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Training & Development

Accelerating Leadership Development Through Mentoring

by Catherine Mossop FCMC

The early 1980's brought Canadian companies into economic globalization. The 1990's brought free trade with the USA, and Mexico, along with widespread business restructuring. Investment in human resource development was focused primarily on training for new technologies. The 20-somethings of the 1980s should be poised to replace their baby-boomer superiors just about now, yet very little investment has been made in their leadership development. Add to the fact that they were squeezed out of professional and early management positions in the downsizing years, it's no wonder the business press tells us we are experiencing a crisis shortage of leaders.

Given that it traditionally takes 10-20 years to develop a leader, organizations are looking for alternatives that will accelerate the development of leaders, as well as develop them for the significant increase in role complexity needed today.

There are new workplace values than in the '80's, which include respect, diversity, equity, service in a "global village", personal growth and development, and work/life balance. These values require a new leadership style, one that cannot be learned in a textbook. This style can only be learned from direct experience and reflective learning. The new leader embraces, lives by, and models the values as a means to inspire their team to perform and build sustainable organizations.



Their qualities for success include a range of capabilities. They must be able to build coalitions and networks both within and exterior to the organization such that they can access a vast pool of unique resources for problem solving; negotiate in internal and external politics; possess the ability to communicate cross-culturally; think strategically and operate operationally; inspire and build the talents of others, to name a few of the new talents leaders need today. Today's organizations need to short-circuit the traditional methods of developing leaders as they simply do not have the time, resources, and infrastructure to follow the footsteps of their predecessors. How are organizations building their leadership talent? Through accelerated learning processes, which incorporates formalized mentoring.

Although mentoring has been around "forever", the application of formalized mentoring as a means to develop a talent pool within Canadian organizations is a recent phenomenon. Well designed mentoring programs

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result in significant positive impact on the bottom line; help retain talent and intellectual capital. They also ensure succession planning and enhance company morale, culture, attraction, and trust levels. Well-structured mentoring programs achieve the best results when:

- Mentoring program goals are linked to corporate strategic direction
- There is a structured program design that supports the mentor relationships
- There is a skilled champion
- There is a credible internal coordinator
- Mentors and protégées are prepared for their roles, responsibilities and understand the ethical dimensions of their relationship
- Program evaluation is linked to goals and strategic direction*

A case in point:

PPG Canada, the Canadian division of PPG Industries, a worldwide manufacturer serving the automotive and aircraft manufacturing industries, uses mentoring as part of the Targeted Career Growth for Professional Program. After completing a career assessment of their competencies, an orientation to building and maintaining a mentoring relationship, and the development of learning plans, participants begin the process of building depth in competencies such as: strategic thinking, risk assessment, and navigating the political environment. Once expectations, roles and responsibilities are clear, the pairs manage their own relationships for the next 12- 18 months. The structure is almost invisible – if there are any relationship snags, the coordinator can be called to serve as mediator or facilitator to help get things back on track.*

While many leadership candidates have developed some core competencies naturally, they may be limited by their personal work experiences and exposure to decision making processes. Organizations need to plan and shape their talent pool. Through carefully selected mentors, and well-designed, properly implemented mentoring programs that support the organization's strategic goals, capable individuals acquire the behaviours and competencies needed to be effective leaders. Through sharing knowledge of the organization, the industry and personal experiences, and in challenging the decision-making processes, mentors help protégées further develop their people and managerial skills, business acumen, and leadership capabilities. Unlike personal mentors, structured organizational mentoring programs support business objectives with clear measurable results, achieve significant ROI, and contribute to the sustainable future of the organization.

In the early 2000's, Bombardier Aerospace achieved year over year ROI of 1,200% for an accelerated development program for their early-identified leaders. In addition to the best practices identified above, the year-long program had several core components that contributed to their success:

- Program objectives were linked to organizational goals. The organization's goal could be characterized as: applied innovation that enhances customer satisfaction with world class product. The

linked development strategy was to accelerate the development of high potential individuals by reducing time to develop a manager from 5 years to 2.5 years and by increasing retention from 60% to 90% in 1-year. Individual learning goals were focused on leadership development capabilities.

- Internal sponsors and external executive mentors balanced the learning process. Internal sponsors were within the line management group whose role was to identify and support learning projects that would contribute to both individual learning and organizational goals; external mentors focused their energies on enhancing personal effectiveness in such areas as strategic thinking, building coalitions, coaching others and problem solving.
- Participants engaged in a 2-day off-site preparation program that incorporated: leadership assessment processes, establishing learning teams to work together on a common project for the duration of the program, draft their learning objectives, and meet and establish a learning contract with their mentors.
- Participants prepared individual learning plans that were linked to their performance plans and focused on developing for the future. Learning objectives were written in the SMART method such that raw data for determining ROI could be obtained. Impact measures were achieved through reducing overtime as a result of enhanced coaching skills, implementation of a 5-S initiative (a cost saving process), applied strategic thinking to a customer problem that resulted in a significant saving, to name several.

At the close of the first year of the program, retention was at 98% and the second year program achieved the same retention levels. Now, four years later and post the devastating impact of 9/11 on the aerospace industry, the organization has been able to retain a reasonable proportion of these high-potential individuals and all are in significant leadership roles today.

Mentors help "stretch" leaders' boundaries and perspectives of their own capabilities, reduce turnover, and support succession planning processes. It is a cost effective way to prepare your best people today for tomorrow's challenges and continued business success. And the new leaders emerging from the mentoring programs are right for the leadership needs of today and tomorrow.

**Mentoring and the World of Work in Canada: Source Book of Best Practices, 2003, Cuerrier, Mossop et. al., Les Editions de la Fondation de l'entrepreneurship*

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