



Round the curve of time –

2 mentoring
case
studies

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The curve of time

While it is virtually impossible for some Gen-Xers and those of the Millenium Generation to envision a time without widespread and rampant use of the internet and other relatively recent, associated technologies, it is helpful to understand that

“the more things change, the more they stay the same.”

Human nature and human needs are a constant when it comes to building mentoring partnerships and developing people-to-people programs. The following two case studies illustrate in large measure the ongoing needs that must be met whether online or not. For the most part, mentoring has not switched from paper-and-pencil to online connection. Yes, contact will often be maintained via email but mere electronic contact does not hold the connotations of the word “mentoring” -- a true, full-fledged complex match of one person with greater wisdom, experience and skills in one or more life areas to another who needs and wants to stretch and learn through this transfer.

Shell Oil Company’s 3 Formalized Mentoring Schemes

Before contacting us, Shell Oil Company in Miri, Malaysia, had a loosely structured one-size-fits-all Mentoring Scheme. In fact, the mentoring “expert” hired made 12 trips from India to carry out the needs analysis and training. Separately, protégés and mentors had been trained for a week, but still did not know what to do as partners when they met. Consequently, mentoring did not reduce turnover, nor develop employees, as expected.

As a result, Dr. Joseph Ko (the Coordinator) visited mentoring experts across North America to learn firsthand what each could provide, and then selected our firm to correct the situation. Dr. William A. Gray and Marilynne Miles Gray went on-site to formally evaluate Shell Oil’s existing Mentorship Scheme, and then redesigned it to match the needs of different types of protégés.

In brief here’s are the mentoring solutions put in motion. Keep in mind one of the most basic Principles of good program design and execution – each program is unique. What works in one setting and group commonly will not work for another. This brief description does not replace services a professional mentoring and coaching expert.

1. Get newly-hired university graduates up to speed faster and with greater accuracy.

Orientation Mentoring provided by capable peers accomplished this. A key tool in this effort was our Protégé Needs Inventory – revolving around required competencies that each had to apply in short order. Access to the PNI enabled each protégé to identify specific needs so that peer mentors could systematically provide needed assistance without any guessing or wasted time with hit-and-miss meetings. Partners were able immediately, upon meeting, to hit the ground running.

2. Shell also wanted to reduce the costly turnover of high potentials at a time when promotion was not possible. **Career Expansion Mentoring** enabled these protégés to expand their technical expertise by carrying out a carefully planned, highly challenging Mentor-Assisted Project in the mentor’s area of expertise.



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3. Like most technically-oriented companies, Shell needed a better way for each veteran employee to explore and choose the most appropriate career path. The bonus was that this freedom to choose was also a benefit for the company. To achieve this goal, top-level technical and managerial mentors provided [Career Path Mentoring](#).

Working as a team, the Grays advised a training design of 2-day sessions for each of the three groups using the most appropriate of their Models, mentoring-specific tools and workshop activities. Shell staff clearly understood the need to take this approach -- to provide a mixture of different appropriate elements for new hires, veterans and those in between.

The Grays trained over 100 mentor-protégé partners to develop a productive relationship. The criteria for success was that at least 95% of the partnerships

- would form positive relational bonds immediately (during the first few hours of the training, even if they were total strangers) and
- work together on the agreed-to competencies over a specified period of time (without asking to be rematched) and
- actually accomplish one or more of the competencies within a given period of time.

These training sessions were observed by 12 Shell in-house trainers so they could see how the various materials and activities enable virtual strangers to quickly form a good relationship. A one-day debriefing followed so as to discuss adjustments that might be needed in the future, answer questions, discuss the Facilitator's Guide, and so forth.

Results

The revised mentoring scheme was so successful that Dr. Ko and his team implemented similar versions at other Shell Oil locations throughout Southeast Asia, in addition to continuing the scheme in Miri, where Shell Oil Company originated.

For a number of years, Shell continued to use our materials to cascade the program beyond its origins in Malaysia.



DSCC gains through our online mentoring software system

The Defense Supply Center (DSCC) in Columbus, Ohio is one of the USA's largest. DSCC needed a mentoring program that would develop different levels of Leader Competency throughout its diversified workforce. After considering other vendors, DSCC licensed our original mentoring software system [called OMS Online Mentoring System™] to help the Coordinator

- match the most suitable mentor-protégé partners,
- track each protégé's progress working on major needs, and
- evaluate benefits gained by each protégé and mentor.

In tandem with this, DSCC also used our field-tested paper-based training materials.

What were some of the steps we took?

1. Working onsite with the Steering Committee, we determined from their emphasis on certain elements and the types of questions asked there was a need to plan a formal coordinated mentoring program that could easily be expanded upward and downward to include higher and lower level participants over time.

