

MENTOR TRAINING

Overview & Training Objectives

A mentor is someone who serves as a counselor or guide. Being asked to serve as a mentor is an honor. It indicates that the organization has confidence in the person's abilities and trusts him or her to have a positive impact on another person.

Mentoring for new employees not only helps employees settle into their jobs and the organization's environment, but also increases employee retention. The use of a mentor may be an informal, short-term situation or a more formal, long-term assignment. Moraine Valley Community College utilizes an informal program.

In an informal mentoring program, the mentor helps the new employee for a limited period of time. Advice from the mentor may include the most basic of information about everyday routines including tips about "do's and don'ts" not found in the employee contract or handbook to helping the employee learn job responsibilities. A mentor available to answer routine questions also saves time for the supervisor or manager. In addition, new employees often feel more comfortable asking questions of a mentor instead of a supervisor.

In a program of this type, mentors are volunteers. Forcing someone who does not want to serve as a mentor to do so can quickly create problems. Obviously, someone with a negative attitude, who might encourage a new employee to gripe and complain, should not serve as a mentor.

Parameters

Both a mentor and the new staff member (mentee) need to understand the parameters of the mentoring relationship. These may be more important in a long-term, formal mentoring situation, but can also influence the success of short-term, informal mentoring.

- The mentor's role is to teach, advise, and help transition the new employee into the college. The mentor does not interfere with the supervisor or manager's decisions. The new employee, while expected to seek the mentor's advice on various issues, is not bound to accept that advice.
- Confidentiality is important. Both parties need to feel confident that discussions remain between them--not immediately relayed to a supervisor or manager.
- Certain areas may be considered off-limits. The mentor needs to outline these areas at the beginning.
- Decide in advance how you will communicate. Will you have regularly scheduled meetings? Will discussion be face-to-face, over the telephone or even via E-mail. Both parties need to make their preferences known at the beginning and reach an acceptable compromise if the preferences are different.

- Discuss time limits. If the mentoring period has a time limit the mentor should state that at the beginning.
- Discuss time commitments. Again, this may be more critical for the long-term, formal mentoring. The mentor must expect to give the new employee adequate time, but the newcomer should not expect excessive amounts of time. Setting a schedule at the beginning (example: meet once a week the first month, then once a month after that) avoids irritating misunderstandings later.
- Openness and respect. Both the mentor and the person being mentored need to be open and honest, yet respect the other. A mentor who withholds important information or comments does not contribute to the other person's success. However, such comments should be delivered with tact and courtesy--and (even if somewhat hurtful) received with an open mind.
- Professional relationship. The relationship between the mentor and his or her mentee is a professional one, not a personal one. This is particularly important for the new employee to understand.
- Compatibility. It would be helpful to use some kind of matching system for the mentee and mentor. This will help both understand each other's communication styles, strengths, and limitations.

Expected Outcomes

At the end of training, a mentor should be able to:

- Practice active listening skills to help assist in the new employee's transition
- Practice asking a variety of questions to help new employee resolve issues
- Provide non-judgmental feedback
- Make directive comments and provide suggestions appropriately
- Identify effective ways to help a new employee deal with change and adjust to a new environment
- Convey a welcoming and positive representation of the college

(from G.P. Smith. "Coaching and Mentoring: The Importance of Having a Good Mentor." 2007)