Central Service Mentoring Programs

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
1. Define the terms “mentor” and “mentorship”
2. Explain the benefits of a mentoring program
3. Discuss how mentors can help the mentee
4. Identify steps for planning and implementing a mentoring program

MENTORING PROGRAMS ARE AN IMPORTANT TOOL IN TODAY’S Central Service (CS) department. An effective program improves employee satisfaction and retention, helps to develop future leaders in the department and creates a better-trained and engaged workforce. This lesson will discuss mentoring and how to plan and implement an effective mentoring program.

OBJECTIVE 1: DEFINE THE TERMS “MENTOR” AND “MENTORSHIP”
A mentor is defined as someone who teaches or gives help and advice to a less-experienced person. Mentorship is a relationship in which a more experienced or more knowledgeable person helps to guide a less experienced or less knowledgeable person. The mentor may be older or younger than the person being mentored, but he or she must have a certain area of expertise.

In CS, a mentor may be another employee of the organization or he/she may be a professional from outside of the organization. In either case, the mentor is a role model who shares experience, knowledge and advice to help the mentee grow professionally.

Mentoring can occur informally when a relatively inexperienced person asks for input from a “seasoned employee.” Alternatively, formal mentoring programs exist where experienced volunteers receive training in mentoring activities and then interact with selected staff for career development programs. There are numerous variations of opportunities for less-experienced members of the department to learn from more veteran colleagues. Mentoring relationships may be brief (e.g., the length of a
Mentoring relationships can translate to greater job satisfaction, which can mean a more positive work environment. CS departments might also experience less employee turnover as workers feel a greater loyalty to the organization. The facility might even use its mentoring program to attract new employees.¹

OBJECTIVE 2: EXPLAIN THE BENEFITS OF A MENTORING PROGRAM
CS mentorship programs benefit not only the employee (mentee), but also the mentor, the CS department and the profession, as a whole.

BENEFITS TO THE EMPLOYEE (MENTEE)
An employee who is mentored benefits by having a mentor in the department who can provide advice when greater knowledge and experience is needed. A mentor does not do the employee’s job; however, the mentor may demonstrate a task, guide the employee through solving a problem, or critique the employee’s work. Mentorship may help an employee feel less isolated at work and encourage him to interact more with others.

Problems that may hinder the mentee’s current performance can be addressed by their mentor. Higher levels of mentee job satisfaction has been known to occur, resulting in the decreased chance that a newly-employed CS professional will encounter job-related problems or resign from the department.

A mentor can provide a mentee with tips on career growth and introduce the employee to other professionals. As the employee matures in his or her career, a mentor can remain a valued adviser to the employee.¹

BENEFITS TO THE MENTOR
Mentors also reap rewards from the mentoring relationship. A mentor will likely feel positive about the opportunity to provide advice and make a meaningful difference in the professional success of a new staff member.

Mentors themselves learn as they interact with mentees. The opportunity to teach or advise others can increase the mentor’s confidence and own job satisfaction. Through listening to the concerns of the employee, the mentor develops a better understanding of the issues and stronger communication skills. If the mentor is a leader such as a supervisor, mentoring can improve his or her leadership/supervisory skills. Even if a mentored employee leaves the company, the mentor and mentee may maintain a professional connection, which may expand the mentor’s professional connections.¹

BENEFITS TO THE CS DEPARTMENT
CS departments that invest in mentoring programs achieve greater productivity in the workplace. Less-experienced staff members who are mentored can more quickly learn about the department’s culture and how to properly work within it. As the mentee turns to the mentor for advice, they make fewer mistakes on the job, thereby, minimizing losses to the employer.

MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS CAN TRANSFORM THE WORKPLACE
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BENEFITS TO THE CS PROFESSION
Mentoring in the workplace can have long-term benefits as employees become more self-directed and develop stronger communication and problem-solving skills. This allows for an organization to become more creative and focus its attention on growth, rather than training. Mentored employees value collaboration and sharing of information, which can lead to enhanced professionalism. CS employees who are mentored are also more likely to become involved in their professional organizations, which can help further their careers and the CS profession itself.¹

OBJECTIVE 3: DISCUSS HOW MENTORS CAN HELP THE MENTEE

ROLES OF A MENTOR
An effective mentor typically serves several roles:²

- **Trainer** – Mentors who are asked about specific on-job performance issues can provide applicable assistance and serve as an informal trainer.
- **Coach** – Mentors can provide positive
reinforcement about desired performance, and they may advise against actions that may lead to on-job difficulties.

- **Counselor** – Counselors do not make decisions for another person. Instead, they discuss the pros and cons of a situation. They ask open-ended questions to learn what the other person is thinking. A counselor provides benchmarking information that can help one to evaluate personal perspectives.

- **Guide** – Just as a guide safely leads someone unfamiliar with a geographic area to a particular destination, a mentor can help lead a mentee down the road to a longer-term destination in their professional career.

- **Role model** – The saying “actions speak louder than words” suggests mentees can learn a great deal from their mentors just by observing as they (the mentors) interact with others in the department.

