

Workforce Strategies

Focus

Coaching and Mentoring

Systematic Matching, Training Contribute to Success

Coaching and mentoring are age-old elements of working life. More seasoned individuals help develop their colleagues. Often the relationship is an informal one or is the way a boss imparts to employees how to do their jobs. In recent years, however, many employees have initiated formal approaches to coaching and mentoring as a powerful method for transforming the company culture, improving retention, and realizing employees' development potential.

Match Making: with "I Opt"

At the Federal Aviation Administration Southwest Region . . . workers have to sign up to get into the mentoring program and each match is custom-made. At the FAA, mentors and proteges are paired in a month-long process using a mixture of tools. FAA offers training for mentors and mentees, but taking the training is optional.

Matches are based on what proteges need, but often a great deal of assessment is needed to determine what that is, said Mae Frances Leach, director of organization development for the Southwest Region based in Dallas. Leach and three others run the mentoring program, which is open to 5,000 employees.

The FAA mentoring program was developed as part of its diversity movement to include those who had been excluded from top leadership roles and to help them get the skills and opportunities they would need to succeed in new jobs, Leach explained.

One of the off-the-shelf testing tools, "I Opt", is especially helpful in matching mentors and proteges. The structure of "I Opt" has been an "invaluable" tool for giving people in the mentoring relationship feedback, Leach said. This tool has given the program more credibility than anything else it does, she added.

"I Opt" originated from an organizational engineering theory based on the concept that each individual has a preference for a particular strategic style profile with observable behaviors interpreted by others. Using the "I Opt" tool when making matches, Leach's office focuses on compatibility of the partners in regard to how people make decisions, how they solve problems, how they pay attention to tasks, the kind of supervision they need, and how they respond to changes.

Matches do not work without a systematic approach, Leach said. The process includes a

needs assessment of the protégé similar to 360-degree feedback-performance ratings from managers, peers and direct reports. Information from assessments, counseling sessions, and training helps proteges form goals. To help them more clearly articulate their goals, the program uses off-the-shelf programs such as "Career Point" and "Do Your Best." First-level supervisors are encouraged to participate during this phase because such inclusion tends to reduce barriers to the mentoring process, Leach said. The mentoring program helps proteges align their goals with objectives in individual development plans or actions plans, which are then used as part of performance management for the proteges, culminating in an action plan.

The action plan specifies activities, resources needed, timetables, and results management for the mentoring team to follow. Typical activities usually include the protégé shadowing others, writing articles for publication, making presentations, and attending training classes outside of the essential training plan.

If a mentor is needed with a certain unique feature, but the right person is not already in the mentor pool, Leach's group makes a point to find such a person and invite him or her to be a mentor. Praise makes it hard to refuse the invitation, she said. Mentors must be willing, however, to make a commitment from the beginning to spend a certain amount of time each month with the person they say will support and develop.

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Coaching and Mentoring, (staff author)

This is an excerpt from Workforce Strategies. It is an interview with Dr. Frances Leach of the Federal Aviation Agency. The article outlines how Dr. Leach uses Organizational Engineering technology to contribute to the success of the coaching and mentoring programs at the FAA.