



SkillSharpener Web Extra

Mentoring can boost rep skills and development

Managers should encourage mentoring, even on an informal basis. Reps will learn more, and learn faster, with the help of a mentor they can call on for advice and guidance.

One of the best things that a company can do to support the personal development efforts of its employees is to encourage mentoring within the organization. It doesn't have to be a formal program. And in fact, formalizing the process of finding and choosing a mentor can take a lot of the effectiveness out of it. But by encouraging mentoring efforts at all levels of the organization, a company can improve staff development, boost morale, and ensure that it has the necessary talent coming up within the organization to meet all contingencies.

As Brian Tracy, performance development consultant and author, puts it, "No one lives long enough to learn everything he needs to learn starting from scratch. To be successful, we absolutely, positively have to find people who have already paid the price to help us learn the things that we need to learn to achieve our goals."

Encouraging mentoring efforts

Even if your organization doesn't offer a formal mentoring program, your staff might benefit from a discussion of what mentoring is — and isn't. A mentor is someone you can look up to and whom you seek to emulate, and is relatively common in many businesses. For a customer service rep that could be a manager, a supervisor, a team leader, or even another CSR. As manager, you might share your own experiences with mentors, and ask supervisors and senior reps if they would be interested in

serving as mentors for other, less-experienced reps.

The role of a mentor differs from that of a coach in that while a coach is focused primarily on job-related performance and improvement, a mentor can act as a career guide, offering counsel and advice on how to reach long-term career goals. A mentor can help a rep put together a career-development plan by identifying the short- and long-term skills that a rep needs to develop, the types of training and educational resources available, and a practical timetable for growth and development.

On an informal basis, a manager can express his or her support of mentoring, explain how the process works, and indicate which senior reps or supervisors might be willing and available to act as mentors.

If you think mentoring might work in your organization, a discussion on how to find and work with a mentor is a good place to start a discussion with your reps. And because mentoring is as much a personal relationship as a business relationship, you might want to add that a mentor should be:

- Someone who can respect other people's views of the world and work with them.
- Someone who believes you have the necessary potential to succeed.
- Someone who sees the best in others, empathizes, and offers encouragement.



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- Someone who is not afraid to take risks and do things differently, but will be supportive and allow you to take responsibility for your decisions.

Mentoring for new employees

One area in which managers might want to implement a more formal mentoring process is during onboarding — bringing new reps up to speed in your organization. New recruits generally need more time and help to become familiar with an organization, how it works, and in meeting performance expectations. One way to do this is through new-employee mentoring. Here's how you might approach this:

- Provide employees with a checklist to help them understand their responsibilities and their ultimate performance expectations.
- Assign a senior rep or team leader to act as a mentor to the new employee. The mentor should be someone that you know has good people skills as well as someone who achieves high performance.
- Be available to provide coaching to the mentor and to answer any questions that might come up.

Providing a mentor during an employee's initial period on the job is very important because attitudes and work habits — as well as performance skills — are developed during those first few weeks or months on the job.

A key element of mentoring

An important part of the mentoring process is goal setting. A rep has to be able to set goals before he or she can take complete advantage of the help and guidance that a mentor can provide. And a mentor has to be able to offer advice on what goals to set and whether a rep's goals are realistic.

Ask reps if they typically set goals for themselves, and ask them to share the types of goals that they have set. Also, review the types of resources and training that your company offers that might help them meet their skills-development goals.

You might also want to review these tips for keeping goals on target:

- Set realistic goals and don't expect overnight success.
- Understand why a goal is important.
- Make sure individual goals align with company and departmental goals.
- Focus on achieving a few goals at a time.
- Get support for your efforts by sharing your goals.

This last item, of course, is why setting goals with the help of a mentor can greatly contribute to a rep's meeting his or her goals.

Contact: Brian Tracy, www.briantracy.com. ■