2. While it may seem self-evident that not everyone in the target group will participate, it often is **assumed** that participation is a given. Thus the way prospective participants are treated and the information released to them (when, how much, what) is given short shrift.

All too often **little or no information** is fed to would-be participants. Or there is **no differentiation** between the concept of "would-be" participants and those who actually join the mentoring pool itself.

An informed decision is critical to success.

Or information about the program is **released far too close in time** to the program launch for prospects to make a good decision or ask questions.

Sometimes, would-be participants are **not given an opportunity** to ask questions.

With all this in mind, we custom-developed then provided a Mentoring Program Information Session so participants would clearly understand the following components (and more):

- ❖ program guidelines,
- ❖ what this program was and was not intended to accomplish,
- ❖ what the selection criteria would be,
- ❖ the timelines
- ❖ what was expected and by whom, and
- ❖ how our web-based mentoring system could be used to enhance and speed up results.

3. Because we understand from long experience and much research the clear value of the client "owning" the program, we trained the Program Coordinator to use each of the OMS system's functions, for instance how to match the most compatible mentor-protégé partners. A month later trained, we trained mentor-protégé partners onsite to quickly build a productive relationship. Two in-house trainers observed, as part of a Train-the-Trainer component that also included debriefing what was observed and learning to use the Facilitator's Guide.



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Results

Our program design for the DSCC worked as intended.

Our online system was heavily used.

Both it and training materials were employed to cascade mentoring out to three very different groups of participants.

The final group to be rolled into the overall design used the subsequent version of our Mentoring Management System™ - Colaboro™ - for a self-directed Pool. In this way, participants could find their own partners without having to do cumbersome interviews because matching was done with our *Mentoring Compatibility Indicator* in tandem with at least one of our other proprietary tools. Engaging in Self-Directed Mentoring Initiatives™ could be done 24/7/365 once the Pool was launched.

The Coordinator was trained using our Just-in-Time Mentoring™ approach, for oversight and privacy / security purposes. Not only did the scale of the initiative democratize mentoring, but it ensured mentoring was available to everyone who wanted to participate. For example, a person could be a mentor in one Pool and a protégé in another. It provided useful functions to enhance results so users did not have to invent a process that would work. No having to go out and interview each prospective mentor to try to figure out if the match might or might not work. As another example, users could create online Mentoring Action Plans for accomplishing more complex goals, then report progress on completing these Plans.



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Round the corner of time

Note: both organizations understood the requirement for planning to ensure success. Pre-launch information and training was considered crucial. Coordinator oversight and monitoring was essential. These factors give programs longevity.

Often, because Task Forces and Steering Committees are inexperienced, they focus on what they believe are the most important aspects: licensing software that (on the surface) appears to be the cheapest, fastest and easiest for the largest possible number of people.



However, the truism is:

what's cheap ain't good ... what's good ain't cheap

Here are 10 discoveries you'll make about cheap, fast and easy from other brands:

- Cheap mentoring software isn't flexible. Every group gets the same cookie-cutter approach.
- Cheap software has at most 2 or 3 tools. Not the 5 or more needed to do the job.
- Cheap software often has no mentoring basis and so won't work.
- Cheap software may have add-on hidden costs making it more expensive in the end.
- Cheap software gets used for a year or two at most then is discarded sometimes in favor of another brand or in favor of going back to the "old, manual" approach of hand-matching partners.
- Then, when these organizations have difficulty finding recruits for the programs or retaining those volunteers they have, they wonder why. They overlook what is obvious to those of us who are mentoring experts: prospective participants grow cynical; volunteers dislike the seeming inadequacies of the Task Force, Steering Committee and Program Coordinator.

This doesn't have to happen.

- "Easy" software is often that because the client pays the vendor to do all the Coordinator work, run the software and answer 911-type calls (because the software isn't "easy").
- "Easy" software has only a few rudimentary tools. Your organization will never know the outcomes of all the money spent.

This shouldn't happen.

- Fast software is that because accommodates only small numbers.
- Fast software may take longer in the end to set up and run. What was promised by the vendor to be ready in 30-days suddenly takes 10 weeks.
- Fast software may promise "a match in 20 minutes approximately" then it becomes clear your organization will have to pay partners to take extra time to carry out tasks that are not necessary (such as spending 45 minutes to interview a prospective partner because the software cannot do the job adequately).
- Fast software isn't user friendly the way you thought.

This shouldn't happen.

We make every effort to ensure your mentoring experience is positive and productive.

Mentoring Solutions Inc. has web-based application software experience in the mentoring field since 1997 when we first started to build online based on our tried, true and tested Mentoring Process. Give us a call to find out more.

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