



THE TWO OF US

Are mentoring schemes still making good business sense?

by AMANDA WOODARD

The world of work can be a lonely place. Whether starting a new job and trying to assimilate into the company's culture, or standing on the precipice of a big decision that will have an impact on thousands of colleagues, it's good to have someone to talk to.

That's why many large corporations have taken mentoring – formal and informal – to their hearts. And even if they're not quite sure what value it's providing, there is a feeling that it makes good business sense.

Peter Wilson, AHRI's chairman, says mentoring starts from the challenge of meeting your responsibilities at work but ultimately is about the total growth of an individual and how that's going to apply in a company setting.

CASE IN POINT: AHRI

AHRI's scheme originated in 2008 when the decision was made to consolidate mentoring programs that had been run by state councils into one national scheme. Since then, more than 2000 mentees have participated in the year-long sessions – requirements are only that they hold an HR role and are members of AHRI. Anne-Marie Dolan, development and research manager at AHRI and organiser of the mentoring program, says confidentiality is paramount and mentees are matched with mentors from different organisations who aren't in competition with each other, and usually from different industries. "We stay in close contact with them and generally only have a handful of partnerships that don't work out, say five to 10 out of 150," says Dolan. "Success is measured by the fact that an evaluation service is performed mid-year and at the end of the program and we have consistently high responses."

Feedback has revealed some interesting benefits, says Dolan. "Mentees report that the program provides a good sounding board. They may know the answers to their questions but getting it affirmed by someone outside the organisation gives them confidence before they go ahead and enact it. Secondly, it's a chance to vent or

debrief as well as an opportunity to discuss what's happening in the organisation as well as outside it."

For the 300 or so mentors in the AHRI scheme, there have been unexpected benefits, too, says Dolan. "Several have said that it helped them to reconnect and allowed them to view HR through fresh eyes. Issues that newer practitioners were facing were things that they weren't seeing in more senior roles. You sometimes lose sight of what you face in a more hands-on position."

As an example of how mentoring schemes are evolving and responding to the world of work, AHRI is now exploring other mentoring options, such as targeting small businesses, graduates and peer mentoring.

Peer mentoring in particular has received a lot of attention of late. While it's expected that executives will have a broader network of people beyond their own organisation who have different ideas about solving problems, nevertheless businesses are aware that to attract and nurture talented people mentoring should be part of what they offer.

"Peer mentoring is part of the new model of leadership where being able to talk to someone about complex leadership issues is seen as vital," says AHRI chairman Peter Wilson.

CASE IN POINT:

JOHNSON & JOHNSON

At Johnson & Johnson, the healthcare products and pharmaceuticals giant, mentoring is helping to shape future leaders. Elayne Verner is leadership development manager at Johnson & Johnson Medical and says its formal mentoring program is part of an enterprise strategy targeting talented individuals at a senior level with the purpose of building “a strong succession pipeline for key leadership roles and accelerating progression”.

Into its second year, the program is modelled on “the best bits from other parts of the company within the Asia-Pacific region, and tailored to a local approach”, explains Verner. A shortlist of mentees is drawn up by J&J’s executive board, after which the board cross-matches with mentors in other parts of the company (J&J Medical is one of four businesses in Australia). “The idea behind that is to broaden their enterprise mindset as well as focusing on specific competencies. For example, someone in finance could be matched with someone in medical affairs to give more diversity of thinking,” she says.

Occasionally, mentors and mentees will struggle to know how to spend their time and may need guidance. In what Verner calls “a high-touch program”, the mentor and mentee relationship is closely monitored with monthly meetings and progress feedback to HR to ensure leadership objectives are being met. “Mentoring can be quite open-ended or it can be career focused. You want to allow enough freedom for it be driven by the mentee and yet have enough of a process wrapped around it. We try to provide enough structure without stifling the drive from the mentee to suit their development needs,” says Verner.

While J&J arranges its mentoring in-house, some organisations choose to contract out. Sophie McCarthy’s company, McCarthy Mentoring, caters to the government, business and not-for-profit sectors. She says mentoring isn’t just about attracting and hanging on to talented employees, “it’s about

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SOPHIE MCCARTHY,
MCCARTHY MENTORING

keeping people engaged and encouraging them to take responsibility for their careers – taking the initiative, asking for [mentoring] opportunities or looking for them rather than waiting for them to be offered.”

While it’s mostly organisations that approach McCarthy seeking mentors, individuals make up around 15 per cent of her clients. “These people might be in the executive team but they’re at a level at which they can’t talk to peers,” she explains. “Or they may be new to leadership and don’t have people they can confide in.”

