Leaders as Mentors: Organizational Value & Impact
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Implementing a leader-as-mentor program can have a huge impact on satisfaction and engagement.

Leaders are resident experts, and talent development teams can leverage these internal resources to develop and retain top talent.

LEADERS AS MENTORS

Equipping your organization’s leaders to mentor others within the organization is one of the most effective strategies to improve employee engagement and increase employee retention. Mentoring develops employees successfully and teaches leaders invaluable leadership skills.

Employee engagement has remained low over the past two decades, but leaders are the key to changing this statistic — in fact they’re the biggest factor in employee engagement. 70% of employees’ engagement is decided by the way they’re managed. Leaders have a wealth of knowledge and experience that, when shared through mentoring relationships, creates a culture of mentorship that engages the entire organization.

Many companies struggle to implement employee development programs that achieve their intended goals, while ignoring one of the best resources they have for fostering engagement and motivating productivity: their very own leaders. Leaders are resident experts on industry history and trends, relevant functional skills, and corporate culture.

1 Leaders Account for 70% of Variance in Employee Engagement (2015) Gallup
The thing is, not all leaders know how to be mentors. Many leaders will insist they already coach others and know how to get the best work possible from their teams. Yet research shows that implementing a well-constructed leader-as-mentor program can make a substantial difference in employee satisfaction, promotion rates, and leadership development.

Mentoring will ensure that your leaders (Managers, Directors, VP’s and above) develop the following competencies\(^2\) in order to be effective in their roles:

1. Displays High Integrity and Honesty
2. Develops Technical/Professional Expertise
3. Solves Problems and Analyzes Issues
4. Innovates
5. Practices Self-Development
6. Drives for Results
7. Establishes Stretch Goals
8. Takes Initiative
9. Communicates Powerfully and Prolifically
10. Inspires and Motivates Others to High Performance
11. Builds Relationships
12. Develops Others
13. Collaborates and Demonstrates Teamwork
14. Develops Strategic Perspective
15. Champions Change
16. Connects the Group to the Outside World

IN THIS EBOOK, YOU’LL LEARN HOW TO:

- Introduce the leader-as-mentor concept to your organization
- Match protégés and mentors
- Launch a successful mentorship program

What it means to mentor as a leader

A mentoring relationship between a leader and an employee unfolds differently than other forms of mentorship. Though it doesn’t replace the value gained from external mentorships, the dynamics and purpose of the relationship have uniquely valuable benefits. By mentoring the next generation of talent, your senior leaders have the chance to address company- and industry-specific challenges and questions that are tough for other types of mentors to tackle.

Both leaders and employees are hungry for more hands-on learning opportunities and for that, leader-as-mentor programs are ideal. In a multi-generational leadership study, 89% of respondents said that developing their leadership skills was important, yet only 47% said their companies had formal mentorship programs to help develop these skills.³

When a leader successfully mentors another employee (whether it’s a direct report or someone from another team), the results can be dramatic and beneficial for everyone. Both parties become more engaged at work; they’re more productive, more loyal to their organization, and more likely to get promoted.

↑ Productivity  ↑ Loyalty  ↑ Promotions

³ The Multi-Generational Leadership Study (2015) workplacetrends.com
Leaders as Mentors improve the talent pipeline

Leadership gaps remain a challenge for 60% of companies, partially due to the 10,000 Baby Boomers who retire every single day, and a lack of Millennials interested in leadership. In order to fill that gap, organizations must rethink how they develop new leaders and find a way to entice an entire generation into considering careers that lead them into the C-suite.

By giving less experienced employees the chance to connect one-on-one with a mentor, they get to learn directly from established leaders within their company. They'll gain important career skills and are likely to become more engaged at work.

Leaders who mentor are more loyal to the companies they work for. And, they’ll hone skills which can help them rise to higher positions in the organization and further close the leadership gap. While many leaders spend their days in “crisis mode” ensuring they meet their department goals, mentoring provides a way for them to step back, connect with colleagues in a different context, and reignite their passion for their work.

