

Mentoring In The Modern Times : Role Reversal

Ms. Tripti Tiwari
Assistant Professor
BVIMR-New Delhi

E.mail: tripti.tiwari@bharativedyapeeth.edu

Dr. Aparna Marwah
Assistant Professor
BVIMR-New Delhi

E.mail : aparnamarwah@gmail.com

Dr. Seema Chaudhary
Assistant Professor
BVIMR-New Delhi

E.mail : tatha.seema@gmail.com

Abstract

Reverse mentoring is an innovative way to encourage learning and facilitate cross-generational relationships. It involves partnership of a younger, junior employee acting as mentor sharing his experience and expertise with an older, senior colleague as mentee. It is an alternative form of mentoring and a technique to gain technical expertise of the mentor and emphasizing leadership development of the mentees. Reverse mentoring in fact helps in building bridges between generations. Young employees offer a fresh perspective on technology, social media and consumer culture. The idea is to bring the same perspective in the field of education.

OVERVIEW

Dr. Srinivasan, a Senior Professor at a reputed university got a smart phone from his only son residing abroad as a birthday gift. His son gifted him the smart phone so that they could

connect on Skype. He felt helpless for not able to connect to him and faced difficulty using the phone. He felt helpless and perturbed. He decided to get rid of it and resort to his older mobile phone.

A young faculty Mr. Sumit Bakshi, joined the university as an Assistant Professor. Dr. Srinivasan was the Head of Department for Sumit and during their routine professional transactions, Dr. Srinivasan accidentally developed a rapport with him and began to learn the smart phone nuances from him.

Today Dr. Srinivasan is on Whatsapp, Twitter, Facebook and remains in constant touch with his son and friends settled abroad.

INTRODUCTION

In organizations, the “typical” mentoring program will often involve a hierarchical relationship with a senior manager or professional as mentor and a more junior person as mentee. Coping with the existential cut-throat competitive scenario and pressure of survival of the fittest, there can be a plethora of valuable learning experiences between peers and sometimes reversing the traditional hierarchy. In this scenario, the primary learner is the senior person and emphasize the experience of the junior person.

Reverse Mentoring has assumed gaining importance because people sitting at senior positions can easily lose touch with the external world, miss out on certain skills and need to understand the perceptions and concerns of people at lower levels. It has usually evolved in two forms-technical and diversity.

Technical reverse mentoring provides a safe friendly environment for executives to explore skills such as IT, both in terms of how they use technology and the vivid picture of how the technology and workplace trends are evolving developing with the changing times. This form of mentoring can provide personal exposure to technologies which can help in crafting out a strategic response to technology change. On the other hand it helps in creating clear understanding how leaders think and visibility at higher levels. Diverse reverse mentoring

helps in educating leaders about managing diversity and cross-cultural issues thereby exposing them to an open forum.

Reverse Mentoring leads to Role Reversal which indicates that knowledge isn't a one-way street and it is in everyone's best interest to share expertise. It leads to pairing of a younger junior employee (mentor) with an older, senior colleague (mentee) thus making way to an innovative practice to encourage learning and facilitate cross-generational relationships. In the long run, it helps in building the leadership pipeline, fostering better intergenerational relationships and enhancing diversity initiatives and driving innovation.

IS IT REAL AND APPLICABLE?

General Electric's former CEO, Jack Welch, is generally credited with introducing a formal reverse mentoring program in 1999 when he ordered 500 of his top managers to find young employees who teach them about the Internet.

Consider Citibank who's recently partnered with University of Miami's School of Business Administration to launch a reverse mentoring program. Citibank hopes this six month program will, "tap into the digital wisdom of the younger generation," providing Citibank executives with a prospective they might not have thought of. These types of programs are becoming extremely popular as companies attempt to stay savvy to evolving trends. It's also a growing method of recruitment for companies. As one executive put it, "If we understand the next generation better, we can motivate and cultivate talent better."

Key Learning's for those who teach and train : Flipping The Coin

The idea of flipping mentoring on its head. As Educators, we should start implementing the same. What needs to do be done?

- *Make the perfect match* - Reverse mentoring involves two people with extremely different, experiences, backgrounds and cultures. Therefore it is imperative to create the ideal mentoring partnership. The young mentor needs to possess good social skills and have the confidence to interact with and teach senior management.

