Developing a Successful Mentoring Program

LEARNING OBJECTIVE
1. Explain the differences between mentoring, coaching and training
2. Address the benefits of a departmental mentoring program
3. Identify the steps in planning and implementing a mentoring program
4. Explain the need for a program evaluation process

In today’s competitive healthcare market, healthcare leaders are finding it difficult to find, develop and retain good people. When a facility lacks the ability to financially compensate employees for excellent work, it becomes especially important to create a professional working atmosphere that allows for continued growth and job satisfaction. One way this can be achieved is through effective mentorship.

Objective 1: Explain the Differences Between Mentoring, Coaching and Training

There tends to be confusion amongst the roles of mentoring, training and coaching. While each is a form of professional development and all may share some of the same processes, mentoring, training and coaching are very different types of professional development approaches.

Mentoring is generally an informal relationship between two people that develops professionally over time, with both parties seeing the benefits of the mentoring process. Mentoring serves to advise the mentoree on how to plan for long-term professional development and reach long-term goals. Mentors may serve as a trainer or coach during the process; however, career development is the ultimate goal. Mentors help someone decide which career path they would like to pursue and how to successfully reach that goal. For instance, a mentor may help a technician decide whether they want to become an instrument technician or work toward becoming the department educator or perhaps, ultimately, the department director. The mentor’s role is then to help set the educational and personal growth plan to reach that next professional level. Mentoring may only be needed for a short duration, or it may continue many years as the mentoree travels their chosen path.

Coaching is a process that revolves around asking questions, pointing out problems or challenges, and making suggestions to help someone meet a specific goal. Coaches may intervene in a work process to help the student re-think or perform a process differently. Coaching is usually a goal-oriented process. For example, when a technician has a higher than acceptable error rate in instrument assembly, the coach may ask questions to ascertain the employee’s skill level at that particular time. The coach may then suggest steps in the process that the employee should refine to be successful on the job (more training, paying closer attention to detail, etc.). The coach will then observe and intervene, as necessary, to help the employee gain better instrument assembly habits.
Training is a formal, defined process with learning objectives and is often performed more briefly compared to coaching and mentoring. The trainer is the subject matter expert with extensive knowledge in the topic area. How knowledge is transferred from the trainer to the trainee is flexible and can take several forms, such as a lecture, hands-on learning, discussions and case studies. In the case of a technician having difficulty with instrument assembly, the trainer would develop a process to teach the technician instrumentation identification and proper inspection and assembly processes.

**OBJECTIVE 2: ADDRESS THE BENEFITS OF A DEPARTMENTAL MENTORING PROGRAM**

There are several benefits to implementing a mentoring program in the Central Service (CS) department. The primary goal of mentoring is employee motivation. The benefits of having motivated employees are numerous, including employee job satisfaction, employee support and the sharing of wisdom from the mentor to mentoree. Mentors often have increased job satisfaction because they recognize they have helped someone meet their future goals. Mentors may also receive additional consideration when applying for departmental promotions.

Other benefits derived from a mentoring program include improved employee retention, more intradepartmental promotions, faster employee assimilation into the departmental culture and work processes, and reduced turnover rates.

Many studies show that millennials (today’s growing workforce sector) want a mentor and regular feedback, and have a need and desire to continuously grow and learn in their field.

Once developed, mentoring programs are an inexpensive way to prepare future department leaders.

**OBJECTIVE 3: IDENTIFY THE STEPS IN PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING A MENTORING PROGRAM**

Careful planning is required for implementing a successful mentoring program. A mentoring program does not replace a departmental training program and it does not replace departmental leadership and management; however, a well thought-out mentoring program will augment both training and leadership.

The following are some suggestions for the development of a successful mentoring program.

**OBTAIN SUPPORT**

Upper management, Human Resources (HR) and the Operating Room (OR) can serve as valuable advocates for the mentoring program. Tying the program goals into the organization’s long-range goals will help gain the support of these important departments. It is wise to present the program’s outline, timeframe and proposed benefits, as well as the initial state of staff development. A mentoring program should be flexible, and fine tuning should be an ongoing process, so each employee receives the guidance they need. Once the program is underway, routine updates focusing on successes and areas where the program is being improved should be prepared and shared with the advocate departments (e.g., upper management, HR and OR).

Obtaining the support of key departmental personnel is also essential. Supervisors, educators and lead personnel must buy in to the process because time away from the workspace will be needed to facilitate mentoring. The best thought-out and prepared programs can fail quickly without the support from these key areas and constituents.

**DETERMINE PROGRAM PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS**

Not all departmental staff will be
appropriate for the mentoring program
and the department also cannot support
mentoring all employees at one time.
To help ensure a successful program,
guidelines should be developed for both
the mentors and mentorees.
Both the mentor and mentoree should
know the amount of time and frequency
of meetings, the overall program timeline
(e.g., six months or one year) and any
special skills that will be required to
participate. Mentors should be successful,
high-performing staff members with
a proven track record of successful
performance. Knowledge, skills and
abilities of effective mentors frequently
include:
• The desire to assist others
• An ability to think creatively and
  suggest problem-solving alternatives
• The ability to motivate mentorees
• Effective oral and/or written
  communication skills
• An interest in assisting the department
  and mentorees
• An ability to apply change management
  principles
• An understanding of the department’s
culture and the ability to use this
knowledge to explain and defend
suggestions provided to the mentoree
• Detailed knowledge about CS policies
  and work procedures

Mentorees should demonstrate a strong
desire to develop and follow a career path,
and dedicate the time necessary to learn
new skills.
Both parties should take the program
seriously and strive for success. Both
must also understand and agree that
communication is a two-way street
and that confidential information must
remain confidential. Also, both should
agree to give and accept appropriate
feedback throughout the mentoring
process.