Only 30% of Millennials express interest in rising to the executive level.

In 2015, Millennials passed Generation X as the most populous generation in the workforce. Source: Pew Research Center

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1. Do 10,000 baby boomers retire every day? (2014) Glenn Kessler, Washington Post
2. Looming Leadership Gap: One-Third of Global Companies Struggle to Find Senior Leaders and Only 12 Percent of employees Aspire to the Corner Office (2015) Saba.com
Setting goals for your leader-as-mentor program

Depending on the type of outcomes you hope to achieve with your program, you should carefully consider how a mentoring program of this nature can help your business objectives.

If you’re hoping to drive employee engagement and keep less experienced talent interested in the company, you might choose to pair senior leaders with high performers from different business units - having them focus on business drivers and challenges.

If your senior leadership seems disconnected or out of touch with the junior workforce joining the organization then you might consider a program that pairs these leaders with junior employees who exhibit passion and excitement for where the company is going.

Facing a lack of diversity and not sure how to turn things around? Structuring a mentorship program that connects minority professionals or middle managers with your leadership could be the key.
Introducing mentorship to leaders

Leaders who choose to become mentors have higher rates of promotion, are viewed better in the eyes of their peers, and experience a greater chance of getting a raise. They also report back that the experience has given them new leadership skills.

But it’s common for leaders to be resistant to the idea of mentoring at first. Many will tell you they already know how to get the best work from others, that the employees who report to them are all engaged at work and reaching their full potential.

This view is predicated on knowledge-based management, whereas mentoring fosters relationship-building, communication and action. It can help to remind them that many of the less experienced employees are Millennials, a generation that expects constant feedback at work.

Some leaders may take a little convincing to let go of the knowledge-based culture that’s been built up around a traditional management structure. Mentoring can help them get a deeper understanding of how newer generations are different, and the multitude of skills they have to offer. In turn, this will help leaders find better ways to motivate their teams and drive results.

Leaders have to be ready to set aside their egos and listen to colleagues lower down in the organization. They must be willing to take feedback and change the way they approach each individual, based on what they learn about him or her in the process. And that’s difficult, especially for leaders who have been in their positions for a while. But those leaders who can set aside their egos and learn to develop employees will see their careers take off, as they continue to build their leadership skills and rise within the organization. Mentorship itself is a collaborative act. A successful mentorship requires that both parties invest time and energy and at least a small amount of vulnerability.
Introducing mentorship to employees

Though employees tend to be receptive to the idea of internal mentorships, there may be some reservations. There are likely to be legitimate concerns that this kind of undertaking could change the relationship between employees and leaders.

A good mentorship program will address these concerns and create a framework around how employees can navigate the relationship to get the most from this experience. This starts with a set of ground rules you’ll want to create for the program participants, as well as setting clear expectations for what the mentorship will consist of.

HERE ARE FOUR WAYS TO ADDRESS EMPLOYEE OBJECTIONS:

1. Mentorships build rapport and trust between leaders and employees, giving rising stars more confidence and support as they advance.

2. Having a leader who truly wants to understand what your goals are will give you the opportunity to face new challenges with guidance along the way.

3. You’ll learn ways to manage up and how to collaborate with leaders to work towards mutually beneficial outcomes.

4. By getting to know your leaders better, you will gain a better understanding of the company and sharpen your business acumen, which can directly impact decisions you make regarding your career path.
Successful mentorship matching

Matching a mentor and protégé can be a complex process. A great match is based on a well-rounded picture of both parties and includes more than just interests, skills, and job title. Though very small mentorship programs can operate successfully when matches are chosen by judgement alone, as soon as your mentorship program involves 20 participants or more, software significantly improves quality of matches⁹.

Above all, these partnerships should be matched by an objective outsider, rather than by the mentor and protégé themselves, or someone who may have a particular bias in matching. There are a number of blind spots that appear when protégés and mentors are left to find one another on their own. When protégés are allowed to choose their mentors they tend to choose based on seniority of job title alone, even though mentors lower in the hierarchy might have more time to devote to the partnership and unique insights that could help that particular protégé.

