JOINT MANAGEMENT 2004

MENTORING - INVESTING IN HUMAN CAPITAL

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ABSTRACT

Mentoring – Investing in Human Capital

One intervention in the road to succession planning is mentoring. This paper provides an understanding of the design, implementation, and evaluation of a resource-lean, internally developed and maintained, protégé driven mentoring program. Additionally, copies of *The Mentoring Startup Kit* are available to interested parties. The kit easily allows any organization to transfer and customize this program to meet its specific needs.

DSRSD's Mentoring Program

The Mentoring Program was designed as an employee development initiative and in support of future Dublin San Ramon Services District (DSRSD) succession planning. DSRSD strongly believes in the development of its employees. The Strategic Plan's Organizational Culture component clearly outlines the responsibility of each manager/supervisor to 'coach/mentor' employees.

The Mentoring Program, implemented in June of 2002, fosters relationships within DSRSD that are meaningful to the mentored employee and DSRSD (e.g., information sharing and increased retention). Any employee may function as a mentor and/or protégé. Coaching, interpersonal skills training, and support tools are provided for all employees who would like to engage in a mentoring relationship and desire additional skills.

DSRSD's mentoring program is protégé driven and confidential (i.e., only the Mentoring Program Coordinator knows who is participating in the mentoring relationships.) Mentoring relationships are initiated by a potential protégé selecting a mentor from the candidates in the mentoring pool. The protégé selects the mentor based on his or her own developmental needs and takes the lead in setting objectives, tone, frequency of meetings, and structure of the mentoring relationship. Additionally, each person joining the mentor pool must also identify his or her protégé capacity, i.e., the number of protégés he or she can support. Once selected by a protégé and after agreeing to become a mentor, the mentor supports his or her protégé through providing expertise and guidance.

The Mentoring Program Coordinator and DSRSD's Intranet site are available as resources, as well as to provide guidance. After six months, and again after twelve months, an on-line survey is released to the entire organization. This survey is aimed at determining satisfaction, identifying potential improvements, and ensuring the program is providing value to the organization. Based on our first online survey results (42% response rate), the Mentoring Program meets the needs of the organization. Mentoring relationships have resulted in the following: employees are obtaining additional certifications for future staffing needs within DSRSD as attrition increases; utilization of the educational

assistance program has doubled; and on-the-job training for positions employees wish to pursue in the future at DSRSD or elsewhere is increasing and even occurring on the employees' own time.

KEYWORDS

Succession planning, mentoring, human capital, mentor, protégé.

PURPOSE

The Mentoring Program was designed as an employee development initiative and in support of future DSRSD succession planning. DSRSD has committed resources to developing employees. The Strategic Plan's Organizational Culture component clearly outlines the responsibility of each manager/supervisor to 'coach/mentor' employees. DSRSD has clearly articulated two fundamental reasons mentoring is important for DSRSD:

- 1. The workforce in the United States will experience an exodus of Baby Boomers. Additionally, there are fewer people coming into the workforce. The majority of that upcoming workforce targets their career path towards the private sector. The result is that local government and special districts are facing a severe shortage in their candidate pool. In the next three to five years, approximately 30% of DSRSD's workforce will retire. The transference of the experience, knowledge and skills of our "tribal elders" (i.e., employees who have great expertise gained through their experiences and time in the field) to remaining employees is vital. DSRSD has provided a structured mechanism through its mentoring program that enables transference of that expertise. One additional benefit is that we have found that mentors gain satisfaction in teaching and knowing that protégés will continue their work and values, i.e., their legacy. By teaching protégés, mentors also review and upgrade their own professional skills while still with DSRSD.
- 2. DSRSD is striving to become an "Employer of Choice". We believe that mentoring creates a bond between the employees who make up DSRSD. Encouraging that bond and the continuing development of a relationship built on trust and support among its employees is essential to our success on this Initiative.

