

HELP WANTED

Tie mentorship into employee training



By Brian Justice

Tell me, and I forget. Teach me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I learn.”

These words express the essence of truly effective mentorship: a personal investment in someone else’s career development pays off in the short-, mid-, and long-term and for all stakeholders.

A study of more than 1,000 employees concluded that mentoring has a positive impact on both mentors and mentees and fosters employees that are more highly valued by the business.¹ The study found that 25% of employees who were mentored got raises, mentors were promoted 6 times more often, and mentees were promoted 5 times more often.¹ And retention rates were higher, too: 72% for mentees and 69% for mentors.¹

Up close and personal

Mentoring that is structured to the person, and not just the job, is crucial. In fact, when a mentorship program is perceived as an obligatory exercise assigned by the human

resources department, it can generate resentment.² That drove Jonathan Baktari, MD, CEO and chief medical officer of e7 Health, to be sensitive while developing mentorship programs at e7 Health.

“Medical assistants are the core of our staff, so we take a big interest in ... how they are educated and mentored,” he said. “They benefit more from mentoring than many other health care professionals because their training period is [sometimes] short and many of them come from other types of work experiences.”

Noel Montgomery, BS, CMA (AAMA), NCMA, PFT, an educator at the Healthcare Careers Academy at Mount Tahoma High School in Tacoma, Washington, took an early and keen interest in mentorship.

“Defining who you are personally and professionally—and showing it with patience and transparency—can provide you with excellent tools to lead someone,” he says. He began mentoring new CMAs (AAMA)[®] at a supervisor’s request. He recounts working

with a particularly insecure and stressed new hire. “I even wondered how they landed an interview,” he said, “but I was open to working with them and doing whatever I had to do to help them build up their confidence and conquer any doubts they had.”

After demonstrating procedures and explaining office flow, he asked them to perform the procedures and repeat the explanations. The new hire expressed frustration and reacted with negative self-talk. Montgomery countered by praising areas in which the new hire excelled and the new skills they demonstrated when they practiced what they learned.

As the days progressed, so did the new hire. In fact, after only a week, a patient asked how long the medical assistant had been working in the clinic. When told that it had only been seven days, the surprised patient replied that they had thought it had been more like seven years.

“That spoke volumes to me,” says Montgomery, who proudly notes that the

mentee is now a supervisor running an outpatient clinic with 10 physicians and multiple employees.

The personal touch is something that Torey Winn, CMA (AAMA), of Community Health Programs in Dalton, Massachusetts, believes in too.

“The most important thing is to listen and know who your mentee is [and] what their strengths are, as well as their weaknesses,” she says. “Weakness is not a fault, just something that needs to be understood so that they can learn.”

Listen and learn

Being upfront immediately about expectations benefits everyone and helps mentees understand that efforts are seen by the practice as investments in their personal and professional growth.

“I think that the most important thing is to listen and know who your mentee is,” says Winn. After more than 40 years, she still remembers her own mentors fondly. “They were more than just educators. They were leaders who showed me the ins and outs of the work that I was doing.”

Her career expanded from billing to transcription to phlebotomy, then medical assisting in private practices to practice manager at Community Health Programs, where she is now a recruiter and is often asked to mentor new practice managers.

“My company recognizes the work that I’ve done and my knowledge base,” she says. “I can bring that to new folks. Give them pearls of wisdom that help them to not only do their job but understand it so they can excel and move up in their own careers.”

How to show the ropes

A few mentoring techniques are particularly effective with millennials. One is reverse mentoring. A senior employee demonstrates and explains procedures and practices, while the younger employee teaches their colleague skill sets, such as how to use social media to communicate within the organization and with patients. The teaching goes both ways and builds mutual respect.³

Another is group mentoring. A special-

ized online platform allows a mentor to work with several mentees at the same time, sometimes in different locations. Participants share experiences, progress, and build a common experience that increases camaraderie and speeds learning.³

Anonymous mentoring matches mentors and mentees, but, as the name implies, one does not know the identity of the other. Sometimes they are not even in the same location. The guarantee of anonymity encourages frank exchanges, which may be especially useful for new employees who might be hesitant to ask certain questions for fear of being judged and for advisors who may fear being too harsh when they advise or correct someone in person.³

More than a job

Thoughtful and thorough mentorship includes more than performing tasks correctly and efficiently. It includes aspects of the profession that someone just out of school or coming from another line of work may not consider.

“Being a good mentor means taking someone who’s new in whatever field and giving them insight into what I call the *art* of what they are doing,” says Dr. Baktari. “You can have training manuals on how to give a shot or draw blood or run the office, but how you handle people, patients, and coworkers and how you conduct yourself is just as important.”

The benefits, he says, include more than just proficiency on the job. They include inspiring confidence in the most important people of all: patients.

“When you walk in [wearing] scrubs, patients view you as part of the health care team,” says Dr. Baktari. “They attribute someone in scrubs with all the attributes they give to a health care *professional*, and that is a high standard to be held to.” ♦

References

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Mentoring the millennials

By 2025, millennials will make up approximately 75% of the workforce.⁴ A poll of more than 2,000 professionals from a wide range of industries showed that millennials want steady feedback,³ and mentorship is the most effective way to provide that. They bring with them expectations that, at the core, are not really that different from employees from the previous generations. But there are some unique aspects.

What millennials want from their boss³:

- Help with navigating their career path
- Straight feedback
- Mentorship and coaching
- Assistance with formal development programs
- Flexible schedules

What millennials want from their company³:

- Development of skills for the future
- Strong values
- Customizable benefit packages
- Work-life balance
- Clear career path

Millennials place a strong emphasis on work that is personally fulfilling and allows them to make friends and learn new skills and all in the service to a larger purpose. Mentorship programs that recognize those values will drive success for both employers and employees.

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