

## Coaching and Mentoring – Are You Missing an Opportunity?

Today's business environment encourages, if not demands, an approach to management that develops people through coaching and mentoring rather than through constant direction. Whilst many managers and leaders are embracing this method it is often confined to the coaching of members of the manager's own team. Whilst this is obviously something to continue it is also worth asking oneself the following questions:

Am I a mentor?

Do I have a mentor?

Am I coaching my boss?

Am I coaching my peers?

Am I coaching project team members who report to another manager?

If you answered no to one or more of these questions you may be missing an opportunity.

### Being a Mentor

Mentoring can be a very rewarding experience for all concerned. As a mentor it is great to see someone you have shared your experience with progress within the organisation. It benefits the business by contributing to succession planning, and of course it benefits the person being mentored in a number of ways to be explained later.

Once you have built up experience and a reputation in your area of business becoming a mentor is pretty easy, being a good mentor requires many attributes and a commitment of time. The sort of attributes one needs to develop are:

- Communication, especially listening and questioning
- Empathy
- Networking
- Coaching

Once you are ready to go ahead let it be known that you are available to mentor, and you will probably be inundated with people wanting to take up your offer. Or, if you don't want to take that approach, select someone who you think has a great future within the organisation and make a direct offer to them.

## Getting a mentor

Having a mentor has many advantages. Your mentor could be internal or external (Or even one of each.) Either way, make sure it is someone who has been very successful and who you respect. A good mentor will provide you with the following:

- Advice and tips
- Contacts and networking opportunities
- Greater visibility
- A sounding board
- A path to the top, usually just behind them

If your organisation does not have a mentoring programme in place don't be afraid to ask someone to be your mentor. Most people will find it flattering and will be pleased to help.  
Mentor/Mentee Relationship

A strong relationship is key to good mentoring, there must be respect on both sides. This may take time to build up, so don't expect instant results. This sort of relationship should be considered as long term, and many people stick with their mentor throughout a long career.

## Coaching your Manager

This may seem like an unlikely situation, and for some it might be a step too far, but bosses who are self aware will admit that they are not perfect and we can all learn from each other. Success in this area depends on having a good rapport with your manager in the first place. If your relationship is on rocky ground you may need to work on that before embarking on coaching upwards.

If you have an open, honest and respectful relationship with your manager raise the topic with them and see if they would be open to some coaching from you. If so get started by:

- Planning it
- Looking for common goals
- Identifying ways to achieve a win/win situation

Working with a manager in this way will often strengthen a good relationship and lead to benefits for you both.

## Peer Coaching

This is another area where people feel less comfortable. This may be due to the thought that if you are at the same level in an organisation you should have the same skills and abilities – not necessarily so. Or perhaps you get the feeling that you are interfering in a colleague's area of the business. Organisation culture can play a part here, an open culture where people are encouraged to ask for and/or offer help will benefit from the sharing of information and knowledge. This will be irrespective of where people sit in the organisation chart. Everyone has their area of expertise, but also areas where we could improve, consider helping people in an area where you have skills that they need to develop.

One way to start the ball rolling may be to ask one of your peers to coach you on a topic where you feel you could learn from them. This would enable you to boost your skill level and to offer to help them in return.

## Coaching the Project Team

Sadly people assigned to projects often do not get the coaching they need during the project implementation. This could be due to a number of reasons, largely relating to the project managers, who:

- Are too busy
- Think it is not their responsibility
- Know the person will be moving to another project soon
- Don't realise there is a problem until it is too late

We are all aware of the problems we have getting the right people with the appropriate skills onto our projects and I am sure we have all had to make do with an inexperienced person when the 'best' people are assigned somewhere else. Taking the time to coach these people may be a hassle but by developing them you are doing everyone a favour. They get to build their skills and will be a better team member as a result on any future project. Let's face it, you may get them back on your next project, so it will all have been worth it.

## Take the Opportunity to Coach

Do you want to make more of a difference? Do you want to help yourself and your colleagues? Are you willing to invest in building the skills of your organisation?

If so start straight away by identifying someone other than a direct report to coach and here are some tips to get you started:

- Agree a goal for the coaching
- Get the timing right – not when you or the coachee are stressed
- Choose a neutral, comfortable place for your discussion
- Don't be too quick to offer solutions – let the coachee come to their own conclusions
- Ask open questions
- Listen carefully and summarise frequently
- Allow silences
- Let the coachee do most of the talking
- Don't expect to fix everything in one session
- Always have some next steps agreed at the end of a meeting
- Review progress over time
- Keep a record and encourage the coachee to do the same
- Keep your discussions confidential
- Reward progress
- Give constructive feedback

## Champion Mentoring and Share your Success

Be a mentor, get a mentor and encourage others to find one. If your organisation does not already have a mentoring programme in place suggest it or start it.

Finally share your success stories with others to encourage them to do more coaching and mentoring. Imagine how much your business could benefit from all the shared learning.



Find out how ESI International can help your organisation.

To learn more, please contact ESI at [enquiries@esi-intl.com](mailto:enquiries@esi-intl.com) or +44(0)20 7017 7100.