

PASSING THE TORCH

Coaching and Mentoring as Innovative Ways to Support Leadership Development

By Margaret Echols



Change is all around us

Change is happening at an ever-increasing pace. We all have experienced this in our careers, with our clients, and work within our organizations. Whether you are a leader, manager, consultant or other internal specialist—you have an opportunity to support individuals in your organization in becoming adept at moving effectively with change—maybe even developing the ability to influence the changes they would like to see happen.

Research has shown that the most effective leaders at leading and adapting to change at any level in an organization are those who have the highest level of emotional intelligence. I will discuss emotional intelligence competencies at greater length in this article, since many intractable problems in the workplace are the result of poor communication, lack of self-awareness and weaknesses in other emotional intelligence competencies. The components of knowledge, skills and abilities that make up emotional intelligence competencies can indeed be learned, and *coaching* and *mentoring* are excellent ways to support this type of competency building.

The challenge is to accelerate the development of resilient leaders and

institutionalize leadership and learning as core capabilities throughout organizations. Coaching, mentoring and blended coach-mentoring programs have proven to be effective tools for impacting the development of future leaders and creating environments that support continuous learning.

What do we mean by Coaching and Mentoring?

Coaching and mentoring can mean many things. I distinguish between the two as follows:

Coaching: Coaching is the artful use of conversation employing the communication skills of affirmative listening, giving feedback, and asking effective questions to create a process of learning and growth. The coach helps the client create a vision for change, clarify and set goals, shift perspective to see new possibilities and take new actions. The coach holds the client accountable for what they say they want and what they say they will do, and draws forth the client's inherent wisdom and capability.

Mentoring: Mentoring is a long-term relational process for developing an

individual (protégée) under the close guidance of a teacher, counselor or leader who knows how to navigate within the culture of the protégée's organization. The intention of mentoring, until recently, has been to groom a high potential protégée for leadership succession through the advice and imparted experience of the mentor. The mentor can open doors for the protégée and introduce him or her to a circle of other leaders or people of influence and power. Today mentoring is more open and diverse. It now generally refers to a relationship between two individuals, the mentor and the protégée (mentee), where the mentor uses coaching skills to guide the learning and growth of a protégée who seeks to acquire or strengthen competencies needed to improve job performance or career progression. Today's mentor is more frequently a blend of the two, or a coach-mentor.

Why Coaching and Mentoring?

Coaching and mentoring programs are used to develop knowledge, skills and abilities that produce real, lasting results beyond just delivering information as is typically done in most training courses. In the 1997 Journal of Public Personnel Management, it was reported that training alone improves productivity by about 20%, but when combined with coaching, productivity increases to nearly 90%. More recently, Booz Allen Hamilton hired a consulting company to study the return on its executive coaching program. They reported an ROI approaching 700% in 2003 as a result of their coaching program.

In successful programs, organizations ask participants to focus on their professional development needs in alignment with the organization's mission and strategic goals. The value of these programs is in their diversity and flexibility to adapt to the organization's goals, culture and the learning goals of participants.



Mentoring programs can help participants in a variety of targeted areas including:

New Hires – Orient newer hires to the organization; support them through the assimilation process

Career Development – Find a place in the organization where experienced employees thrive and can make the best contribution, thereby retaining top people

Diversity Initiatives – Leverage diversity in people and thinking by appreciating and valuing differences

Leadership Development – Accelerate the next generation of high potential talent; support them in taking risks and venturing into new territory using their own initiative

Competency Development – Encourage and support others in making their best contribution through developing and enhancing critical competencies

What is the role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in results-focused coach-mentoring programs?

Research from Daniel Goleman, internationally recognized author and expert in this area, and others has shown that the most effective leaders are those that have the highest level of EI competencies. These competencies include the following:

- Self awareness: accurate self-assessment, emotional awareness, self confidence
- Self management: self control, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, adaptability, achievement orientation and initiative
- Social awareness: empathy, organizational awareness
- Social skills: influence, developing others, communication, change catalyst, conflict management, teamwork and collaboration

Mentors who understand the elements of EI, how to recognize it, and how to nurture and enhance it for themselves and others are more likely to have a significant impact and achieve more positive results with their protégées within the organization.



What are best practices in coach-mentoring programs?

- Flexibility – one size doesn't fit all. Programs must be voluntary and customized to the needs of the organization and participants.
- Senior leaders champion and actively participate.
- Supervisors must approve and actively support participation of their staff.
- Protégées drive the programs; that is, protégées are responsible for their own development.
- Mentors are trained and encouraged to seek opportunities to give and receive feedback.
- Protégées are trained to be mentors and expected to participate as future mentors.
- Consistent meeting of pairs is vital; usually bi-weekly.
- Confidentiality is imperative.
- Protégées should complete an individual development plan (IDP) with clearly defined, realistic goals.
- Assessment and feedback instruments often are used to help create an IDP.
- Pairs complete a partnership agreement specifying

What are best practices...?

- expectations, goals and commitments.
- Program has starting and ending dates and a graduation ceremony to share success stories.
- Resources for development are available including articles, books, videos, developmental assignments, training, conferences, etc.
- Monitoring and evaluation plans are used to evaluate results and make improvements as needed.



Coaching, mentoring and the blended coach-mentoring programs can provide tremendous benefits in today's organizational climate of urgency, intensity, and ever-higher performance requirements. It is important to realize that these programs are not panaceas. Without the requisite commitment, planning, structuring and monitoring, they can fall far short of expectations. Individuals seek connection, traction, and some beacon to help guide them. Organizations and groups that have made a long-term commitment and have invested in developing robust programs for their people are providing that beacon.

About Margaret Echols



Margaret Echols, Master Certified Coach, is founder of the Development Consortium. Her Washington, DC-based company offers an array of consulting services focused on the areas of organizational and individual learning and development, executive coaching, teamwork and strategy. Margaret has presented at a number of conferences on topics related to increasing personal and organizational competence, including the Coaching and Mentoring Conference and the Conference on Emotional Intelligence. Her work is described in Daniel Goleman's book, *Working With Emotional Intelligence*. You may reach Margaret by email at margaretechols@earthlink.net or by telephone at 202-537-1461.