



Are Your Leaders Mentoring Their Successors?

by Hilary Sayers on 13th September 2012

It would be hard to find a successful leader who couldn't think of a person who had provided the right words of counsel or encouragement at an opportune moment in their career. Yet, the opportunity of having experienced leaders guide and mentor others is often left to chance.

Mentoring partnerships can and do develop spontaneously when driven by the needs and interests of two people. But organisations need to play a much more proactive role in facilitating good mentoring practices if they are serious about talent development.

Why is Mentoring so Important?

In his book *Crucibles*, Robert Thomas points out that to enjoy increasing returns from leadership investments, top management must actively cultivate next-generation leaders and this means their immediate successors and at least two generations beyond them.

There are other compelling reasons to put mentoring at the heart of a business growth (or, survival!) strategy. The level of ambiguity in today's business environment demands the sharing of experiences and best practices. The looming talent crisis as baby boomers exit the workforce requires speedy transfer of expertise to those who will follow them.

And, as if all this wasn't enough, mentoring can be instrumental in delivering three key drivers of employee engagement: career support, opportunity for development and trust in senior management.

How can Mentoring Relationships be Encouraged?

Mentoring comes in various forms from structured programs to more informal approaches. There is no hard and fast rule; what will work best is what your people are ready for. Simply, put the right ground rules in place and allow participants the freedom to manage the mentoring partnership in the most appropriate way for them.

The expectations of mentoring need to be realistic. A single, long-term relationship with one mentor can seem a daunting commitment for the mentor and a limiting one for the mentee. The truth is that job and career mobility are higher than ever before and this calls for shorter, situational mentoring.

Involving the right people in the mentoring experience is important. There is plenty of evidence that high-potential individuals are very willing and eager to tap into the expertise of more experienced people. Similarly, an experienced leader who has skill and interest in helping others grow can impart wisdom as well as the care needed to build a special bond in the mentoring partnership.