

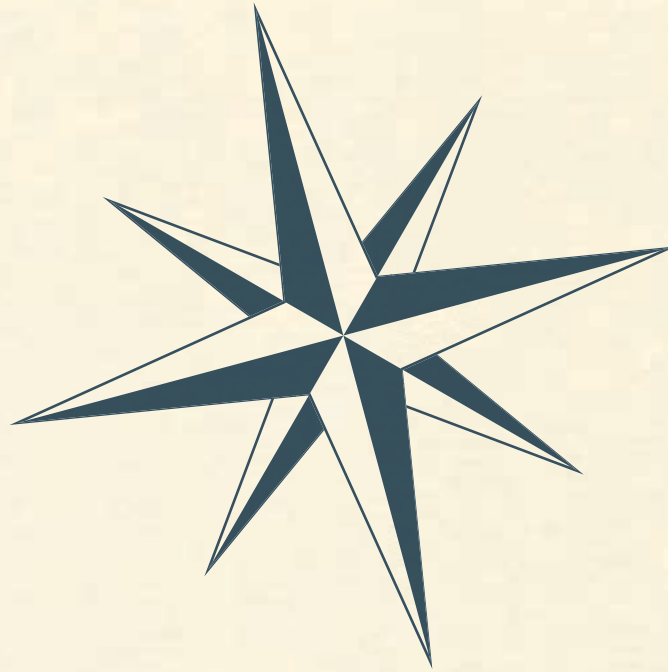
A person in an orange shirt and a man in a light green shirt are holding a large, unfolded map in front of them. They are standing on a grassy hillside with mountains in the background under a blue sky with scattered clouds. The map is the central focus, with text overlaid on it.

# Mentoring

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## **YOUR ROAD MAP TO SUCCESS**

*By* Nona Chigewe



ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR EMPLOYEES HAVE ONE VITAL purpose in common: both are striving to accomplish a life-changing, impactful goal that will propel them to new, extraordinary heights. On their way to reaching this destination, both are engaging in initiatives and searching for tools that will guide them and execute the journey to success.

There are many ways to reach goals and achieve each item sketched on our life's "to do list," but we can't discount a sure-fire mapping tool used to direct organizations and their employees to their final destination, their own private island called success.

This "GPS" is not new on the market but has been improved as more and more organizations and individuals have used it on many of their "road trips." What is this fool-proof guide? Mentoring. Mentoring is a developmental tool used by organizations and individuals to accomplish growth, professional enhancement and organizational movement towards business objectives and personal achievement.

As we focus on innovation and staying ahead of the curve to gain an edge over the competition, it is important to clarify that innovation is not always creating or doing what has never been seen or done before. Sometimes, it is taking a formula that we know has worked in the past and revising the elements to adapt to changes and advancements in the world, in an industry or in a specific company. That is what is occurring in the world of mentoring. This time-tested formula has been around for decades and continues to have impact because of the way the tool has been reinvented to fit today's fast-paced, demanding world.

Let's examine the concept of mentoring. Mentoring is when one individual connects with another to share knowledge, experience and skills in a specific area of expertise. One individual is in a position of need and desires the knowledge and experience in that specific area of expertise. Traditionally, this connection was seen as a one-to-one, face-to-face relationship between one senior- or executive-level individual and one junior- or entry-level individual. This is no longer the case. Those involved in a mentoring relationship are no longer expected to be paired by hierarchy. In fact, mentoring is no longer seen as a

relationship, but more of a partnership, according to Judy Corner, director consulting services/director of mentoring at Insala.

"In today's mentoring relationships, mentors are learning as much as the mentees," Corner said. "Because there may be situations in which the mentee has the knowledge but just doesn't know how to apply it, it is no longer expected that an executive or senior-level person with years of experience has to be the mentor in the partnership."

The form of mentoring partnerships has evolved greatly, allowing mentoring to remain relevant and valid in today's environment. One-to-one has grown to include group mentoring. This can include one mentor coaching several individuals or one mentee with more than one coach. Group mentoring can even go as far as having more than one mentor and mentee sharing and exchanging knowledge. Then there is flash mentoring, which is a one-time meeting between mentor and mentee. This can also occur in a group setting or—similar to speed dating—speed mentoring, in which mentors and mentees meet for a few minutes and rotate to another partner until the end of the mentoring session.

Another form of "flash mentoring" also includes sequential mentoring, in which a mentee will meet with different mentors through a series of one-time meetings over a specific period of time. The idea behind flash mentoring is to provide meaningful and valuable learning opportunities requiring limited monetary and time commitment. And yet another evolution is situational mentoring, which takes a mentor who is highly experienced in one specific area of expertise and that alone becomes the focus of the mentoring partnership. Even though these forms of mentoring have the purpose of getting an objective accomplished more quickly, one truth remains the same: When pointed to the right objective and goal, all forms of mentoring are effective when it serves the intended purpose.

