

Leaders Developing Leaders

By Garry L. Mc Daniel, Ed. D.

In 1997, the Corporate Executive Board, a highly respected research institute, concluded a comprehensive study of over one hundred non-profit, high technology, healthcare, manufacturing and service organizations on the topic of leadership. The purpose of the research was to learn what advances and challenges existed in the area of leadership development across these many organizations. The findings are sobering:

- Most organizations are facing some form of 'leadership gap' in their management ranks either in number or qualification
- This is true for all businesses including non-profits, small retail operations, young, high growth companies as well as mature conglomerates
- Leadership shortages are a very real threat to any organization's ability to execute against current strategy or future operations
- Poor management and leadership is the number one reason people leave organizations; lack of direction, connection to others and a feeling of purpose are more important than pay.
- The cost of inadequate leadership manifests itself through failed organizations, postponed new products and services and delayed expansions (Corporate Executive Board, 1997)

Clearly, there is a lack of qualified leaders in far too many non-profits. Successful executives agree there are two ways to find the leadership talent you need. First, you can hire them. That is expensive and time consuming, but sometimes necessary. The second way to obtain qualified, motivated leadership is to "grow your own." This approach is much less expensive in both time and money and has the added bonus of producing positive, immediate effects on the morale and productivity of your workforce.

Growing Your Own Leaders

It is highly probable that there are willing, rising stars available to be identified and groomed for leadership positions within your organization. You will also be glad to learn that there are also practical, cost-effective methods of developing the leadership talent your organization needs to meet the current and future challenges

without increasing pay. One of the most effective methods for growing strong, productive leaders is through mentoring. Mentoring is receiving increased attention in the non-profit and business world because:

1. When implemented properly, it works
2. Mentoring can be implemented successfully in small or large operations
3. Bottom line results are apparent, long-term and substantial
4. Employee turnover drops almost immediately saving advertising, interviewing, hiring and training costs

What is Mentoring?

Mentoring involves matching a respected leader in your organization with an employee who exhibits potential or can profit from targeted personal or professional development. Sometimes mentoring takes place when you match the employee with a respected industry leader who is not a part of your business. Within Associations, Boards and non-profits, volunteer leaders can mentor each other as they rise through the ranks of elected leadership.

This article will focus on using your staff leaders to mentoring your own rising talent. The expressed objective of the mentoring process is to assist the employee to achieve some defined developmental goal. The mentor should be an individual who is a role model, an exceptional performer and committed to both the business and the mentoring process. The mentee is not a passive learner, but plays a very active role by participating in the identification of their developmental needs, pressing the mentor for clarity, understanding and following through on agreed upon actions. The manager of the mentee also plays a key role in providing the necessary support and environment to enable the mentee to learn and grow. It is important that the manager be actively involved and informed of the mentees activities, plans and learning so that the manager can perform the functional role as on-the-job coach.

Benefits of Mentoring

A mentoring relationship is motivating and challenging for both the mentor and mentee as it lays the foundation for existing leaders to share their wisdom and experience in areas such as organizational understanding, strategy, operations and professional knowledge. Mentoring is also motivating to other members of the workforce who witness the potential for lateral and upward mobility within their organization. Organizations with whom I have implemented mentoring programs report that this is a very beneficial process for the organization, mentee and mentor.

Non-profits reap immediate benefits from mentoring programs through:

- Improved performance and productivity by mentors and mentees
- Improved organizational climate & support for goals and values
- Improved selection and development of emerging leaders
- Opportunities for managers and professionals who have reached a plateau to grow and be challenged
- Dramatic reduction in turnover & related expenses

Mentors report significant benefits:

- Mentoring builds the mentor's reputation and status as a role model and leader within the organization
- Mentees challenge the mentor's accepted ways of working and perceiving the organization
- Mentees occasionally assist the mentor with larger tasks and problems

The key beneficiary of the mentoring process is, of course, the Mentee. These individuals report additional benefits including:

- The opportunity to expand their knowledge and understanding of the strategic, technical, financial and interpersonal aspects of the organization
- Enhanced morale and organizational loyalty
- Improved visibility to executives

Steps for Mentoring:

There are four essential elements to a formal mentoring program. The first step is to identify potential mentors and match them to mentees. The best matches occur between mentors who have demonstrated they are effective at developing others and have the experiences needed to help mentees achieve their developmental goals. Second, train the mentors and prepare the mentees for their respective roles. Great matches don't mean great success. Mentors need to learn

how to listen effectively, resolve conflicts and provide appropriate feedback. Mentees need to clearly understand their role and how to keep their manager informed during the mentoring process. Third, the mentoring process needs to be closely monitored. A skilled observer should monitor progress to ensure that the mentors and mentees are meeting appropriately, are achieving success on the job, and to provide occasional coaching if needed. Finally, the mentoring process should be evaluated. A formal evaluation is vital to document and communicate results, benefits and make improvements for future participants.

Mentoring in Good Times and Bad

An advantage of mentoring is that it can be implemented in any organizational setting or business climate. For example, if your non-profit is undergoing or expecting to experience rapid growth, it is advisable to be growing the leadership you need to take advantage of the potential opportunities. In a downturn, mentoring can help you to reduce turnover among key employees by offering them the chance for challenge and professional growth. When facing a highly unstable or competitive economic environment, mentoring can ensure your business has the talent needed to weather uncertainty and maintain employee morale. If the findings of the Corporate Executive Board cited at the beginning of this article sound familiar to you, then mentoring may well be the process you need to develop your future talent and ensure continued growth in this turbulent and dynamic business environment.

Dr. Garry Mc Daniel is an Austin-based management consultant, trainer and author who has designed effective mentoring programs in high technology, healthcare, government, non-profit and small businesses. He is author of *Conflict To Cooperation: A Process for Mediating Group Differences* (2002) and *Managing the Business: How Successful Managers Align Management Systems with Business Strategy* (1999).

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