CHRONUS

10 TIPS FOR STARTING A SUCCESSFUL MENTORING PROGRAM

PLANNING EQUALS MENTORING SUCCESS

You may have decided to start a mentoring program for your business school, but now comes the hard part—planning it in a way that ensures maximum success. Where should you start? Luckily, we've collected our top 10 tips from our program-planning experts. Read on to find out our recommended best practices and kick-start your program today.

1. DEFINE YOUR LEADERSHIP OBJECTIVES & SECURE LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

You would be surprised by the number of mentoring programs without clear objectives or strong buy-in. Such programs often struggle because there is no consensus of what success looks like for business school students and alumni participants. Good objectives are SMART – specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound. For example, "The goal of our mentoring program is to prepare students to enter the workforce, and have 90% of senior-status program participants placed in a full-time job within 4 months of graduating." Such objectives provide direction to program participants and help organizational leaders understand why they should offer their support. Make sure to identify a senior leader who believes strongly in the program and is willing to serve as its champion. This person will prove to be a critical resource and advocate.

2. FIND A STRONG, PASSIONATE PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Selecting the right program manager is critical to your business school mentoring program. A strong program manager doesn't guarantee success, but a weak one will guarantee underwhelming results. Program managers provide essential ongoing support, training and coaching to participants. They identify opportunities to engage students and alumni while troubleshoot issues, working with others within career service to make ongoing adjustments to keep the program thriving. They also are instrumental in promoting the program to potential participants and serve as the programs ambassador to the department or college. Passion, excellent communication and organizational skills are a must.

3. BUILD FLEXIBILITY INTO THE PROGRAM

Successful mentoring programs balance the dueling needs of structure and flexibility. A level of formality is needed within the mentoring process, participant training, progress tracking, and communication to help the program run smoothly. Yet mentoring is about individual learning and growth, which means participant needs will vary in outcomes sought and preferred methods of learning. When planning a mentoring

program, identify areas that require flexibility and build them into the program. Many university programs have a blended structure which allows students and alumni more flexibility in scheduling, to encourage building stronger relationships and open communication in less formal settings.

Will your mentoring program be one-to-one or a group mentoring format?

4. PUT YOUR MARKETING HAT ON

When new mentoring programs are introduced in a university, there is generally natural enthusiasm. Yet this enthusiasm doesn't always translate into high participation rates. A common reason is the absence of effective promotion. Don't assume potential alumni mentors and student mentees understand the benefits. For many, this will be their first opportunity to participate in mentoring. You will need to convince them participating is worth their time and effort. Beyond mentor and mentee participants, key leaders and faculty need to be educated on the benefits of the program and professional value to the students. Promotional avenues can include using a variety of student and alumni media resources, such as student newspapers, websites, social media pages, and student organization partnerships.

5. ENCOURAGE ALUMNI MENTORS

For example, consider the needs of alumni mentors. Building a solid base of mentors can be a challenge, and understanding the positive and negative factors that impact alumni participation is key. Connect with alumni through respective alumni organizations and identify their needs and issues. Once you've identified them, look for creative ways to reinforce positive drivers and lower the hurdles of negative ones throughout the mentoring process. Alumni mentors are often busy professionals with limited time to spend. How can you help them be more efficient with the time they have to dedicate to mentoring students? Also consider recognition and reward strategies for participants. Formally recognizing mentor involvement can be very motivating to those mentors and help attract new ones. Ideas to think about are how mentoring can benefit their current job, and how their organizations will relate to a younger generation of future employees.

6. PREPARE PARTICIPANTS FOR SUCCESS

Productive mentoring doesn't just happen. Provide training and administrative support to mentors and mentees regarding program and individual goals, participant roles, mentoring best practices, and your mentoring process. Help mentors and mentees clarify their own objectives. The need for training and guidance doesn't end after the initial orientation. Provide tips and best practices throughout the mentoring program to help participants stay on track and get the most out of the program. Utilize platforms such as social media, group lectures, and webinars for alumni and students to participate in as opportunities for further engagement and learning from the mentoring process.

7. EMBRACE THE ROLE OF MATCHMAKER

For mentoring to thrive, a solid relationship needs to form between professional mentor and student mentee. A critical step in the mentoring process is matching mentors to mentees. Consider giving students a

say in the matching process by allowing them to select a particular mentor or list their top three choices based on desired career industry. Mentoring management software can improve and speed up the matching process. Through intelligent profile matching functionality, suitable mentors are recommended based on learning needs and compatibility. Through intelligent profile matching functionality, software will recommend suitable mentors based on students' professional career aspirations and personality compatibility.

8. TRACK, MEASURE, LISTEN AND TUNE

How will you know if your mentoring program is a success? You won't unless you track program and connection metrics and ask for feedback. At the program level, build metrics around defined objectives (see Tip #1 above). Also, be sure to assess the outcomes of individual mentor and mentee connections. One of the easiest ways to measure success and capture feedback is through surveys. Ask participants and stakeholders how well the mentoring program met their goals and the goals of the organization. Also ask them for their ideas for improving the program.
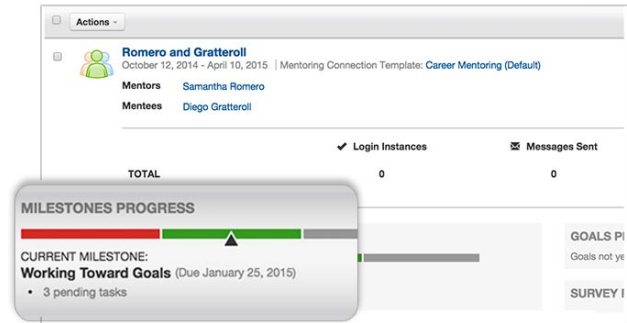
9. BRING CLOSURE TO INDIVIDUAL MENTORING CONNECTIONS

Without defining a closure point, the mentoring process can wander aimlessly. Create milestones to encourage participation, and design a formal process that brings closure to the mentoring experience. Within this process, provide an opportunity for both the mentor and mentee to reflect upon what was learned, discuss next steps for the mentee, and provide feedback.

10. BROADCAST SUCCESS

After a mentoring program begins, the focus naturally shifts into operating the program and keeping it running smoothly. Keep in mind, there are likely many more potential student participants out there waiting for signs that joining the program is worth their time and effort. Continually demonstrate the value of the program, recognize participant contributions, and spotlight successes. Update websites and social media pages with highlights from effective student-alumni partnerships. These efforts will bring energy to the program, expand participation, and increase overall support within the business school.

CONCLUSION

Now that you've learned a few best practices for making your mentoring program a success, we hope you'll consider Chronus software for mentoring as your program management tool to easily start, manage, and

measure mentoring programs online. With Chronus software, you can drive participant engagement while simplifying program administration, resulting in a more engaging, cost-effective student mentoring experience. This configurable, cloud-based solution is ideal for use by corporations, government entities, academic institutions and associations.

ABOUT CHRONUS

Chronus is the leader in mentoring software. Our configurable platform is powering hundreds of successful mentoring programs for some of the world's largest companies, educational institutions, and professional associations. With unique MatchIQ™ technology, a guided experience for participants, and the most configurable platform in the industry, Chronus enables mentoring programs to efficiently scale and drive more strategic value for organizations worldwide.

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Unleash the Power of Mentoring®

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