

WHERE HAVE ALL THE MENTORS GONE?

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The role of mentor is a time-honoured tradition. History provides many examples from the ancient Greeks to the craft guilds of the middle ages. People learn skills, value and culture from others whom they look up to and admire. This was inherent in the master-apprentice relationship but has been lost in the employer-employee relationship.

Mentoring is a great opportunity to bring new ideas, new perspectives, and new energies into a company. Being responsible for a young person's early career is also a big responsibility. That can be both exciting and terrifying. For these reasons, a barrier to implementing a mentoring program is often a lack of mentors.

Before a program begins, potential mentors wonder quietly if they have the confidence in themselves to offer value to others. If you are wondering about what you can offer a mentee, read each of the following statements.

I want to be a mentor because I have valuable skills, experience, knowledge and contacts to pass on.

I want to be a mentor because I am good at teaching, coaching and training.

I want to be a mentor because I am good at explaining my work and listening to others.

I want to be a mentor because I'm prepared and able to take the time to work with a mentee.

Does the list make you pause? Or are you ready to become a mentor?

Mentoring is a unique relationship with both personal and professional aspects. Whether you are considering becoming a mentor yourself, or you are approaching others, consider the many hats that a mentor can wear. They:

teach, coach and train;

model behaviour by example;

communicate – listen and explain;

develop talent through practical assignments;

provide visibility for mentees and opens doors for them;

protect their mentees, allowing them to take risks and learn from them;

give their mentees the benefit of their experience and knowledge; and,

provide feedback, counselling and support mentees in the learning process.

Honouring the mentor tradition means recruiting mentors willing to assume responsibility for a protégé. Equally important, there must also be an honest commitment to follow through and fulfill the obligations of the mentor role.

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