

Mentoring Solutions for the Many Faces of Diversity

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Since 1978, our Guiding Principle, when developing each mentoring program, has always been: while a mentoring program is designed for a targeted group of proteges, it is important to remember that within the group are individuals, with different backgrounds, needs, goals and dreams within a unique corporate context. Each mentoring program must be designed to accommodate the individual differences within the same program, and at the same time, not lose sight of satisfying corporate needs and goals to satisfy the business case and reason for the program.

Upfront planning and design – using a collaborative approach – ensures that the program addresses everyone’s diversity issues and common issues.

While it’s customary to focus on visual differences, such as gender and race, we have also included the unseen differences that could potentially hinder or help a working relationship. We do not assume, for example, that diversity issues automatically arise from differences in race or gender. Indeed, these issues may stem from different working styles, or from different designations such as labor, management, technical and non-technical. In sum, we have learned, over the years, to address diversity issues very broadly and to stress the teaching of many kinds of diversity so that program participants are enabled to more accurately deal with various kinds of differences when in the work place.

The following five brief case studies illustrate how we have provided different Mentoring Solutions® for the many faces of diversity.

1. Mentoring to Facilitate Silo Busting at CSX Transportation

Like most organizations, CSX Transportation is hierarchically structured and has departments that were created to carry out specific functions. Add to this, CSX’s history as a railroad with often-severe management-labor conflicts. Such compartmentalization created “Silos” that CEO Pete Carpenter wanted to break down so that CSX could become a **High-Performing Organization** with a three-fold purpose of: serving customers better, enabling salaried and exempt employees at all levels to develop themselves, and increasing stock market value for shareholders.

These business goals led to the establishment in 1992 of the Associate Development Program. To “**Bust Silos**,” ADP enrolled employees from all levels, from management and labor, and from all departments. The primary purpose was to enable employees to develop themselves so they could pursue career options in new directions, such as moving from labor to management, from one department to another, and/or relocating into new positions. Silo Busting at CSX resulted in a culture of teamwork instead of compartmentalization. By participating in ADP, employees got a chance to understand the importance of each other’s roles within the company, and learn from people that they may not usually have a chance to interact with. Working relationships that were previously antagonistic, due to misunderstanding a person’s function or lack of communication, were smoothed over. People learned that each department is unique and is a vital part of the larger organization. They learned to work together for an essential business reason: to attract and keep valued customers.

One essential component that has made this mentoring program so effective from 1992 to the present (2008), is the **Oversight Committee**. This volunteer group puts more time into interviewing, selecting and matching mentor-protege partners — and providing ongoing monitoring and support for each mentoring relationship — than any other company we’ve worked with. Another key to success is the Corporate Mentoring Solution® we provide: a **two-day Mentoring for Results partner training** session at CSX’s rural retreat centre in Welaka. This remote location and timeframe greatly reduces job distractions and enables mentor-protege partners to focus on getting to know each other and on planning how they will work together to achieve

major protege goals. This arrangement also fosters silo busting, by allowing participants to network and, through informal dialogue, realize the importance of all job functions and discuss how to work together more cooperatively to serve customers better. For example, one mentor-protege pair learned about auditing and sales from each other, and then made presentations to each other's department; this fostered appreciation and cooperation between the departments.

2. Mentoring Professional Transformation at Exxon

Mentoring can often help people make professional transformations – literally shifting their style or way of functioning – enabling them to be more successful. The sales division of Exxon had actively recruited women and visible minorities to meet Equal Employment Opportunity Program (EEO) goals. Close tracking revealed that after five years, these valued salespeople were not performing at a high enough level to justify promotion. Upon realizing this, many females and black males left Exxon, creating an unacceptable **turnover problem** that had to be fixed.

In contrast, white males had higher performance ratings and were getting promoted because they had received informal mentoring. Our Corporate Mentoring Solution® for Exxon uncovered another reason for the high turnover rate of females and black males: they were having difficulty making the transformation from being just technically oriented to becoming more people-oriented — an essential competency for sales.

EEO data revealed that supervisors were providing adequate supervision to orient all new hires during the first year. The performance differences began to occur in the second year, when the females and black males were not getting any informal mentoring. This upfront collaborative planning enabled us to design a more formalized mentoring program for Year 2 proteges when we originally thought it would start in Year 1. The program ensured that females and black males (and white males) received the systematic mentoring needed to become competent salespeople.

