

# Sage Mentors Inc.

## Sage in the News!



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## Learn from the Best

by Sarah B. Hood

### What it takes to implement a top-notch mentoring program in your company.

You may not realize it, but all your top people want an ideal relationship. A lucky few will find one on their own, through informal channels. But most are waiting for you to make that match of a lifetime for them. Yes, we're talking mentors.

Mentorship has been with us for a long time; it was probably an old idea when God gave Noah a few pointers on how to put the ark together. However, many Canadian businesses have created formal programs only within the past few years, as part of a general drive to replace senior managers as boomers retire, and to compete for the best young recruits.

Businesses are now using mentorship to hone top talent, to broaden staff skills and especially to integrate new people into the organization. Across the country, there are one-on-one programs--formal and informal--and group-driven projects. Many companies use in-house mentors, although some (Bombardier, among them) bring in external ones. Some organizations like the term "mentee," while others prefer "protege" or even "associate." But despite the numerous variations successful mentorship programs come in, they all share certain qualities, like sanity, humanity, efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Here are 10 snippets of wisdom about mentoring programs from some of the mentors' mentors.

### 1. Mentoring programs must address specific business objectives

Catherine Mossop of Sage Mentors in Toronto designs mentoring programs to accelerate the development of high-

potential individuals. She is also the co-author of *Mentoring and the World of Work in Canada: Source Book of Best Practices*, distributed through la Fondation de l'entrepreneurship of Quebec. "Mentoring needs to be part of the business strategy," Mossop says. "It's got to be led by line management." A common blunder, she cautions, is "not setting up parameters where you can get a return on investment."

Maureen Neglia, director of recruitment for RBC Financial Group in Toronto, says, "HR cannot be the driver of the program--this has to be something that the business sees as a component of its talent management strategy. Be clear on the objectives, because every program has a different objective."

### 2. Nothing happens without top-level support

"The top priority is senior leadership buy-in," says Mark Porter, vice-president of human resources for Molson Canada in Toronto. "Not just verbal buy-in, but a commitment in terms of time. Very few leaders will say they're against it, but if you're not committed, don't do it."

### 3. Good mentors are made, not born

Management Consultant Cy Charney of Charney & Associates Inc. in Toronto has been involved in creating mentoring programs for a decade. He has created a peer mentoring system in which group members lead one another in learning, and has written such books as *The Portable Mentor* (2002) and *The Trainer's Tool Kit* (2004). Charney emphasizes that mentors must be trained before they begin to work with protégés. "Some people think that it's almost instinctive, but it's not," he says. "Selecting mentors based not on mentoring ability but on seniority is a grave mistake. Good mentors listen much more than they talk; they know how to ask the right questions."

Mossop calls the failure to develop mentors "a huge and high-risk mistake." After all, she explains, "the mentor is the embodiment of the culture and values of the organization and of the broader society. Are we inspiring people to the types of ethical, business and behavioural practice that are going to enhance or hinder the reputation of our business?"

Among the qualities that Mossop enumerates in an ideal mentor: "They know how to challenge the protégé's way of thinking; they have enormous respect for trust relationships; and they've pretty much mastered the metaphor."

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## 4. A boss is not a mentor

"A mentor is different from a manager," says William Pallett, senior vice-president of people and quality for Delta Hotels in Toronto. As he sees it, a good mentor is "someone who can help sort out the political realities of the organization."

Others agree that the lines need to be carefully drawn. "We learned to be more specific with the role of the mentor versus the role of the person's manager," says Molson's Porter. "We have to be very clear that as a mentor you're not giving performance feedback."

At Molson, mentors do not direct projects; instead, they act as role models and coaches who provide feedback and give broader exposure to the business.

## 5. There's no single recipe for the right match

The nature of that perfect marriage of mentor and protégé will differ according to the needs of the organization and the individuals. Certainly, the mentor's skills must fit those the mentee is seeking to acquire. "A well-designed program would have an inventory of mentors with different abilities and backgrounds," notes Charney.

And opposites may attract. Mossop points to a very successful program created within BP in the United Kingdom. "What was really quite fascinating is that they would orchestrate the matches with the maximum amount of diversity: older with younger, different race and colour, male-female," she says. "What this does is really change and improve the calibre of decision-making by capitalizing on the diversity of the population that makes up the organization. This is really important for Canadian organizations, because we have a highly diverse workforce. There's huge strength in that."

## 6. Both sides need to set ground rules

At Molson (as in many organizations), "the candidates complete a document that talks about expectations," says Porter. They are encouraged to set ground rules regarding professional norms (such as punctuality) and personal behaviour (such as appropriate areas for discussion). This approach ensures learning expectations are met, while pre-empting potential disagreements.

## 7. It's hard to maintain a long-distance relationship

Not all mentorships thrive over the telephone line. Molson originally matched mentors and protégés regardless of location, but soon found "that was quite difficult," according to Porter. Now, the company attempts to keep mentors and

mentees geographically close if possible, unless there is some training advantage to a different arrangement.

Sue Baird Shatzky is a human-resources consultant in Career Development Services, part of Organizational Development and Strategic Human Resources Planning at the City of Toronto. She found mentorships were less effective if participants had to travel to connect--even within the same city. "Because the City of Toronto has over 2,000 locations, I found it was more effective to group the participants by geographical location," she says.

## 8. A mentoring program can't do everything

"What we've come to learn is that mentoring is part of a broader approach to employee recruitment and retention, so mentoring on its own won't do it for you," says Pallett of Delta Hotels. "It is part of a larger process." (Or, as Charney succinctly puts it: "Mentoring is in the buffet. This is just one of the many options.")

## 9. Success must be measured

"At the end, participants in mentoring programs should evaluate relationships, and we should be able to see that they've been successful and that goals have been achieved," says Charney. Of course, these must include both the participants' personal goals and the overall goals of the organization.

## 10. The best mentoring programs spring naturally from your corporate culture

"I think you have to benchmark other organizations and then develop an approach that's aligned to your company's culture," says Pallett. (This is illustrated in matters as simple as the amount of meeting time; Charney and Mossop both suggest about an hour a month, whereas some programs involve as many as three meetings a week.)

Also, some organizations need to move toward the mentoring concept gradually. "You need to build a coaching culture," says RBC's Neglia. "It's not something that happens naturally in every organization, and it does have to be part of your talent management strategy."

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