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Better Management is Better Medicine®

Developing a Mentorship Program - 2010

Mentoring is more than just a buzzword. It could be the way you boost employee satisfaction and keep the best and brightest talent at your practice. Why not consider sponsoring a mentoring program as part of your move to ensure a practice environment where people are the top priority, and where staff satisfaction and retention are integral parts of the culture. In *Benchmarks 2010 a Study of Well-Managed Practices®*, 59% of owners, 42% of associates, and 41% of staff members described their level of job satisfaction as “very satisfied.” Not bad! When asked if there was someone within the practice who encourages growth and development, 34% of associates and 40% of staff members strongly agreed. (See **Figure 1**) Again, not bad, but there’s room for improvement. Give your doctor and non-doctor staff the support they need and want – create a mentoring program.

Mentoring is a one-on-one initiative that brings together colleagues with different levels of experience within a practice (or industry or specialty) to work together to improve job performance and create and recognize prospects for advancement. Well-Managed Practice® owners in *Benchmarks 2010* indicated the top things they believed they could do to help foster more of a career mindset in staff members were to encourage continuing education or training, to set practice and individual goals, and to provide opportunities for advancement. A mentoring program will cover each of these, creating an opportunity for your staff to develop relationships with more experienced members of their field while showing them you value their commitment to the practice.

Effective mentoring requires more than just common sense and enthusiasm. Both parties need fundamental mentoring skills, including the ability to listen actively, build trust, maintain confidentiality, encourage progress, and identify goals. Mentors should be able to give the mentee direction, develop his or her capabilities, provide corrective feedback, manage risks, open doors, and inspire. Mentees should be able to learn quickly, accept feedback and coaching, show initiative, follow through, and manage the relationship. For new employees who’ve never had the benefit of a mentor, the practice can help provide direction.

Typically, a mentoring relationship is initiated by the individual being mentored, the mentee, since he or she stands to gain the most from the relationship. Mentees should, therefore, negotiate the arrangements, set the goals, do the work, monitor self-progress, and conclude the formal mentoring relationship when they have learned as much as they can from the mentor and feel it is time to find a new mentor. To create a mentoring program in your practice you can facilitate the process and bring potential mentees and mentors together for a set period of time, at the end of which they can choose to continue the relationship or to end it.

Present the purpose, responsibilities, and benefits of the practice’s mentoring program to your team in such a way as to ensure those who participate do so of their own accord out of a desire to learn or teach, with the motivation to either learn from more experienced team members or to help develop



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less experienced ones. If a mentoring relationship exists because those involved think “the boss wants me to do this, so I’d better,” the relationship will fail. Likewise, if the mentor or mentee is only interested in exploiting the relationship for his or her own purposes (i.e. upward mobility, improved office status, bragging rights, etc.) he or she has missed the purpose of mentoring. Increased learning and the development of talents should be the focus; networking is simply a benefit.

Get your potential mentees excited by explaining the benefits they’ll receive from the mentoring relationship. Generally, a mentor answers an employee’s questions, provides a friendly ear to listen to the challenges the employee faces, offers advice, and shares his or her own experiences. Sometimes an employee needs a mentor with skills different from his or her own, and other times the employee needs a mentor with similar skills but more experience. The key is for the team member to identify where the gaps lie and what his or her goals are, and then to choose people who have the knowledge and influence to help strengthen those areas. Mentoring is a fluid process that will change over time given the needs of the employee being mentored.

Approach employees (either associates or staff members) you feel would provide a valuable mentoring experience, and ask if they would be willing to consider mentoring. A stellar team member may not be a great mentor, so ask volunteers you believe are other-focused, good listeners, and motivated to help develop the skills and competencies of co-workers. When talking to your potential mentors be sure to describe how they’ll benefit from the mentoring relationship. To begin with, the mentee will have knowledge the mentor doesn’t have and the mentor will learn from the experience as well as teach. Mentoring will also give the mentor a chance to expand his or her people-development skills and allow him or her to give back to the profession.

