THE TRAINING CONNECTION'S MENTORING FRAMEWORK

In the past decade, the traditional workplace has shifted dramatically to become mobile, global, and continuously evolving. To stay competitive, members of today's workforce must continuously adapt to current trends and new directions. Their success depends on how well they pursue their career goals while increasing their contribution to their organization.

Having access to a mentor does not guarantee promotion, but having access to wise counsel and advice from a seasoned mentor can help employees learn to handle various situations, enhance their development, and avoid some pitfalls that can derail a career or delay a promotion.

Mentoring partnerships may vary in their level of formality and time commitment. They can be long-term relationships over the length of a person's career, or short-term and situational to help a person solve a specific problem or make a key decision.

The Training Connection's (TTC) Mentoring Process embraces all forms, including supervisory mentoring, situational mentoring (the right help at the right time), formal mentoring, and informal mentoring (nurtured over a long period).

Mentoring's benefits are real, and so are the challenges if it's not implemented effectively. Our mentoring framework is designed to address critical success factors that need to be in place to encourage and launch a successful mentoring system. Based on input from various program managers in public, private, and nonprofit organizations, TTC's mentoring framework provides key questions you need to consider before launching a formal or informal mentoring process and offers mentoring best practices.

The steps below are effective whether you design a formal or informal mentoring process, or target six—or 60—mentoring partnerships.

STEP 1: PLAN THE PROGRAM'S PURPOSE AND DESIGN

Programs with the greatest impact and longevity are built upon a thorough process of designing and setting objectives.

A carefully selected group of stakeholders should meet to design the program's purpose and objectives based on the organization's specific needs. The program's purpose will drive its goals, which will, in turn, drive its design.

Questions to consider:

PURPOSE:

- ♦ Why is mentoring important to the organization? How will participants someday describe their experience in the program?
- ♦ What is the organization's mentoring philosophy?
- ♦ What key organizational priorities or issues can a mentoring process address or support?

- ◆ Will the process be linked to another program: career/leadership development, new employee onboarding, recruitment, succession planning?
- ◆ Is the organization willing to invest time and money in this program?

DESIGN:
- ◆ What type of mentoring process would work best? (formal, Informal)
- ◆ What type of training medium would work best? (live, webinar, on-demand webcasts)
- ◆ How will top management support be achieved?
- ◆ What's the length of the mentoring commitment? (one meeting, one month, three months, longer)
- ◆ What's the typical amount of time participants should expect to invest in a formal mentoring partnership? (2-4 hours per month, less, more)
- ◆ Will partnerships be able to meet during work hours, or on their own time?
- ◆ Will mentorees complete and follow a Mentoring Agreement and Mentoring Action Plan?
- ◆ Will there be a "no-fault" termination option?
- ◆ Will mentors and mentorees craft a confidentiality agreement?
- ◆ Will supervisors play a role?
- ◆ Who will be the internal program manager and/or coordinator?

It's also important to identify a program support structure and outline the roles and responsibilities of a Program Champion (the senior executive who endorses the program) as well as a Program Coordinator (the individual responsible for implementing the mentoring program).

Practical Example

The result of this meeting will be the overall purpose of the program and its organizational and individual goals:

Purpose: Increase job satisfaction and job fit.

Organizational goals:

- Ensure employees understand the core skills, values, and behaviors necessary for success.

- Build and retain a well-rounded cadre of employees reflective of workforce diversity.

- Strengthen communication, trust, and collaboration across divisions.

Individual goals:

- Take responsibility for individual career and professional development.

- Recognize skills needed for success and find developmental opportunities needed to develop those skills.

- Gain an understanding of organizational values, mission, and culture.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY POTENTIAL MENTORS AND MENTOREES

The success of any mentoring program depends on careful recruitment and selection of mentors and mentorees. Selection criteria should be based on the program's stated goals.

> **Practical Example**
> If the mentoring program's goal is to develop a future pool of leaders, the program should seek applicants (mentorees) with leadership potential and mentors who are themselves leaders.

A variety of approaches can be used to identify and select participants. Three of the most popular are:

1. Voluntary or self-nomination
2. Personal recommendation from a supervisor, peer, or colleague
3. Mentoring Design Team nomination (typically for mentor selection only)

It's essential to begin educating participants about mentoring from the moment they apply. Consider framing the application process so it challenges applicants to self-reflect:

♦ Do I realistically have the time to commit?
♦ What do I have to offer?
♦ How will mentoring help me?

Keep the process short and efficient for everyone's benefit. Long applications are cumbersome to read and complete. Whenever possible, consider web-based tools such as **The Mentoring Connection**. Keep in mind that information provided in the application process (i.e., mentor/mentoree biographies) will be used to facilitate suitable mentoring matches.

Questions to consider:
♦ Is the program open to all employees, or will a certain number of mentorees be selected?
♦ If the number of mentorees will be limited, what is the selection criteria?
♦ How will potential mentorees be educated about the program (time commitment, roles and responsibilities, gaining supervisor's support, matching process)?
♦ How (or who) will distribute print and electronic marketing materials?
♦ What will you do if you don't get enough volunteer mentors?
♦ Who will notify those who are not selected, and how will they be notified?