Face-to-face mentoring is another concept that was once a rule but is now an option. Due to the expansion of technology and social media and its fast-evolving nature, the way in which we communicate changes daily. This growth has impacted and

modified the mentoring partnership. Platforms such as Skype, Facebook, email, Instant Messenger and video conferencing now create a way for individuals to connect in a mentoring relationship when that would have been impossible in the past due to geographic location and cost.

However, even though these platforms allow mentoring to take place without in-person meetings, Vetri Vellore, CEO of Chronus, says that a blended model is recommended.

“By blending virtual meetings with traditional face-to-face meetings in a mentoring relationship, you can get more done while creating the trust needed in a mentoring relationship,” Vellore said. “Including both the personal touch of face-to-face to build trust and rapport and the convenience of virtual meetings to ensure that everyday life does not get in the way of keeping the partnership moving, aids in creating a more enriching experience. This can be as easy as connecting by phone or meeting at a conference or professional event.”

To ensure that a mentoring partnership works, there are a few elements that cannot be substituted or removed. All mentoring partnerships serve the purpose of development and growth. No matter the form, at the end of the day both parties are involved in this partnership for the betterment of self. In order to make sure this happens, all mentoring partnerships must be based on trust. Trust is what keeps the partnership moving forward and allows goals to be met. Without it, there is no open communication, the ability for the mentor and mentee to connect becomes challenging, or even impossible, and eventually the partnership diminishes. To build that trust, the next element that must be present in order for a mentoring partnership to work is honesty. Without honesty, there can't be trust in the relationship. And, conversely, honesty is built on the trust formed between mentor and mentee. Mentors need to trust in the partnership enough to provide honest critical feedback that will transform their mentee. Mentees need trust in order to be honest about their needs, their ultimate goals and what is it they want to learn and take away for the partnership.

Once trust and honesty is established, another critical element of the relationship is that the mentee “take the driver's seat” in the mentoring relationship, according to Corner.

“The partnership must be mentee-driven and mentor-guided to ensure that the ultimate goals are achieved, needs are met and results are produced as expected,” Corner explained. “The mentee is the center of the partnership and defines the type and structure of the partnership. The experience the mentee receives is determined by the mentee, so the mentee needs to tell the mentor where it is he/she wants to go and what they are driving towards. The mentee is the driver on this road trip. The mentor is there to guide and serves as the one who steps on his/her set of brakes, if needed.”

Once the mentee has taken the driver's seat, there are a few steps the mentee and mentor must take to ensure the partnership is on the correct course. Together, they must create an agreement for the partnership, similar to a contract among partners. This



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agreement is used to assist the partners by outlining regular meeting times, goals and objectives for the partnership, how goals will be accomplished and when, they need to stop and redefine any terms for the partnership should they get off course or the road gets a little bumpy. Discussing these terms early on, when the connection is made, provides a road map for both the mentee and mentor to follow. Constructing this map together guarantees that both parties have the same guide and are heading toward the same destination. Without a map to follow, mentors and mentees may find that goals are not being met, communication has broken down and no development is taking place. By the time the partners have realized they have lost their way, it may be too late to recalculate their route and find new directions to their expected results.

When deciding to participate in a mentoring partnership,



participants should be aware that dedication and commitment will be necessary. All the right elements can be present, parameters set and directions mapped out, but without the willingness to dedicate time and the determination to see goals achieved, mentors and mentees may find themselves falling short. The output will be determined by the input. Whether the partnership is for one meeting or for several months, the return on investment for hard work is the knowledge and professional growth achieved at the end.

Both the mentor and mentee will be rewarded for the time committed to their mentoring partnership. Mentors obtain a sense of satisfaction that comes from knowing their investment in someone else is positive and assists in bettering the future for that individual. Not only is the mentor working to develop the mentee, but he/she also is helping to improve their profession and society as a whole because what the mentee has learned is going to be applied and hopefully produce positive outcomes.

On the other side of the partnership, the mentee is in a position to be a sponge, soaking up and learning all that he/she can from the mentor. They are also receiving individual, one-on-one attention. Corner reminds us, "The last time we all received individual attention was in kindergarten. The opportunity to have the focus be on you does not come around every day, and mentoring provides that for the mentee." According to Vellore, during a mentoring partnership, the mentee is offered a "crystal ball," which offers a glimpse into your future. "You get to see your career through the eyes of someone who has walked in your shoes. What other resource allots you that opportunity? I don't

know of any other."

The benefits do not stop there. Organizations that offer mentoring programs receive value as well. Mentor programs allow organizations to truly take inventory of their talent and internal resources. Leaders arise from mentoring programs, and talents are recognized and discovered. Organizations are provided insight and discover leadership talent that otherwise may have been overlooked because some individuals excel more easily when given individual attention. Corner points out that organizations also benefit from "just-in-time" learning.

"Mentors within an organization know the immediate needs of the organization. When providing guidance to the mentee, these needs are top of mind and can be applied directly back to the job," Corner explained. "Mentoring is one of the most cost effective and time efficient tools an organization can use to develop its employees. It is the one tool that taps into the wealth of knowledge a company has to teach others."