- **Advocate** – A mentor in a senior position can emphasize the strengths and abilities of a mentee to those at higher organizational levels.

How exactly can a mentor assist a mentee? Examples of mentoring activities include:

- Helping the mentee develop a career ladder (a progression of increasingly more responsible positions);
- Advising about development activities that can assist the mentee to move toward career goals;
- Evaluating alternative education and training programs and courses of action to address on-the-job concerns;
- Providing applicable current education and training materials;
- Suggesting alternative courses of action to address on-the-job challenges/problems;
- Making special assignments and arranging for special training, if applicable; and

- Providing ongoing counseling.

**OBJECTIVE 4: IDENTIFY STEPS FOR PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING A MENTORING PROGRAM**

When starting a mentoring program in a CS department, there are many steps to consider. Figure 1 outlines possible steps for planning and implementing a formal mentoring program.³

**STEP 1: OBTAIN SUPPORT OF TOP-LEVEL ADMINISTRATORS**

Human resources personnel, managers, supervisors and others who support the need for a formal mentoring program should serve as advocates to top-level facility or departmental officials.

**STEP 2: DETERMINE MENTORING PROGRAM GOALS**

The previously noted overall goals, including benefits to the CS department, the mentors and mentees, are among desired results.

**STEP 3: APPOINT KEY PLANNING STAFF**

Those interested in developing a mentoring program are candidates to appoint.

**STEP 4: PLAN MENTORING PROGRAM**

Decisions will be required about how mentors and mentees will be selected and paired; what their responsibilities will entail; the “mechanics” of how/when the parties will interact; topics for which mentoring discussions are appropriate; and how the program will be announced, administered and evaluated.

**STEP 5: OBTAIN APPROVAL OF TOP-LEVEL MANAGERS**

Earlier input from these officials may have been requested and provided; if so, approval of the mentoring, as planned, is likely to be easier and faster. Hopefully, the mentoring program will be seen as beneficial, inexpensive to implement, and with few disadvantages that will require consideration during the approval process.

**STEP 6: IMPLEMENT MENTORING PROGRAM**

Program announcements, staff meetings, organizational newsletters, information in orientation programs for new staff members, and conversations between CS managers, supervisors and other personnel are among promotion possibilities. The availability of and procedures for the mentoring program should also be an integral aspect of applicable career development programs.

**STEP 7: SELECT MENTORS**

Effective mentors are usually successful, high-performing staff members with a track record of successful performance over many years and, probably, in several positions; however, they will also likely need to learn basic mentoring skills. Knowledge, skills and abilities of effective mentors frequently include:

- The desire to assist mentees;
- The ability to think creatively and to suggest problem-solving alternatives;
- The ability to motivate mentees;
- Effective verbal and/or written communication skills;
- An interest in assisting the department and the mentee;
- 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 made to the mentee; and
- Detailed knowledge about CS policies and work procedures.
STEP 8: TRAIN MENTORS
Topics to be addressed in mentor training sessions can include:
• Mentoring goals of the department, and for the mentor and mentee;
• Critical aspects of the mentoring relationship;
• Suggestions for determining the mentee’s needs and for generating alternatives that address them;
• Procedures for developing career plans;
• Training and career development opportunities within the department;
• Training in communication skills;
• Relationship skills;
• Effective coaching tactics; and
• Problem-solving and conflict resolution suggestions.

STEP 9: SELECT MENTEES
During informal mentoring activities, less-experienced staff may simply discuss issues of concern with a more experienced counterpart. In a more formal model, such as that discussed in this article, newly-hired staff members are assigned a mentor during the onboarding process, and this relationship is an integral part of the mentee’s planned career development program.

STEP 10: MATCH MENTORS WITH MENTEES
Considerations in matching mentors and mentees can include the extent to which the mentor has held similar positions to that of the mentee. In some instances, it may be beneficial to match gender and/or race, culture or class backgrounds to reduce barriers that may hinder trust. Also, mentors are typically not a staff member’s immediate supervisor or trainer. This is because the mentee may be less likely to discuss problems or to be candid about other matters if he/she is interacting with a supervisor or person responsible for initial on-the-job training.

STEP 11: MONITOR, SUPPORT AND EVALUATE (IMPROVE) THE MENTORING PROGRAM
Mentoring efforts should be evaluated to ensure they are cost-effective and achieving planned results. Also, like many other programs, continuous quality improvement (CQI) efforts are helpful to assure that the mentoring efforts better meet the needs of the CS department, the mentors and the mentees as it evolves.

IN CONCLUSION
The environment within which an effective mentoring relationship exists is one of mutual respect and trust, and productivity. A safe environment is also needed to facilitate professional learning and growth. Ground rules for managing the mentoring partnership can help to foster this environment and can include how and when meeting times are established; how and what discussion topics are determined; and how disagreements should be resolved. Sometimes, it may be necessary to utilize statements of confidentiality to help assure that neither the mentor nor the mentee shares each other’s confidences with others without mutual approval. Finally, any mentoring-related meetings should receive priority, and each person’s full attention should be concentrated on them.

RESOURCES
