

Mentor programs for ties that bind

Forty-seven percent of people who are currently employed say they plan to begin or ramp up a job search as the job market improves according to a recent survey by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). Is your organization positioned to skillfully attract top talent in today's competitive marketplace? More importantly is your existing staff happy, satisfied and loyal?

The challenge of creating a stimulating environment that fosters employee development and loyalty has most organizations searching for creative, unique solutions. Today, intellectual capital is one of the highest costs to businesses when employees leave. One key to meeting this challenge is creating a culture where meaningful relationships are forged between employees. People that have internal relationships or emotional ties in the office are less likely to leave an organization. A unique way for companies to create internal emotional ties is through a structured mentor program.

A mentor program must have a foundation of clear structure in order for long-term success. Simply matching tenured staff with new hires isn't enough. By incorporating the following elements you can increase your employee retention and create a long lasting mentor program:

- Mission statement congruency: The creation or implementation of a mentor program must match the corporate goals and culture.
- Leadership: Executives must align and promote the value and importance of the program, time spent mentoring must be seen as highly valuable.
- Diversity: An organization must have a diverse employee base to introduce protégés to new ideas and perspectives through mentoring that they would have otherwise not obtained.
- Accountability: Set specific goals and objectives, and if possible measurements to show the value of mentoring efforts.
- Involvement: A majority (more than 50 percent) of the organization, staff at all levels, must participate to reinforce the importance of the cultural initiative.
- Adaptability: As employees develop and grow within an organization the program must allow for transition and if possible multiple mentoring relationships.

What actually takes place during a mentor relationship will vary based upon the mutual goals and objectives of the partnership. The meetings can be formal including specific training, books to review and skills to address. The exchange can also be more informal where a friendship is created through broad discussions about work-life balance and other topics. As long as the participants are committed to achieving professional growth through honest, authentic discussions the outcome will be positive for everyone involved.

To successfully incorporate a mentor program leadership must choose to embrace and commit to creating an environment where work is what people do but success is measured more by who they become or grow into.

In our ever changing “information age” it is the committed learner who rises to the top and mentor relationships offer a real world insight that can not be gleaned in a classroom. If your organizational success depends on your human capital and the intellectual power they produce, a mentor program may be the difference between highly productive retained employees and costly attrition.

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