The knowledge described here by Corner belongs to the employees of any organization because they bring their diverse backgrounds, skills and experience, which can be shared and exchanged with others. The resources are right there within each and every organization. "Organizations that do not have a mentoring program in place are missing a great opportunity," she continued. "Mentoring offers an opportunity to develop staff with relevant, timely information that will impact the business at little to no cost."

So when is a good time for organizations to consider implementing a mentoring program? The questions that Vellore challenges organizational leaders to ask themselves are:

When is it *not* a good time for organizations to implement a mentoring program?

Is there any business situation that is not applicable to a mentor program?

Let's examine it. "Mentor programs can be used in many situations. For example, when an organization is growing and bringing on new employees to keep up with that growth, one of the key concerns is finding time to bring new employees up to speed while ensuring that current employees are able to succeed," said Vellore.

Another is when an organization is introducing new products or entering new markets. There is a great deal of research that needs to be done for the entire organization to reduce the number of "bloopers" that could occur. Even when an organization has to downsize and must make tough decisions about employees, programs or business entities to keep or let go, having a mentor program in place can be a great resource.

Whenever there is a need to reduce the time it takes to transfer knowledge and continue to move at the current pace of business, a mentor program is a great platform to facilitate the process. This process results in new employees becoming acclimated to the organization more quickly, staff members sharing their experiences that are applicable to the new products or markets the organization is ready to take on, the emergence of



undiscovered talent that might have been let go and the birthing of new ideas that can be used to awaken a dying business.

These examples are just a few ways in which mentor programs can provide fuel for organizations and their leaders. Today, many organizations look to their mentor programs for:

- succession planning
- talent management
- leadership competencies and skill sets
- employee engagement
- team building
- career and professional development
- employee onboarding
- teaching and knowledge sharing

“Mentoring is applicable to every organization at every time,” Vellore reiterates.

There are a few check points that organizations will want to build into the mapping of a mentoring program for their employees. The most vital aspect is the structure of the program. Just as each mentoring partnership must have goals in order to work, every mentoring program must have overarching goals as well. There should be a clear and focused understanding as to what the program should do. The expected outcome will need to be well defined and communicated to organizational leaders as well as participants. Everything that the mentor and mentee engage in should point back to the program’s overall objectives. In addition, the goals of the program must align to the business strategy of the organization. Mentor programs will impact the business and will do so in a positive and constructive manner if the goals of the program support the direction in which the organization is headed. This becomes the organization’s road map for its mentoring program.

Keep in mind, as business initiatives evolve, so should the goals and objectives of the mentoring program. From time to time, organizations will need to stop and review these goals and objectives to keep up with change. The plan that has been crafted for the mentoring program should not be written in stone, because there is always more than one route that can be taken to reach intended destinations. The job of the organization is to select the best one to take depending on the conditions that surround the organization. What is the “weather” like (what is the business climate in which we are conducting business)? Will there be “traffic” (any industry roadblocks or new competition of

## Thinking about becoming a mentor or mentee

### *A Good Mentor:*

- Is a good listener
- Knows how to give constructive feedback
- Communicates well
- Receives constructive feedback
- Empathizes with others
- Cares and wants to help others
- Is available and accessible

### *A Good Mentee:*

- Is willing to learn
- Is willing to drive the partnership
- Is ready to put in the effort to receive what it is they want out of the partnership
- Is a great listener
- Is willing to communicate and identify needs

which to be aware)? Do we have enough for gas (what is our budget)? How are we traveling (what are the resources needed to accomplish the business initiatives)? Do we currently have access to those resources? These are questions to ask when creating the structure of the mentor program and when reviewing if the structure is still working or if adjustments are needed to stay on track.

The health of a mentor program can be determined by inspecting a few factors. The number one element to inspect is the stated goals. Whether goals have been accomplished says it all and shows whether the structure that was put in place is achieving what it was set out to do.

Also, organizations should review whether the impacts that the program was expected to make are being experienced and whether impacts that weren’t anticipated are being realized. Participation in the program also speaks volumes. When those involved in the program are seeing their own goals come to fruition, it shows that the program is working. Actually having participation and individuals wanting to take part is another indication that mentoring is doing its job. Also, if the program was created in a manner that aligns with an organization’s

business objectives, then management should begin to see the effects in greater knowledge sharing, greater productivity and more workplace enthusiasm.

Is there any reason why an organization or individual should not become involved in a mentoring program? Are there disadvantages of mentoring? I couldn’t find any. We all have a place in life that we are working hard every day to achieve and a final destination that we are striving to reach. What is great about this, it usually isn’t somewhere that someone else hasn’t already been to. With all the other stops on the way to success, we meet individuals who can change our lives forever: Individuals who are willing to talk about where they have been, how they got there and what it took to get to where they are today. Why not take the time to stop and engage with them? Why not provide the forum that allows others to connect with one another, encouraging learning and applying new knowledge to grow oneself and the companies for which they work?

When asked why he is such a big advocate of mentoring, Vellore replied, “Its impact is in helping people change their lives by transferring knowledge and providing guidance. It’s helping people realize their goals. I was able to see my guidance and advice play a role in improving someone else’s life.” ■