

Mentoring: A Reflective Journey

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By Nancy Davis

CHICAGO—Mentoring is about creating relationships, said David Pease, SPHR, vice president of human resources at Sebecook Valley Hospital in Pittsfield, Maine, and an adjunct faculty member at Thomas College Graduate School. “No matter what the headlines are, we quickly forget names [in the news], but when people truly touch us—we remember them for a lifetime.”

Pease suspects that mentoring programs increase in number after a period of decline. In a June 23 workshop, “Memorable Mentoring: A Reflective Journey,” held in conjunction with the SHRM Annual Conference here, he encouraged HR professionals to sponsor mentoring programs and training for prospective mentors and protégés at their companies, and participate in SHRM mentor programs.

Contemporary business organizations diminish the role of mentoring by adding this responsibility to managers’ roles and giving managers too much responsibility from day to day, he noted. “Clearly, a good manager should be a great coach. But your best mentoring relations might not be with your boss. When you’re selecting a mentor, select someone you’re not reporting to.

A mentor can be internal or external. They can introduce you and connect you to top leaders, but mentors can be external—and that can be really powerful if you’re trying to expand your role in your community.”

Mentor relationships can build your reputation and help you achieve your goals, Pease added. The relationships should be holistic: A mentor serves as learning facilitator and does not have all the answers. Furthermore, mentor relations don’t last forever. People should select various mentors.

Pease cited many benefits for mentors and protégés: Several studies show that people who have had mentors early in their careers have greater pay, enhanced promotion rates and accelerated mobility. He finds decreased job stress for people who regularly connect with others and increased professional satisfaction for mentors. Organizations benefit from greater productivity, reduced turnover when every employee gets a mentor, and a heightened reputation when competing for recruits, he said.

One potential pitfall: Often, mentoring programs either are too structured or not structured enough, he warned. In rigid programs, mentors “spend a lot of time just trying to complete the program and not enough time with the partners.” Yet “it’s quickly over if you don’t have some structure—and an action plan.”

Pease promotes use of a “MEMORABLE” mentor model with the following components:

M- Mutual trust. Both parties actively participate. Start with an agreement that sets goals.

E- Expand and challenge thinking. “True learning can’t happen in a sterile environment,” Pease said.

M- Meaningful feedback. “One of the greatest gifts you can give another person.”

O- Offer alternatives. Mentors should suggest a variety of ways to achieve goals.

R- Reflection. Have people talk about feelings. “We’re talking about people’s lives,” he said. What’s getting in your way? Why do you want to achieve your goals? “With certain senior leaders, getting them to deal with emotions is very difficult. That’s why reflection and a mentoring journal can be useful,” Pease said.

A- Action plans. What is the protégé trying to accomplish? Every session, go back to those goals and set assignments for the next meeting. Meet every month or three months and follow up.

B- Being selfless. Mentors need to enter relationships

because they have a passion to help people grow and develop. “People have to have their egos in check,” he said.

L- Learn from each other. People learn when they teach, he noted.

E- Extend the development. End the relationship. Most essential learning gets done in the first 18 to 20 months, he advised. Partners stay great friends, but the relationship changes. “We’re not working in a formal way to achieve specific career goals.”

The MEMORABLE “framework helps people achieve the results they want,” he concluded, adding that there lots of other tools that partners can use together.

Nancy Davis is the editor of HR Magazine.