STEP 3: FACILITATE A JOINT MENTOR-MENTOREE-SUPERVISOR ORIENTATION

Sponsoring a joint orientation will help mentors, mentorees, and supervisors understand the concept and process of mentoring. The joint orientation includes information about the program's history, goals, roles, responsibilities, and program support structure. In addition, orientation explains the matching process and offers participants characteristics to look for when identifying a mentor or mentoree. Whenever possible, this session is presented live; however, TTC also offers a series of webinars for mentors and/or mentorees not located in the Washington, DC, area.

Note: A special feature of the Dynamic Mentoring Orientation is a speed-mentoring process, which has been carefully designed to connect program participants with each other and open doors to new contacts and opportunities.

STEP 4: MATCH MENTORS AND MENTOREES

A variety of ways to match mentoring program participants range from formal matches by an outside committee/task force to a more informal one that employs a "bring your own mentor" philosophy.

Practical Examples: Formal & Informal Matching

Formal Matching Process

Biographies of mentors and mentorees are electronically distributed to each group (i.e., mentorees review mentor biographies, and mentors review mentoree biographies). Each participant then prioritizes his/her mentor selections in terms of preferred pairings and identifies individuals who might be poor or unworkable matches.

The Program Coordinator collects this information and makes final matches based on the mentor's capability to support mentoree needs, as well as participants' stated preferences.

Self-Initiated Matching Process

To identify and select a suitable match, mentorees are encouraged to review mentor profiles via **The Mentoring Connection**. Mentorees often make the mistake of assuming the best mentoring match is someone with a similar style. While mentor-mentoree compatibility may offer a comfortable relationship, it does not always result in a great match. The best matches are often ones in which key differences exist.

Once mentorees have narrowed down their mentoring choice, they will indicate interest in being matched with the mentor via an email to the mentor. The mentor will have the opportunity to accept, decline, or refer the mentoree to an appropriate mentoring match.

Mentors should take the time to look into their mentoring prospects to ensure any issues important to them are addressed early in the process. This helps increase the likelihood of mentoring matches resulting in positive experiences for both partners. **We recommend that mentors commit to no more than one mentoring match at a time.**

The bottom line: Every effort should be made to give both mentors and mentorees a "voice in the process" and access to a volunteer pool of mentors.

Questions to consider:
♦   How will mentors and mentorees have a "voice" in the matching process?
♦   What are the guidelines for matching?
♦   What happens if a partnership is not working?
♦   What are the guidelines for re-matching?

STEP 5: RECOMMEND MENTORING TRAINING FOR PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

A great way to kick off the formal mentoring process is to encourage mentors and mentorees to attend Dynamic Mentoring Connections Training. This program provides mentors with the right mix of mentoring skills to help them share their wisdom of experience. Mentorees learn how to take advantage of the mentoring opportunity and play an active role in identifying a suitable mentoring match, as well as to sustain momentum once the match has been established. Dynamic Mentoring Connections Training also gives mentors and mentorees tools needed for successful mentoring relationships. For example, they will have a Mentoring Agreement, which outlines how the partners will work together, and a Mentoring Action Plan, which outlines the mentoree's learning goals and activities.

Whenever possible, this session will be presented live; however, TTC also offers a series of webinars for mentors and/or mentorees not located in the Washington, DC, area.

Note: Dynamic Mentoring Connections Training is ideal for matched mentoring participants (attending together) or anyone considering a formal mentoring relationship who would like to prepare for this new role.

STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE MENTORING PROCESS

Once mentors and mentorees have finalized their match and attended Dynamic Mentoring Connections Training, they then implement their Mentoring Agreement and Mentoring Action Plan. We recommend that the Program Coordinator check on the mentoring partnerships throughout the year by providing periodic progress reviews, mentoring forums, and/or one-on-one personal contacts.

Questions to consider:

♦ How will the Program Coordinator check in on the mentoring partnerships?

♦ Are there any group learning experiences they will have access to (mentoring forums, brown-bag sessions, speed mentoring activities, etc.)?

STEP 7: EVALUATE AND TRACK PROGRESS

Having mentors and mentorees participate in progress reviews—one 30 days into the partnership, one at mid-point, and one at the end—has great benefits. Reviews give participants the opportunity to share their challenges and successes. This information gives the Program Coordinator an opportunity to make mid-point or end-of-program adjustments and enhance current or future mentoring programs and partnerships.

Feedback may be collected a variety of ways, such as with online assessments (via **The Mentoring Connection**), personal interviews, and group feedback sessions (facilitated live or via webinar). In addition, more subtle indicators to gauge the effectiveness of the mentoring program may include:

♦ Attendance of mentors and mentorees together at various training events.
♦ Degrees of progress mentorees make on their Mentoring Action Plans.
♦ Casual comments and anecdotes the participants offer.

Evaluation is the last step in the mentoring process, but its success depends entirely upon how well the program was planned up-front. Program purpose and goals must be clearly defined to be effectively measured, evaluated, and improved when necessary.

Questions to consider:

♦ How will the Program Coordinator track the success of the mentoring program?

♦ What results will indicate success?

♦ How will the Program Coordinator collect and evaluate the data?