

How Can You Fix Your Mentoring Relationship?



Question:

Recently I was asked to mentor a new employee in our organization. This individual is no older than my daughter and she seems to have trouble showing any initiative. I am finding the mentoring very time-consuming and frustrating. How do I make this mentoring role work?

Response:

The Benefits Of Mentoring

Mentoring can be a great way to transfer skills, knowledge and history to a new employee, benefitting both the mentee and the organization. Mentoring can also be a great benefit for the mentor who often gains a new perspective and an opportunity to learn a thing or two about what is up and coming in the industry.

The Mentors Role

The role of the mentor is not to provide direction on specific work functions but to provide advice, knowledge and guidance and enable the mentee to learn from the experiences and perspective of another. If this is a formal mentoring project undertaken within your organization, learn the boundaries of your mentor/mentee relationship. A good mentor program will generally spell out expectations for both the mentor and the mentee. Formal expectations should include a defined period of mentoring, for example 3, 6, 9 or 12 months. It will include a pre-negotiated schedule of mentoring conversations and tasks. Standard meeting schedules include weekly 15 or 30-minute communications (in-person, phone, email or a combination) or 1 hour chats, twice monthly. The mentee is often tasked with identifying potential agenda items.

If your organization has no formal mentor program guidelines and/or this is a new initiative, you may find it useful to create your own structure. You may also approach your organization and suggest they develop guidelines for your program. Check to see if your own professional association has a mentor program you can use as a base. Once you have these guidelines you can share them with your mentee and the two of you can move forward with this new agreement. Do not approach your mentee with a complaint about the existing relationship. Remind your mentee that you were both

new to this program and now you have useful guidelines.

Clarify Your Mentoring Role

If the mentoring relationship is extended as a de facto training relationship then you should try to understand the intentions and goals of the person who asked you take on this role. Step back and identify where your mentee's gaps are in terms of ability to accomplish work and then provide your mentee with information to augment training. Let your mentee know the expectations: to observe, take notes and then attempt tasks. Your role will then be to monitor and provide feedback to improve performance. Focus on refining your mentee's learning as time permits.

Taking Ownership of Your Feelings

It can also be useful to step even further back and look at your own personal thoughts and feelings about this situation. Is mentoring or even training a role that you had and/or enjoyed in the past? Have you offered to take on this role? If you have enjoyed it previously then you may want to examine what is in play in the current situation that has made a difference. Has something changed for you recently that is impacting your time and increasing your frustration? Is there something about this individual that does not fit well with your tolerance at this point in time? Often by looking at ourselves we gain perspective that enables an adjustment to better manage our thoughts and feelings.

Win-Win-Win

If you can embrace this opportunity to mentor a new person and are able to gain more perspective on how to manage your own reactions to a frustrating situation then this mentoring opportunity can be a win-win-win for the mentor, the organization and for you.