- *Set a level playing field* - Start the reverse mentoring program with a fun and informal orientation. The orientation should give the mentors and mentees an opportunity to interact with each other as individuals – not as the boss of the whole place or as the newbie who is fresh out of grad school. This will set the stage for the whole program and in time help erase traditional hierarchies. It is essential to remove barriers of status and position in order to create a safe open environment.
- *Set specific formal goals but allow space for individual innovation*
It is important to list out what the reverse mentoring program aims to achieve in general, for all participants. However each mentoring partnership is unique. So mentors and mentees may also enjoy and benefit from helping each other in ways not defined by the program. A young mentor might help a executive choose a new cell phone or a CEO might share tips on how a new entrant can advance his / her career.

The Road Ahead

When Junior Level Employees mentor Leaders, they get the opportunity to contribute to the organization in new ways. These young mentors are sought after for their knowledge, skills, opinions, ideas, perspectives, and even their advice. And this in turn fuels morale, engagement, and ultimately retention. The ripple effect continues when the senior-level Mentee who reciprocates by extending mentoring to the junior-level Mentor based on the trust they've already established. The practice could pave the way for a new standard of open dialogue in business stretching far beyond technology. Ideally, learning and information sharing should cross all lines of seniority and responsibility. Advancing yourself in today's volatile economy is all about continuous learning.

And what better way to learn than by creating a 360-degree dialogue with all generations.

Teaching Notes:

Teaching Objectives:

The case explores the use of a comparatively new way of training and development that possibly is applicable in all fields of management. Due to increasing use of different I.T tools and techniques, a continuous need for learning and development always exists but without extra investment for the same.

The Case study gives a brief idea about such a method which when adopted by the organization, specially focusing on those who educate and train while taking care of technology gap thereby creating a healthier work environment. The case is written with an intention to be used effectively by faculties and students of management of different specializations, or executives or entrepreneurs who wish to understand how they can prove to be an asset for the senior level by just sharing their knowledge. Specific topics addressed using this case are:

- Concept of Reverse Mentoring
- Problems faced by senior working professionals while using new technology gadget
- Benefits that technologically advanced generation can provide
- Strategies for successfully utilizing the existing knowledge inside organizing
- Gap analysis and remedial steps taken while strengthening relationships among senior and junior employees

Suggested Study Questions:

1. What are the common ways adopted by senior level who are trying to learn new technologies?
2. What are various challenges you might face while trying to adopt reverse mentoring technique?
3. What are the important factors to ensure successful adoption of reverse mentoring in any organization?

Suggested Analysis:

1. What are the popular methods adopted by senior levels who are trying to learn new technologies?

Traditionally, mentoring and teaching involves the senior and experienced, sharing out of their own experience. But when it comes to learning a new technology, the most commonly adopted methods are:

- Learning through the guide or manual provided

- Asking someone of same age or level
- Using the internet

2. What are various challenges you might face while trying to adopt reverse mentoring technique?

There can be lot of problems faced by seniors who are exposed to the new way of mentoring i.e reverse mentoring. Common challenge that might occur are:

- Ego issues regarding learning from a junior
- Feeling of shame
- Inability to adopt quickly with the new technology
- Focusing more on the organizational values and thinking juniors might not underestimate their judgment
- Thought that the junior might not take them seriously once mentoring/training is over

3. What are the important factors to ensure successful adoption of reverse mentoring in any organization?

In order to ensure that if any organization plans to adopt the reverse mentoring technique, they must focus on the following things:

Hire people with right attitude. New comers should have attitude to learn adopt and finally lead.

Take regular surveys. This might help to understand what the young blood feels about the organization and get their fresh perspectives in order to change anything that might not be working using the old methods.

Set up regular meetings. This would help the team understand each other's capabilities, which would in turn help in planning the right team for the reverse mentoring process.

Schedule trainings regularly. It is very essential to conduct regular trainings first to provide clear understanding of what organization goals and values are. This would help the Junior employees to provide their valuable inputs and the seniors would be able to identify who is best in any task for making them their own mentor later.

Suggested Readings :

- <http://talkbusinessmagazine.co.uk/2013/10/10/employee-effect-role-reversal-decision-making/>
- <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/careers/career-advice/role-reversal-mentoring-from-the-bottom-up/article4171259/>
- <http://bestpractices.diversityinc.com/talent-development-mentoring/is-mentorship-the-new-mentoring-case-studies-from-ey-deloitte-att-dell-and-hilton/>
- Corporate Executive Board: "GE's Reverse Mentoring Program" January 2002

- The Art of Mentoring: Lead, Follow, and Get out of the Way. Peddy, Shirley. Bullion, 1998. Books
- Beyond the Myths and Magic of Mentoring: How to Facilitate an Effective Mentoring Process, Revised Edition, Murray, Margo, with Marna Owen. Jossey-Bass Inc., 2001