thousands of people learn something new – from how to download email to their cell phones, to the finer points of leadership, to increasing their personal effectiveness.

Although most people give a new endeavor 100% effort, fewer than half of us will truly comprehend the experience and retain the valuable lessons embedded in it.

**What’s the problem?** We don’t all learn the same way.

We all have our own style of learning, a shorthand that allows us to absorb large amounts of information quickly and easily. Most of us, however, do not understand our primary learning style.

Every person has a distinct learning pattern, based on People Learning, Information Learning and Action Learning. For most people, their learning style has worked well, and it’s the “go to” approach to new situations and solving problems. However, our natural comfort zone can become a learning rut when used exclusively and not rounded out by the other learning styles.


Your primary learning style is the method you use most often and with which you’re most comfortable.

In a reverse mentoring relationship the partners are embarking on an intensive learning program, so using all three learning methods will be extremely helpful. Also, mentors should be aware that most people tend to communicate and teach others in the ways that they, themselves, like to learn. Understanding learning styles will help you be a great mentor.

Adapted from The Personal Learning Model ©The Learning Café
Reverse Mentoring Month by Month

Month 1: Getting to know you
Getting to know one another can be accomplished by discussing:
- Goals and expectations for the partnership
- Similarities and differences
- Strengths and development opportunities
- Ground rules and time commitments

Here are some conversation starters to engender meaningful conversations:
- What have been your most memorable experiences?
- What is the most helpful feedback you’ve received?
- What is something that most people don’t know about you?
- Discuss strategies to balance work and personal life. What have you leaned that you could share?
- What compromises have you made?

Month 2: Explore generational myths and misconceptions
While 51% of executives say the large number of Millennials entering the workforce greatly affects their strategy, fewer than 1/3 pay special attention to these workers’ wants and needs – primarily because they don’t understand them.

Provide partners with education about generational differences (and similarities.) Caution everyone about stereotypes and perpetuating “old” messages – comments like “we don’t do that here” and “they don’t want to pay their dues” from tenured employees and comments like “they don’t want to change” and “they’re stuck in the past” from newer employees shut down reverse mentoring efforts before they get off the ground.

Each of the generations has a different way of learning, advancing and collaborating – pay attention to the cues.

- Discover generational myths, and truths
- Explore generational similarities and differences
- Discuss how understanding generational perspectives helps one’s career and professional effectiveness?
Reverse Mentoring

*Month 3: A Day in the Life*

Month 3 is the opportunity to walk in your partners shoes – to experience their world first hand.

- Learn something about each other’s world
- Observe a meeting or a call and debrief
- Job shadow

Use these Conversation Starters to learn more about your partner’s life at work.

*Talk about your work and life experiences. What have you done that was unusual or controversial? What experiences do you hope to have in the future?*

*Who were the most important people along the journey?*

*What is the smartest decision you ever made, and why? What did you learn that you’d like to apply to the future?*

*What mistakes have you made that you thought would have a negative impact on your career? How did you learn from them? What would you do differently?*

*Month 4: Pulse Check*

During pulse checks look for success indicators such as:

- Are people taking the time to meet and work together
- How satisfied are the partners with the progress
- Are they benefiting from and enjoying the partnership
- What ideas do they have to improve the program

Ask partners questions to learn more:

*What are your goals? and Have they changed?*

*How are your expectations being met?*

*What’s next?*

**TIP**

*We learn from one another’s experiences. Encourage partners to share their stories.*

- What have been your most memorable experiences?
- What did these experiences teach you?
- Who were the important people along the journey and why?
- At this point in your career what do you have to teach/share? What do you want to learn?
Months 5 & 6: Partners’ Choice

Month’s 5 & 6 should include topics of interest to the partners – topics that allow them to achieve their expectations. Potential topics include:

- Networking
- Knowledge sharing
- Technical relevance
- Social platforms
- Social software
- Social networking
- Leadership
- Business Challenges
- Innovation
- Competitive Edge
- Customer service
- Consumer preferences

Conversation Starters:

What do you want to be known for? What mark do you want to imprint on the company?
What legacy are you creating or building?
What kinds of things are you doing to pass along your expertise?
What mistakes have you made that you thought would have a negative impact on your career?
How did you learn from them? What would you do differently?
What would you like to teach others?
What knowledge and experience can we share to support each other’s development?

Reverse mentoring can be a winning situation for all involved. When less experienced employees’ opinions are heard they will feel more valued by the company. Experienced employees will realize that opening up to new and different ideas will more effectively serve their clients and drive earnings. When fresh, unbiased perspectives are combined with detailed knowledge and strategic skills, innovation and increased employee engagement will result.

Ask yourself:

What are your next steps and how will you best proceed?
for
NAED
December 2014

Diane Thielfoldt
dthielfoldt@msn.com
843.471.2374

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