At the end of the year-long relationship, **quantitative** surveys revealed that some protege's needs were met not quite as much as expected due to long-distance relationships and the mentor's heavy workload, both of which hindered getting together with the mentor. **Qualitative** evaluation (structured interviews) revealed that every protege felt valued and optimistic about their future with Exxon, and all recommended that Exxon slightly reduce the job functions of mentors so that they had more time to assist proteges. This was done and the net result was significantly greater retention of Exxon's highly valued diversified workforce, which saved money and, in turn, increased sales, which made money – all of which paid for this mentoring program.

3. Reciprocal Mentoring Overcame the Generation Gap at Varian Associates

The diversity issue for the Radiation Division of Varian Associates was the generation gap between recently hired personnel, most of whom had master's degrees, and veterans who did not. Although the newer hirers knew how to use the latest technology and software programs, they lacked the practical know-how and business acumen that the veterans had gained from years on the job. Due to animosity between the generations, we thought it best to allow proteges to nominate mentors, who were then asked if they would like to work with that protege. In many instances, a protege chose a mentor that he or she had difficulty working with. When asked why this mentor was nominated, the answer was – “I want to see if we learn how to work together in a formalized relationship.”

To overcome the generation gap, mentor-protege pairs engaged in **reciprocal mentoring**. The protege taught the latest in software savvy and the mentor taught practical know-how. The pilot program was so successful that it was expanded each year.

Each mentor-protege pair worked on a six-month Mentor-Assisted Project™ (MAP) in the mentor's area of expertise. (Expertise that the protege wanted to acquire.) Was this beneficial? Yes. Every protege completed a MAP in an area of professional interest. For example, one mentor was chosen for his expertise in project management. This mentor identified how to quickly prepare a future project manager. This was significant because the Radiation Division had no formal training courses on project management, yet most of the work they did involved working on project teams. After the MAP ended, this mentor

and protege developed a training program that greatly improved the competencies of all future project managers. This MAP and others enabled the Radiation Division to move from the bottom of 23 divisions to become a **profit center**.

4. Reverse Mentoring at AT&T Global Communication Systems

Mentoring is generally thought to follow the hierarchical structure of the organization -- with someone higher ranking mentoring someone lower ranking. However, when we worked with AT&T Global Business Communication Systems, our initial Mentoring Solution was **bottom-up or reverse mentoring**. After top-level management mandated that everyone would receive diversity training, the group representing the diversified workforce, approached these decision-makers and offered to mentor them. This lower ranking group helped these corporate leaders understand the frustrations of being different and the unique contribution that diversity could bring to the organization. One consequent benefit was that these leaders decided to target minority small-businesses – something they had never previously thought of. doing Through the proteges, they now had direct access to people who represented the diversified workforce and could contribute to these new initiatives. As a result of this unique approach, the decision-making process became more collaborative.

To add value to the initial mentoring initiative, we suggested **reciprocal mentoring** relationships be established. Corporate leaders continued to receive reverse mentoring about diversity issues from the diversified workforce, which, in turn, now received more conventional mentoring to guide their career development.

5. Mentoring Teams Improve Management-Labor Relations at C&O Railroad

Management-labor conflicts have historically plagued many corporations, especially the railroad industry. The Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad was no exception. General Manager Al Crown wanted to resolve this age-old conflict. We guided the development of a mentoring program in which five-person Mentoring Teams comprised of management and labor **co-mentors** assisted three proteges. On each team, the three proteges had common work experience.

For example, one group of proteges had all been working as computer programmers. They did such a good job technically that this qualified them to supervise other people doing these same jobs. Their diversity challenge entailed dramatically changing their working style to become less detail-oriented and better able to see the big picture, as well as more people-oriented. A second group had earned promotions from the Operations side of railroading (which required assertive decisions and actions to keep the trains rolling out of the yard on time). Now, they were learning to supervise other Operations workers, and needed to become more people-oriented and motivating. The co-mentors role-modeled how to work together to help the proteges make this major style-shift transformation. Was this of value? Absolutely. During the mentoring process, the proteges were able to observe the role model of cooperation between the co-mentors, which furthered C&O's initiative to improve management-labor relations.

Summation:

The preceding examples illustrate that each mentoring program must be thoughtfully planned and designed to meet the diverse needs of participants (as individuals and as a group) as well as their organizations. For over 30 years, we have provided a wide variety of **Situational Mentoring Solutions®** based on this Guiding Principle: **“Different Strokes for Different Folks.”**