Once your staff understands how a mentoring relationship works, offer an “enrollment period” during which potential mentees complete a questionnaire indicating what each hopes to learn through the mentoring process, as well as any personality traits that might be helpful in matching the employee with an effective mentor. (See **Figure 2** for what Well-Managed Practice® staff members want to learn.) Mentees should provide specific, measurable goals in areas such as developing skills and competencies, understanding concepts, or accomplishing a goal from the most recent performance evaluation. Potential mentees may also request a specific individual as mentor if they have a preference. Ask potential mentors to complete a similar questionnaire indicating areas of expertise, what they hope to learn through the process, and personality traits that might be helpful when being matched with a mentee (for instance, two introverts may not be a good fit together). The key for a successful mentoring relationship is for the employee to identify where his or her gaps in knowledge are and what his or her goals are. Match mentoring pairs based on what mentees want to learn, what specialized knowledge mentors have, and whether the two will be compatible in a mentoring relationship.



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Once mentors and mentees are matched, get the process rolling by scheduling the first meeting. The practice can sponsor the relationship for a set period of time (three, six, or twelve months). Regular meetings every two to four weeks for an hour or so provide the pair with a structure they can follow, and the relationship won't be left to atrophy. The practice can help develop the relationship by requesting proof of meetings, by offering assistance if the relationship isn't productive, and by switching mentors and mentees if the need arises. At the end of the set period, offer mentors and mentees the chance to continue the existing mentoring relationship on their own, or to continue the mentoring relationship with a different individual. The practice should offer to sponsor new relationships, but the goal is to teach employees how to develop mentoring relationships on their own.

For the first several meetings, provide specific topics of conversation. Mentoring pairs need to self-direct the discussions eventually though, so provide them with a list of general conversation ideas and let them guide the discussion in the direction that will most benefit the relationship. (See **Figure 3**)

Mentoring can energize, give the practice a recruitment edge, shorten employee learning curves, increase employees' job satisfaction and loyalty, and improve productivity and work quality. If the relationship is properly managed, both sides will benefit and the practice can merge past and present into a better future.

Figure 1

Growth and Development

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

I believe I have an excellent opportunity to advance or grow with the practice I'm currently in.

| | <u>Associates</u> | <u>Staff members</u> |
|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Strongly agree | 33% | 25% |
| Somewhat agree | 54% | 42% |
| Somewhat disagree | 10% | 24% |
| Strongly disagree | 3% | 9% |

There is someone within my practice who encourages my growth and development.

| | <u>Associates</u> | <u>Staff members</u> |
|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Strongly agree | 34% | 40% |
| Somewhat agree | 52% | 39% |
| Somewhat disagree | 10% | 15% |
| Strongly disagree | 3% | 6% |



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Figure 2

Desired Training or Mentoring

In which of the following areas would you like additional training or mentoring? Rank the following in order of importance. (Most Important = 1, Least Important =8)

| | <u>Associates</u> | <u>Staff Members</u> |
|---|-------------------|----------------------|
| Communication and relationship skills | 1 | 1 |
| Innovative ideas | 2 | 3 |
| Focus and organization | 3 | 2 |
| Enthusiasm and optimism about work | 4 | 7 |
| Being a reliable, professional coworker | 5 | 5 |
| Respect for clients and coworkers | 6 | 4 |
| Ethical leadership | 7 | 6 |
| Work ethic | 8 | 8 |

Figure 3

Sample Conversation Guide

Meeting 1:

Get to know each other:

- Where you grew up
- Where you went to school
- Where you worked previously

Discuss current job:

- What you do
- Your favorite/least favorite parts

Schedule next meeting

Future Meetings*:

Discuss:

- Current and past work and life situations
- Current and past goals
- Current and past strengths and weaknesses

Attend meetings and seminars related to your conversations together

Mentor and mentee observe each other at various tasks

Mentee practices skills

*Information taken from The Mentoring Group website (mentoringgroup.com), a division of the not-for-profit organization, the Coalition of Counseling Centers.

Meeting 2:

Discuss current job:

- Recent projects
- Recent difficulties/solutions

Discuss goals:

- Summary of short-term work goals
- Summary of long-term work goals
- Goals for the mentoring relationship

Schedule next meeting



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