While Senior Managers and Mid-Managers are highly encouraged to participate as mentors, any employee, who is not on a probationary status, may function as a mentor and/or protégé. Coaching, interpersonal skills training, and support tools are provided for all employees that would like to engage in mentoring relationships and desire additional skills.

RESPONSIBILITY

Protégé Responsibility

DSRSD's mentoring program is protégé driven. This means that while any employee can join the mentoring pool, mentoring relationships are actually initiated by a potential protégé selecting a mentor from the candidates in the mentoring pool. To request a mentor, the potential protégé completes the Protégé Profile form located on DSRSD's Intranet and turns the form in to the Mentoring Program Coordinator. The potential protégé can identify up to three potential mentors on this form, and is asked to identify what he or she is hoping to obtain from the relationship, or what knowledge or skills the mentor has that the potential protégé would like to learn. DSRSD has clearly stated that the knowledge or skills do **not** have to be work related. Because one of the goals of the mentoring program is to build the relationships among employees who comprise the organization, and tighten the bond of trust

between employees, DSRSD simply encourages each potential protégé to select their mentor based on their own needs. We have found that nearly all relationships built have been based on work-related skills or knowledge, and feel it is key that the employees self-selected this route.

After the protégé profile form is completed and turned in to the Mentoring Program Coordinator, the first potential mentor is contacted by the Mentoring Program Coordinator. At this point, the potential mentor has the opportunity to accept or reject the potential protégé. If the protégé is not accepted, the Mentoring Program Coordinator contacts the next potential mentor and he or she is given the opportunity to accept or reject the potential protégé. This sequence of events has the potential to take place a third time, as the potential protégé could have identified up to three potential mentors. Once a potential mentor accepts the protégé, the Mentoring Program Coordinator documents the match. This documentation is only available to the Mentoring Program Coordinator, as per the confidentiality agreement with the Full Management Group. At this point, the Mentoring Program Coordinator notifies the protégé that the match has been made and the protégé is then responsible for initiating contact with the mentor.

Because the District's program is protégé driven, where the potential protégé selects the mentor based on the protégé's own developmental needs, District protégés take the lead in setting the objectives, tone, frequency of meetings, and structure of the mentoring relationship. If the protégé wishes to end the mentoring relationship, he or she must notify the Mentoring Program Coordinator of the decision.

Mentor Responsibility

Each person joining the mentor pool must identify his or her protégé capacity, or the number of protégés he or she can support. Once selected by a protégé and after agreeing to become a mentor, the mentor agrees to support their protégé through providing expertise and guidance to the protégé. If the mentor wishes to end the mentoring relationship, he or she must notify the Mentoring Program Coordinator of the decision.

Sponsor Responsibility

This individual ensures the cooperation and support of the people needed to meet the goals of the mentoring program. He or she manages politics to remove barriers to the program as well as creates buy-in and builds enthusiasm for the program. He or she ensures access to and availability of the resources needed to meet the goals of the program, which may include people, documentation, tools, equipment, and budget. The Sponsor also settles disputes when competing priorities require the same resources. He or she monitors the goals of the program to make sure they remain in line with the organization's strategy and makes decisions about the program.

Mentoring Program Coordinator Responsibility

This individual matches protégés to mentors, initiates communication to both mentor and protégé, and provides guidance and contacts. He or she is also responsible for continually 'marketing' and maintaining visibility of the program within the organization. He or she works very closely with the Sponsor to ensure that the vision of the program is being communicated, being adhered to by the actual program itself, and remaining a priority within the organization. The Mentoring Program Coordinator also provides coaching on mentoring relationships to mentors and protégés on an 'as requested' basis. It is also the responsibility of the Mentoring Program Coordinator to maintain the confidentiality of the pairings within the program. The only person who knows the individuals involved in mentoring relationships is the Mentoring Program Coordinator (and the two people in the relationship!) Data provided in reports to the Board of Directors or **any** employee of DSRSD only reflects the number of people engaged in the program – the data does not reflect the names of the participants.

