Module 16

Read Ahead

Employee Mentoring
Module 16: Employee Mentoring

Objectives

After attending the training in Module 16, participants will be able to:

- identify what mentoring is and is not.
- understand the importance of mentoring.
- recognize the benefits and challenges of mentoring.
- implement the steps in a mentoring program.

Introduction

The primary duty of any leader is to create more leaders through employee development. This is the ultimate test of leadership. It is pleasant to lead an organization when there is a supply of emerging young leaders advancing through the training pipeline. However, achievement in any organization is impacted negatively when the top leader insists on carrying the entire load.

The route to exemplary leadership is not a one-person task. Acquiring the skills and experience to reach that level usually includes training, mentoring, and coaching. This requires significant time spent learning firsthand from a higher-level leader. Typically, private sector organizations select candidates to enter the leadership process and design programs specifically for them. However, as part of a government organization, ALDOT cannot hand pick employees for mentoring but must instead offer this advantage to all employees within a division, bureau, or unit and within a specific classification. ALDOT, as with other state agencies, must provide evidence of a process that is clearly fair and equitable.

This module addresses mentoring, one of the key elements of leadership training and development. The remainder of this Module will cover the role of mentoring in leadership, why it is important, the major steps in implementing a mentoring program, how to match mentors and mentees, and similar topics.

Mentoring Is a Top Priority

Based upon an evaluation of a previous program developed by ITE, a 2008 Leadership Survey revealed that mentoring and coaching were the top leadership development training needs. Ninety-seven percent of survey participants indicated that training was either needed or strongly needed, yet “Training” does not suggest only classroom training. This was a compelling message to ALDOT leaders, and plans were initiated to produce a Module on mentoring.
Successful Mentoring

The best mentoring programs match good leaders (mentors, who are already very busy) with less experienced individuals who have the potential to become good leaders. The program involves a one-on-one developmental relationship that is mutually beneficial. Both the mentor and the mentee give up part of their time and set this time as a priority to conduct program activities, communicate frequently with each other, and report progress to the program coordinator. Well-run mentoring programs usually produce employees with a better understanding of the organization, its limits and opportunities, and what it takes to lead. In addition, mentees acquire new skills and new attitudes.

Success is not guaranteed, and many efforts fail due to lack of planning or weak program guidelines, selection of poor candidates, mismatches between mentor and mentee, workload or time issues, or lack of chemistry. It is imperative that mentors make the relationship work. This is why communication skills and interpersonal relationship skills are so important for leaders.

Mentoring Is Important

There are numerous reasons why transportation professionals should embrace mentoring as a priority, as illustrated by the following points:

- Mentoring and coaching are the top leadership needs in many DOT's.
- Employees have a deep longing to develop relationships with their leaders.
- It is a key feature of succession planning.
- Successful organizational practices and institutional memory can be shared through mentoring.
- It helps build organizational loyalty and pride.
- It can be used to build diversity.
- Mentoring is a contributing factor for employee retention.
- It creates a desire in those being mentored to focus on helping the whole organization succeed.
- It provides the tools and information for organizational success.

About 45% of successful professionals report experience as a mentor or mentee. If mentees grow in knowledge, skills, and performance, they may receive promotions and higher expectations for advancement. Informal mentoring has been shown to be less effective than formal mentoring.

Advice to Mentors

Getting started requires thinking like a mentor from the beginning of the process. The following criteria can be used to become an effective mentor:

- Make “people development” your top priority by creating a supportive climate for learning and development.
- Limit the number of mentees you mentor at any time.
• If possible, develop a relationship before beginning the process.
• Mentor others without expecting anything back.
• Be a good, active listener.
• Let the mentee work with you for a period, using the following model:
  1. Mentor does it.
  2. Mentor does it, and mentee watches.
  3. Mentee does it, and mentor watches.
  4. Mentee does it and becomes proficient at it.
• Equip the mentee by regularly sharing leadership books, CDs, and DVDs and by recommending seminars to develop skills and gain confidence.
• Stay with the mentee until he or she can perform successfully.
• Assign the mentee meaningful tasks and try to short-circuit situations that impede progress, such as the following:
  • lack of clear directions
  • bureaucracy
  • busywork
  • poor communication

Remember, the mentoring process does not stop with the leader mentoring the first mentee. Encourage successful mentees to repeat the process by mentoring others.

**Implementing a Mentoring Program**

After you make a commitment to become a mentor, whether voluntarily or selected, check to see if the organization has an established Mentoring Program. The best programs are established like a strategic plan with widespread organizational participation and top leadership support. These plans are usually housed in the HR or Training Bureau. A Mentoring Program is treated as a special form of training similar to some of the engineering programs held by ALDOT. The effort includes developing a purpose, a mission statement, objectives, goals, and guidelines for mentoring activities.

If ALDOT does not have a formal Mentoring Program, the steps below can guide you while creating your own program.

**Step 1**
Identify and recruit an administrator and champions for the program.

**Step 2**
Identify and recommend employees and mentors. Schedule exploratory meetings.

**Step 3**
Establish a clear purpose for the mentoring process and develop mutually agreeable outcomes based on commitment by both mentors and mentees.