Training for the mentor role is important. Even
though there may be a small percentage of
“natural mentors” in the department, there are
still areas where the mentors may lack experience.
The HR department can be a valuable ally when
training mentors, as many of the topic areas are
HR-related.

DEVELOP A SYSTEM FOR THE
INTERESTED PARTIES TO BECOME
PART OF THE PROGRAM
This step may be as simple as potential
mentors and mentorees verbally
indicating they wish to become a member
of the mentoring program – or it may
involve a formal application process
that includes interviewing prospective
mentors and mentorees.
During this phase, a process to
dissolve their participation or change
mentors should also be identified. As the
mentoring process evolves, it may become
apparent that the mentor/mentoree
relationship is not as strong or effective as
needed or desired. This can occasionally
occur even after care has been taken to
match working styles, schedules and
learning types.

COMMUNICATE THE PROCESS
Once the program guidelines are in
place, it becomes essential to market
the program to the CS department.
Announcing the program goals and
objectives should begin creating interest
in the program. Consider posting the
participant guideline in a centralized
location, so everyone can review
the expectations; then discuss how
participants will be matched and reserve
time to answer questions. Announcing
the program in the facility newsletter may
also help create interest and support for
the program.

TRAIN MENTORS
Training for the mentor role is important.
Even though there may be a small
percentage of “natural mentors” in the
department, there are still areas where
the mentors may lack experience. The
HR department can be a valuable ally when
training mentors, as many of the topic areas are
HR-related. Some of the key areas that should be addressed when
establishing a mentor training program
include:
• Outlining critical aspects of the
  mentoring relationship. Identify which
topics may be discussed and which
should not be included in the program.
For example, discussing the areas a
mentee should develop their skills,
such as peer interactions, is appropriate,
whereas discussing private conversations
of peer interactions is not appropriate.
• Making suggestions for determining
  the mentee’s needs and for generating
alternatives that address them. One
example may be utilizing e-learning
approaches when the mentee is unable
to attend formal classroom sessions.
• Identifying and outlining procedures
  for developing career plans.
• Establishing training and career
development opportunities within

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the department and the facility. The HR and Education departments frequently hold in-house classes on many career development topics at little to no cost.

- Offering training in communication skills.
- Offering training to develop relationship skills.
- Developing effective coaching and mentoring tactics.
- Providing problem-solving and conflict resolution suggestions.
- Ensuring resource availability. Many resources are available for career development within the facility. If the mentoree is striving to become a CS educator, ANSI/AAMI ST79 and AORN Guidelines for periOperative Practice will be beneficial and should be readily available in the CS manager’s office. The existing educator may spend some time with the mentoree to help them learn how to develop a training session. Then, when ready, they may allow the mentoree to teach or assist in teaching a departmental inservice or training session. For mentorees who strive to become a lead technician, supervisor or manager, a day of shadowing the person in the chosen position may be appropriate and insightful. Again, the HR or Education departments may have training sessions, videos and literature available for the mentoree’s use. Technical schools, junior colleges and other secondary education institutions may also have classes available to help prepare mentorees for their chosen goal.

MATCH MENTORS WITH MENTOREES

Appropriately matching mentors with mentorees is crucial for the success of the mentoring team. The mentoree’s goals and the mentor and mentoree’s personality types, learning styles, mutual areas of professional interest and work schedules should all be part of the decision process.

Once the mentors are matched with their mentoree, they should convene and develop a plan for meeting times, frequency and location. Mileposts should be identified and a plan for communicating success and roadblocks to the department management should be established. Future meetings should be focused and remain on the session’s topic. Developing a brief agenda or outline may help keep the meeting moving and on target.

OBJECTIVE 4: EXPLAIN THE NEED FOR A PROGRAM EVALUATION PROCESS

Mentoring efforts should be evaluated to assure that they are cost effective and achieving planned results. Also, like many other programs, continuous quality improvement (CQI) efforts are helpful as the program evolves to ensure that the mentoring efforts meet the needs of the CS department, the mentors and the mentorees. Advocates and departmental members will want to know how the program goals are being met and what changes should be made to improve the program.

The departmental manager should review the stated objectives and mileposts, and determine if the team is focused and staying on track. Meeting with the team to gain ongoing feedback about the program will help ensure the success of the next group. Coaching team members and adjusting priorities may be necessary to keep the team focused and productive.

CONCLUSION

The hiring process is expensive and time consuming; therefore, it is important to develop ways to retain existing staff members and promote job satisfaction. Providing a professional atmosphere in the CS department that encourages professional growth is a way to keep experienced employees – and an effective mentoring program is one important way to accomplish this goal. A successful mentoring program can increase job satisfaction and provide an intra-departmental promotion system that will help maintain existing staff, while providing qualified staff to move up the career ladder.

RESOURCES


WANT TO BE AN AUTHOR?

IAHCSMM is seeking volunteers to write or contribute information for our CHL Self-Study Lessons. Doing so is a great way to contribute to your own professional development, to your Association, and to your Central Service department peers. IAHCSMM will provide guidelines and help you with the lesson to ensure it will be an enjoyable process. For more information, please contact Julie Williamson (julie@iahcsmm.org).