Confidentiality is paramount for the success of any mentoring relationship and McCarthy typically matches mentees with mentors outside their own organisation and even outside their profession. McCarthy works with around 100 mentors across the world, half of whom have been with her for more than 15 years. She agrees the process is not unlike a dating service. “We’re looking for a mentor they will work well with, who they are going to respect and who they will find challenging – and we’re fitting personalities together.” The process begins with a brief from the company and face-to-face interviews with individuals. Some people (and organisations) are seeking very specific objectives from a mentoring



TIPS ON GOOD MENTORING

PETER WILSON, AHRI



Get to know each other in the early meetings because value alignment and level of comfort are very important. Don’t be impatient and ensure that you are dealing with someone you can trust.



Be proactive in what you are trying to achieve and assess progress as you go along.



As a mentor, do your homework. If you are dealing with bullying for example, give advice on tactics, how to stand up and get your job done, and feel better about yourself. Discuss what worked and what didn’t.



Mentoring should have a lot of ‘ah ha’ moments when you get insights and see a challenge in a different light. For example, the aim may be to become a CEO and there may be a realisation that ‘it is not for me’. A minority don’t achieve their objectives but are happy with their conclusion.



Know when to say goodbye. Most mentoring associations last between 12 to 18 months. In some instances mentor and mentee become intimate informal advisers for each other’s career after the scheme has closed.

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NATIONAL PRESIDENT, AHRI

experience while others just want a confidential sounding board for their ideas and problems.

Mentoring has a cascading effect, says McCarthy. “People who have been mentored successfully are often the best advocates. When it has been offered to you, you’re pretty excited about opening it up to someone else.”

Traffic isn’t all one-way in the mentor/mentee relationship either. Between senior and junior employees, exposure to the next generation’s thinking is proving to be invaluable for mentors, says Wilson. “Reverse mentoring is occurring more frequently, where the mentee teaches the mentor. It’s happening particularly in the realm of social media.”

Wilson, whose book *Make Mentoring Work* explores the history and evolution of mentoring to the present day, says Asia has also been an important driver in highlighting the significance of mentoring to business success. “Competitive pressure forced Western companies to look at the way Asian businesses operate. They are primarily family businesses and hierarchical but they work very co-operatively with older generations mentoring the young.” He recounts that former Commonwealth Bank of Australia CEO Ralph Norris mentored a Chinese woman who was a banker from HSBC. “The insight he got from her influenced his decision to appoint a Chinese-born woman as his head of CBA in China.”

In Australia, cross-organisational mentoring has been particularly successful,

believes Wilson, particularly for advancing the careers of senior women executives. “A situation where, for example, a CEO of company A mentors someone in company B works well because the chairmen are all looking for female, non-executive directors to mentor (because they’re under pressure of quotas) and they’re getting the best of the crop who then go on to be mentors themselves.”

CASE IN POINT: QANTAS

Qantas, one of McCarthy’s clients, has run a mentoring program for female employees since 2006 when seven women were selected to take part. This year 25 employees are being mentored, including a pilot and a young engineer. Gabrielle Curtin, Qantas’ executive manager, group organisation development, sees the scheme as a way to accelerate the professional development of talented employees. “We tend to partner individuals with people who will really stretch them and extend their view of themselves and their role. It helps them think more strategically about what they are doing and why, not just in their current role but in their future career,” says Curtin.

At a time when Qantas is going through a company-wide transformation program, and in a business environment that is rapidly responding and reacting to external events, it’s important to give managers time out for mentoring, says Curtin. “We believe it helps to transform managers into more reflective executives, which in turn strengthens our leadership capabilities,” she says.

CASE IN POINT: WOMEN

Investing in mentoring can have long-term strategic benefits, helping build a more diverse leadership group. At Qantas, CEO Alan Joyce has led from the top as one of the male champions of change promoting and mentoring talented women into senior roles. He is regarded as an enlightened boss and is often the deciding factor in whether senior women are sponsored up and through an organisation, says Jen Dalitz, founder of Sphinx, a social enterprise that promotes women in leadership. “If you have a boss who has gender on the radar and is focused on

targets, then as a woman you win the jackpot,” she says. One woman whom Dalitz has mentored received great advice and support in one division of a large organisation. “She then moved to another part of the business and had a very bad experience that left her thinking: Is this the same organisation?”

The reason mentoring is particularly important for women, explains Dalitz, is that “for men, mentoring happens a little more naturally and informally in a work context. They are more comfortable giving and receiving advice; women tend not to seek those opportunities or feel comfortable taking them. Therefore a mentor becomes one of the key people who can strategise the next move in their career.” Dalitz has found that a lot of women are paying for mentoring themselves because they’re seeking independent advice.

While any individual development is generally well received by company employees, measuring the success of it rarely goes beyond the anecdotal. At Qantas, Curtin believes this needs to change. “Women coming off the program say it’s been great for networking across the organisation but it would be better if we could prove that they were able to collaborate with others to get complicated cross-business strategies executed.