Conversely, when mentors choose their protégés, they tend to opt for a partnership with someone who reminds them of themselves. In a Harvard Business Review survey, 58% of women and 54% of men openly admitted they chose their protégés “on a basis of comfort”¹⁰. This tendency doesn’t necessarily create a more successful partnership, and it greatly disadvantages women and minorities as they are not equally represented in management and leadership positions. This, in turn, can hinder the company’s future potential. The business benefits of diversity are well established — companies with strong gender diversity are 15% more likely to outperform less diverse companies, while ethnically diverse companies are 35% more likely to outperform less diverse companies¹¹.

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HERE ARE A FEW TIPS FOR MAKING GREAT MATCHES WITHIN YOUR ORGANIZATION:

1. Before your program starts, use interviews or assessments to identify the strengths of mentors and the development opportunity areas of protégés.

2. Don’t be afraid to match protégés and mentors from different parts of the company - in fact, this is a great way to share skills that transcend disciplines.

3. Have an objective outsider collect information on protégés and mentors to create matches.

4. Help protégés and mentors schedule a kick-off meeting, explain why they were matched and provide a sample agenda to get them started.
Implementing a leader-as-mentor program successfully

Just because the mentorship itself happens between the leader and the protégé, it doesn’t mean the company’s role in fostering mentorship ends with the program’s announcement. You need to create and nurture an environment in which this kind of relationship is truly valued and help both parties find the right structure and match for them.

Foster relationships
One of the easiest ways to sabotage a new mentorship program before it even begins is by expecting results after one or two sessions. These partnerships take time to build. You need to foster a trusting long-term relationship. Give your mentors and protégés a consistent time to meet. Do it on company time so they feel the support of the organization behind them as they work.

Respect privacy
In order for a partnership like this to work, both parties need to feel comfortable talking openly. If meetings happen in-person, and the leader has a private office, that’s a perfect place to meet. Otherwise provide each partnership with a conference line or encourage them to find a private space for their meeting so that participants have a chance to work without the fear of being overheard on sensitive matters.

Build rapport
Encourage leaders to develop rapport with their protégés. A successful partnership will be based on support and feedback, rather than judgement and criticism. Millennials, in particular, value and expect feedback at work. This is a perfect place to provide it.

Track progress
To ensure the partnership is running smoothly, and catch any little issues that could become bigger issues, it’s best to schedule regular check-ins with both the protégé and mentor. It doesn’t have to be a long, or involved process, simply use it as a chance to see how the relationship is progressing and help provide guidance.
Ensuring program success

In order to create a great mentorship, specific goals for the partnership need to be defined at the start of the relationship and tracked throughout. By the time the mentorship ends, both parties should be able to state whether or not they reached their goals without hesitation. To ensure that goals are met, they should include a clear set of action items, outlining how that goal will be met and the steps involved. Documenting this provides both the mentor and the protégé something to reference during their engagement, and a tool to hold one another accountable.

Whether or not mentorship goals are achieved is a key indicator of success for your program. Be sure to take the necessary time up front when planning to launch your program, to ensure a win for everyone involved. Approach mentor/protégé matching with care, set clear expectations for the program to both participants and stakeholders, build in regular feedback loops with participants, and evaluate success at regular intervals to keep things on track.
About Everwise

The Everwise enterprise social learning platform is a completely new approach to scalable and effective talent development. Everwise connects professionals to the people and resources they need to thrive at every stage of their career.

Everwise extends beyond traditional content-driven solutions which, while scalable, are largely ineffective on their own.

The Everwise personalized learning experience:
• Encourages action-oriented learning that supports skill mastery on-the-job
• Connects professionals with mentors, peer groups and communities of practice to facilitate true social learning
• Curates expert content and customized missions that keep them learning while on-the-job

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If you’d like to find out more about implementing a successful mentoring program in your organization, please learn more at:

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