**Step 4**
Establish a written action plan based on the purpose and expected outcomes of the process. The following categories of activities can be considered and evaluated for potential inclusion in the written Mentoring Action Plan:
• **Periodic work place shadowing**
  Allow the mentee to attend staff meetings and other meetings; work alongside the mentee as you go through your daily activities. Allow the mentee to be involved in major and minor decision-making processes and problem-solving measures.

• **Information sharing**
  Provide ALDOT information and educate the mentee to understand and commit to department processes and operations. Transparency is important and allows the mentee to really see and understand what is going on in the bureau or division.

• **Evaluation of leadership practices**
  This includes assessment of the mentee’s leadership practices, including the mentor having serious and frank conversations and providing feedback on the mentee’s strengths and weaknesses.

• **Reading leadership development resources**
  Selected books by experts can provide exposure to new topics and methods for self-improvement, which can lead to a deeper commitment by the mentee. Resources outside normal job duties are important because they allow the mentee to see the bigger picture of leadership.

• **Social interaction**
  Discussions of non-technical subjects such as families, hobbies, activities, and sports may deepen the relationship between the mentor and mentee. It is important to remember that, in reaching employees, successful leaders must share part of who they are, how they think, and what they value. This is how trust is developed.

**Step 5**
Establish an Action Plan. The mentor and mentee should establish written meeting schedules, communication expectations between meetings, and success measures for pre-established milestones. This Action Plan drives the success of the program because both people are held accountable.

**Step 6**
As the program unfolds, conduct periodic updates and modify as needed to benefit the development and growth of the mentee.

**Step 7**
Celebrate mentoring successes and begin mentoring others.

**Why Some Leaders Do Not Mentor Others**

Mentoring is a significant commitment, especially at higher levels in the organization. Because of this time and energy commitment, some do not like to mentor others. Although there are many excuses for not mentoring people, we as leaders must be willing to develop and use our people skills. As leaders, we must demonstrate that we care for our employees and are willing to help them develop. Other excuses, in addition to the commitment of time, were identified by John Maxwell in *Mentoring 101*. Examples are provided below.
# Reasons and Excuses that Some Decline Mentoring Opportunities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>Insecurity</td>
<td>Insecure leaders tend to make themselves look good at the expense of others. They feel threatened at the thought of equipping others to lead. This may be because they do not want to appear ignorant; they truly do not have the knowledge or ability to perform the job.</td>
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<td>Ego</td>
<td>Some leaders’ egos are so large that they always must be the center of attention or the best at anything. Therefore, they cannot tolerate an employee becoming as good as or better than they are at any given responsibility. At the core of ego is selfishness.</td>
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<td>Inability to Recognize Leadership Potential</td>
<td>Some leaders lack the discernment to see employees’ gifts, passions, successes, opportunities and joys. It is sad to think that some future or potential leaders do not have a chance to develop because of the inability of the leader.</td>
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<td>Incorrect Concept of Success</td>
<td>Leadership is not position, power, prestige, money or perks; it is helping others become leaders. A manager or supervisor, even at the highest level, is not successful unless he/she is helping employees to become a success and grow into their potential.</td>
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<td>Lack of Training</td>
<td>Some leaders do not know how to mentor, which is best learned through an appropriate program, training and practice.</td>
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<td>Lack of chemistry between mentor and mentee</td>
<td>There may be times when personalities just do not work.</td>
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<td>Poor alignment of mentee goals and mentor’s skill set</td>
<td>At times, the mentor may not have the skill set that is needed to be learned by the mentee</td>
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Benefits of Mentoring

Mentoring is time consuming and intensive for mentors and mentees alike. However, it also brings joy and benefits. Dr. Lillian Eby, in a seminar in 2006, tabulated numerous appreciable benefits that mentoring participants receive. People and organizational benefits from Eby and others are listed below.

Mentor Benefits
- Source of learning
- Assistance with tasks
- Opportunity for recognition by others
- Networking opportunity
- Relational and psychological benefits
- Rewarding experience
- Loyal support from employees
- Workplace or professional legacy
- Development of relationships with employees

Mentee Career-Related Benefits
- Exposure and visibility
- Protection and sponsorship while learning
- Challenging assignments with skill building and knowledge transfer

Mentee Psychological Benefits
- Role model
- Work-related friendship with leader
- Acceptance and confirmation by leaders
- Appropriate counseling

Organizational Benefits
- Energized mentors and mentees
- New leaders with enhanced skills and attitudes
- Mentors and mentees significantly equipped to pursue higher leadership positions
- An internal reputation as an organization that cares about its people
- An external reputation as a great organization that cares about its people
- Employees’ realization that they can become leaders and increase performance
- Improved morale among employees
- A recognition program for rewarding employees
- Greater networking and team development internal to ALDOT
References


Eby, Lillian. “Facilitating Effective Faculty Mentoring: Dean and Department Head Workshop.” University of Georgia, January 2010.