“I do think a lot of organisations are mentoring now and they’re not too sure of the benefits but they don’t want to pull it or change it so they cross their fingers and say it must be doing something,” says Curtin. “We are starting to look at outcomes such as: have you changed your job?; what are your influencing strategies?; have you done more complicated work? We are in the process of getting sharper with measuring the success of it.”

In the current economic climate where development budgets are being squeezed, assessing the benefits of mentoring becomes more important, says Dalitz. “They’re not expensive to run but they have a huge impact on levels of presenteeism and productivity. Where else could companies spend and get such a big return on their investment? Mentoring is a great opportunity.”

CASE STUDY



MENTEE:

AMIE SANFILIPPO

1. Tell us about your current role, qualifications and experience.

I am an HR advisor for HCF, Australia's largest not-for-profit health fund, and have been in my current position for three years. As my role is generalist in nature, I really enjoy the variety this provides. Broadly I am responsible for providing advice, support and training to my main client group, the HCF Dental Network, which consists of around 300 staff. Day to day, I act as a point of reference for staff and line managers on employment, remuneration and performance management matters. Other responsibilities include managing workers' compensation claims, re-negotiating Enterprise Bargaining Agreements and managing the HCF Dental Assistant Traineeship.

I completed a bachelor of business (majoring in HR and IR) and have worked in HR for the past eight years, gaining experience in various industries such as insurance, hospitality and higher education.

2. How long have you been in the mentor program?

This is my first experience as a mentee and I began the program in July last year.

3. Tell us about your first session.

After getting to know each other and agreeing on how often we would meet, Athena and I talked about our backgrounds, why we entered the HR field and our career progression. Athena was particularly interested in my motivation for joining the program and what I hoped to achieve.

4. How has Athena been of help to date?

I really enjoyed Athena's approach to mentoring and found it very effective. Athena kicked off the mentoring by suggesting that I select a number of goals to focus on over the next year.

The goals varied from 'having' goals to 'being' goals, which related to both my work life and personal life. After selecting my goals Athena provided guidance on how to formulate SMART goals (smart, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-bound) and reviewed my action plans. Since undertaking the program, I have received a significant pay increase and will be acting in my manager's position for a period of time while she is on leave.

Separate to assisting me achieving my goals, Athena supported me with preparing difficult conversations that I needed to have in the workplace, allowing me to learn from her experiences, forwarding helpful learning materials and guides and encouraging me to apply for my manager's maternity leave position.

Most importantly, Athena helped me by being open minded, willing to listen and understand, and by sharing her positive approach.

5. Would you encourage other young professionals to join the program?

I would definitely encourage other young professionals to join the program. It is a fabulous learning opportunity and one that I have continued to learn from – particularly when reflecting back on the program and reviewing the goals I had set. I also think that by taking the initiative to undertake a program such as this, young professionals are able to show their employer that they are serious about managing their own career and getting ahead.



MENTOR:

ATHENA CHINTIS

1. Tell us about your current role, qualifications and experience.

I lead the HR function for the Property Council of Australia, which is the leading industry group for Australia's \$600billion property industry. My role is busy, challenging and diverse – I'm responsible for the day-to-day operations and

strategic direction of the organisation's HR agenda. My career in HR has spanned 20 years and includes various management and specialist roles, mainly within the finance sector. I have graduate and post-graduate qualifications in HR, and am a chartered member of AHRI.

2. How long have you been in the mentor program?

This is the fifth year I've been involved as a mentor in the AHRI mentoring program.

3. Tell us about your first session.

When Amie and I first met, she'd just had a performance review and wanted to use that as the impetus for setting some program goals, but we took it one step further. I used the 'One2One Mentoring Sort Cards' (developed by McCarthy Mentoring). This is a really easy-to-use exercise and it helped us identify a number of personal and professional goals that Amie wished to tackle over the next 12 months. From there, we developed action steps to work towards achieving those goals. I was really impressed with Amie's enthusiasm and willingness to learn and take on new challenges. She was a fantastic mentee.

4. How do you feel you've helped Amie?

I know that Amie appreciated our discussions and the advice I gave on a number of fronts – personally and professionally. Career growth was one of Amie's goals. She put her hand up for an internal promotion opportunity and I was stoked when she was successful! To be honest though, Amie came up with the answers herself most of the time. I just acted as the sounding board and made sure she stayed true to herself and the original goals she set.

5. Would you encourage other professionals to share their time?

I was surprised to see one of my old uni friends at an AHRI mentoring event. When I asked what she was doing there, she reminded me that I once advised her to consider being a mentor. So yes, I would encourage other professionals to share their time. I've really enjoyed being part of the program. It's a great opportunity to give back to the HR profession and it's satisfying to see others develop and grow. **HRm**

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