

Mentoring as a Team Sport

Contributed by Gloria Boden, SDA/C, Wakefield Beasley & Associates

Revised December 2006

The AIA collects and disseminates Best Practices as a service to AIA members without endorsement or recommendation. Appropriate use of the information provided is the responsibility of the reader.

SUMMARY

Gloria Boden, a member of the Society of Design Administrators, discusses the importance of mentoring and addresses different mentoring models.

MENTORING BENEFITS FOR THE MENTOR AND PROTÉGÉ

When Odysseus was getting ready to leave for the siege of Troy, he appointed a guardian to his household. For the next 10 years, this guardian acted faithfully as teacher, advisor, friend, and surrogate father to Telemachus, son of Odysseus. The mythical guardian's name was Mentor.

Principles of modeling and mentoring have been key elements in the continuity of art, craft, and commerce from ancient times. Young boys were traditionally apprenticed to a master, a person who was considered excellent in his trade and who owned a shop or business.

Today a mentoring program may improve organizational and individual performance as well as improve the communication process within an organization. Through the partnership between mentor and protégé, leadership development can be provided with mutual development for mentor and protégé.

There are several mentoring models available. The traditional or "one-on-one" model used in a mentoring program is one mentor working with a single protégé. The strength of the traditional model is that it addresses the individual's needs in a free-flowing manner with no set agenda or plan.

The newer model is that of a learning group in which one mentor or learning leader works with a group of three to five protégés. In situations where only a limited number of mentors are available, this option might be very effective. Strengths of the learning group include the opportunity to learn various perspectives, creation of a peer network for the protégés, and assistance in providing the following kinds of insight for the protégé:

- Organizational insight
- Who hires and fires
- What is the culture?
- Standards
- Practices
- Goals
- Resources
- Benefits

In one particular case, an innovative method of mentoring was created to enable technologically out-of-touch corporate executives to catch up. For these executives, the Internet was changing everything so fast that they had to formalize a process to keep them up to date. As for the employees, they thought their leaders had been losing their technical edge and would be losing clients as a result. The founders established a Junior Board of Directors whose role is to evaluate technological opportunities and to stay on top of trends. Each member of this Junior Board of Directors had some particular area of expertise that the principals lacked. They met with the principals monthly to discuss technology trends and make recommendations. The younger were now mentoring the older—hence, "Reverse Mentoring."

THE UPSIDE AND THE DOWNSIDE

On the upside, mentor-protégé relationships can boost productivity through performance planning and increased teamwork. Protégés get highly relevant practice of needed skills without the cost of classroom training; there is no room to rent, no trainer to hire, and no excessive time off the job to compensate for. Senior people who participate as mentors can benefit from the fresh ideas of protégés and see their own styles emulated in the organization.

On the down side, people with high aspirations who see limited opportunity to advance are not likely to listen to a litany of the other benefits of facilitated mentoring. Also, instituting a mentoring program may add to the frustration of ambitious managers

who know there is little opportunity to advance and who see investment in a mentoring program as a misuse of scarce resources.

IS MENTORING FOR YOU?

To decide if your organization needs a mentoring program, ask why a mentoring program is needed. Determine the scope of the mentoring program. Here are some points you might want to consider:

- Does the need for developing people extend across all functions and down through all levels?
- Does your organization have enough people to match protégés with mentors who are two or more levels higher? A protégé who is at the next level below can be a too-close-for-comfort competitor to the mentor.
- Is there support from the top and throughout the organization? Does upper-level management want to “grow” competence rather than buy it?
- How will a mentoring program fit with other human resource development programs?
- Determine your firm's future succession planning needs. Succession planning is creating plans to perpetuate your organization.
- Consider labor shortages, the cross-cultural work force, and technological changes that may demand new skills.
- Is the company a target for a takeover or merger?

In reality, some organizations and some people will never be ready for mentoring. Organizations where strong commitment to developing and promoting people from within is not clearly evident probably should not consider facilitated mentoring. A lean organization, one that experiences many peak-and-valley workloads, probably does not have a large internal training and development department and may find it cost-effective to use consultants as performance coaches. Ultimately, the goal of the program should be to strengthen the profession

It is true, however, that both formal and informal mentoring have helped to create some outstanding administrators, managers, writers, artists, educators, and citizens. One classic example of mentoring was the relationship between the architect Charles McKim and his protégé Henry Bacon. McKim guided and encouraged Bacon. Many maintain the reason Bacon received the commission for the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., was due to McKim's influence.

RESOURCES

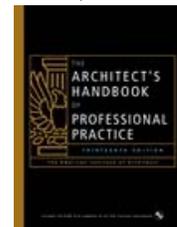
More Best Practices

The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic:

- 03.02.01 Mentoring Interns: A Firm Commitment
- 03.02.03 Seek Out the Many Rewards of Mentoring
- 03.02.09 Firm Supports Protégés Through Inclusive Mentorship

For More Information on This Topic

See also “Staff Development,” by Laurie Dreyer-Hadley and Kathleen C. Maurel, Assoc. AIA, *The Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice*, 13th edition, Chapter 9, page 242.



See also the 14th edition of the *Handbook*, which can be ordered from the AIA Bookstore by calling 800-242-3837 (option 4) or by email at bookstore@aia.org.



Feedback

The AIA welcomes member feedback on Best Practice articles. To provide feedback on this article, please contact bestpractices@aia.org.

Keywords

- Practice
- Personnel management
- Employment
- Professional development

Society of Design Administration



8 South Michigan Avenue, Suite 1000
Chicago, IL 60603
800-711-8199
sda@gss.net

This Best Practice is a contribution of the Society of Design Administration. The contents of SDA White Papers are considered the sole opinion of the author and do not constitute legal advice.