



MENTORING PROGRAMS: ART OR SCIENCE?

By Judy Hissong, CLM
President, Nesso Strategies



Mentoring programs are garnering more and more attention as we see our largest generation in the workforce nearing retirement, and the next largest generation entering our organizations. These programs have been around for years, and haven't taken hold for a number of reasons, including the difficulty in choosing how you initiate the mentor/mentee relationship. Do you assign mentor relationships when you hire someone? Do you require new hires to find a mentor within their first 30 days? Do you have mentors sign up for your program and require them to meet with their mentees in some interval? All of these are good moves toward mentoring, and the more we know about how to build the program, and

then create the structure for it, the more success we will have.

The additional challenge comes from the necessary transition of knowledge, also called succession planning, which has been avoided, circumvented, or otherwise uncomfortably advanced with little progress. How will you transfer the interpersonal skills and savvy while continuing to embrace technology as a tool for efficiency and profitability? What will you do to move your current culture into the future? These are questions leaders are asking, and the answers aren't easy. Have your senior leaders consider the ramifications of no succession planning

What if we marry mentoring and succession planning? This provides a path to transfer business skills that happens when a departure is announced, without concern as to a specific timeline. Mentoring and training happens inside the current culture, which fosters growth and consistency to your organization. This also prepares the organization for generations to come, and your people remain engaged through new learning processes and interactions. We don't have to reconcile the specifics of a succession plan on its own, we can include the revelations of a good mentor/mentee relationship to determine who is best equipped to succeed our departing leaders.

The challenge is creating the mentor program so that it is both desirable and sustainable. Successful mentoring programs have these things in common:

- They are 6 to 12 months in length of commitment.
- They have enrollment applications for both mentees and mentors. These forms ask what they want to get out of the program, and what they plan to give to it. The committee, or individual, that reviews these applications can now consider how these line up when matching mentors and mentees.

- Mentees and mentors create SMART goals together: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely. This important element ensures you have clarity for the outcomes of the program, and that the mentee/mentor relationship is built with goals.
- Establish success measures. Measure the success of the program by regularly measuring the participant skills that have been developed or improved.
- Train people in the program. The mentees and mentors. Provide education and practice skills including communication, feedback, giving and receiving information, and where to give advice and where to coach. Set the training program before people commit, and be sure you have buy in to the training and the relationship. Programs with established training more than double the success rate!
- Administer the program. Track communications and meetings, and evaluate the program during and after (surveys, face to face interviews). Look for ways to improve, revise, and enhance before you initiate your next program.

Mentoring is an art, a craft that can be honed with practice. Many professionals deem themselves “too busy” to mentor, and others profess their love of it, and avoid meeting with their mentee. This is where the science comes in, to guide the professional relationship with finite time requirements, intentional training and applications that make the best match possible, and measures the results on regular intervals.

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JUDY HISSONG, CLM

President, Nesso Strategies | Founder, Legal Leadership Institute

Judy understands teams. And she knows how to help you maximize the potential of yours. For over two decades, Judy has applied her vast knowledge of team dynamics, emotional intelligence, work/life balance, leadership, finance, and legal management to help law firms improve their people, process, performance and, ultimately, profits.

Bachelor's Degrees in Accounting and Physical Education | Master's Degree in Sports Management | Former Professional Athlete | Licensed Provider of Emotional Intelligence Tools | Certified Living Your Vision Facilitator | ALA Certified Legal Manager | ACE Certified Personal Trainer | ICF Professional Certified Coach

CONNECT WITH JUDY

619.546.7885 | judy@nessostrategies.com | nessostrategies.com | legalleadershipinstitute.com



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