The Mentoring Program Coordinator evaluates the program after three months, six months, twelve months, and annually thereafter. These evaluations are done in two ways. Initially, the participants in the mentoring pairs are contacted individually for a one-on-one meeting once every three months for the first six months. The Mentoring Program Coordinator asks how the pairing is going (Are the mentor and protégé comfortable with the relationship? What resources would be helpful?), asks if the individual's partner is obtaining what he or she needs, and asks how the individual knows he or she is obtaining what he or she needs. Six months after the start of the Mentoring Program, an on-line survey of the program is conducted, requesting that each member of the organization, whether a member of the Mentoring Program or not, provide feedback on the Mentoring Program to date. The same on-line survey is administered annually thereafter. This data is provided to the Sponsor, the Full Management Group, and the general employees.

PROCEDURES

Potential mentors complete a mentor profile form, identifying the types of mentoring they are willing to provide. Mentors may mentor protégés on career path decisions, interpersonal skills, leadership skills, or other specific topics, or simply offer general mentoring. Additionally, mentors provide a bit of personal information, in response to a structured set of questions. This helps potential protégés find points of commonality. Potential mentors must also identify their protégé capacity.

Potential protégés meeting the criteria (i.e., not on probation) complete a protégé profile form identifying their top three mentor choices. The Mentoring Program Coordinator then matches the protégé to a mentor and, upon mentor agreement, notifies both the protégé and the mentor of the match. The protégé is then responsible for initiating contact with the mentor.

The Mentoring Program Coordinator and our DSRSD Intranet site provide resources, guidance, and coaching. The Mentoring Program Coordinator performs informal follow-up calls to mentors and protégés. After six months, a survey is released to the entire organization. This survey is aimed at determining satisfaction with the current Mentoring Program, identifying potential improvements, and ensuring the program is providing value to the organization. After twelve months, the Mentoring Program Coordinator performs another survey. At this point, the survey will take place annually to identify trends in the program.

RESULTS

The program was first introduced in June of 2002, and at the onset there were eight mentoring relationships. Over the course of the first year, there were a maximum of 16 mentoring relationships. At the end of the first year, the Mentoring Program Coordinator communicated that mentoring relationships generally have an initial life span of one year. Employees were encouraged to reflect on their mentoring relationships and determine if they were ready to end the formal relationship and begin a new mentoring relationship, or simply free up their partner to mentor another employee. At that time, there was a dip in the number of mentoring pairs (as low as 12 pairs). In a few short months the pairings have begun to climb again, and as of December 2003, there are 14 mentoring pairs and the majority of these are new matches! In addition to the support from the Mentoring Program Coordinator and evaluations of the program, there has been extensive marketing of the program: posters at all three work sites; regular e-mail communication regarding tips and facts about mentoring; updates about the program at quarterly general employee meetings; brochures; laminated cards including information on what to ask if you are a protégé or mentor; mentor round table lunches; protégé round table lunches;

and, a mentoring breakfast event (i.e., "Mentoring... What an Eggs-cellent Idea!") sponsored by the Full Management Group at DSRSD.

CONCLUSIONS

DSRSD views the mentoring program as one of the cornerstones in its Succession Planning initiative. The four cornerstones of this initiative are the New Hire Academy, the Supervisor Academy, the Mentoring Program, and the Structured On the Job Training (SOJT).

The small investment made in an organization's human capital through a mentoring program yields a large payoff in the long life of the organization. Although organizations generally view mentoring programs as preparing employees to "move to the next level" (i.e., promotion), mentoring also allows the strengthening of the 'glue' within the organization – the continuity player. These individuals may remain in the same positions their entire career. The prospect of being viewed as 'experts' and being able to share their knowledge with other individuals, including those who are new to the organization as well as employees who have been in the organization for many years, results in these strong continuity players knowing that they have left their own legacy within the organization, i.e., the legacy of their skills, knowledge, and unique perspective.