

# Are your companies' mentoring efforts adding enough value?

BY KERRY DAWKINS ON APRIL 14, 2014



A cornerstone of almost all business strategies is the need to get more out of people. It's because of this that mentoring remains a key component of many development programmes. Especially in South Africa at this time there is a vital need to build the talent pipeline and to support the development of leadership and technical skills. Many companies formally include mentoring in their HiPo, Fast Track, Graduate or Top Talent programmes.

Of course, formal and informal mentoring happens in various other places in organisations, too. The challenge is to ensure that all these mentoring

programmes are adding real value and as a result positively impacting the mentee and the business. It is therefore imperative to correctly assess the value and relevance of your mentoring efforts. Is it meeting the needs of the business and mentees, especially in a changing world?

Lets examine for a moment the average mentoring effort.

*A cup of coffee in the canteen with a brief discussion where the mentee describes their current time pressures on the client account, how demanding the client is and how tired they feel, the mentor then gives some advice with a supporting story about how they handled that same situation (possibly 15 years ago) and then the mentee is relieved when the mentor stops with the "when-we" story and they discuss the latest Manchester United soccer game.*

You will notice that:

- both mentor and mentee entered the relationship with a **good intention** and the mentor was motivated to assist in the company's development efforts. BUT the mentoring relationship is not having enough of an impact on the mentee and is not positively impacting the business outcomes. It is a lack of skill not motivation
- there is a tendency for mentors to believe that they don't need to prepare or have any tools at their disposal to be able to assist the mentees. They believe that their years of experience have prepared them to give advice.
- the business is grateful to the mentor for giving up their precious time to have the coffee chats and they don't feel they can hold the mentors responsible or accountable for any outcomes. The mentor wants to look good in the eyes of the mentee and the company and real value or skill level is not adequately assessed.

Mentoring definitely has a place but, like so many other things, needs to be transformed to fit in with the requirements of the new world of work. Mentoring needs to take a big step forward and away from traditional views where the mentor is seen to be all-knowing. In these changing times, the mentor has a critical role to play but not one that is based on their experience alone, rather requiring them to effectively combine their experience with a toolkit for real support, development and guidance of talent. Mentors need skill – and not just good intentions – to be able to have a real impact on the lives of today's younger employees.

Generation Y Talent are impacted by the new world of work and this is leading to many new issues and questions, including:

## **More options, more choice**

Mentees have many options in their current workplace and within the industry. Flexible work options are also available. The average person has many questions around what is best for me and for my career.

### **Resilience**

Mentees are under pressure to deliver and they need to develop resilience. They are not sure how to develop resilience and how to cope with the demands placed on them.

### **Remaining Relevant**

Mentees have many options for learning and development and they know and want to keep learning. They have many questions around what is the best option way forward given their time constraints and the financial pressures of their lives. In five years, it is likely that the majority of technical skills and knowledge that they currently have will be worthless.

### **Business Changes**

Mentees need to adapt to the changes in the business and need to be able to cope with change. Consider the swarming trend – talent may work for one manager on one project and after 6 months when they are no longer required on the project they will move to a new project with a new manager. The managers is unlikely to be concerned about their longer term growth and may be too conflicted to be able to support the talent in making choices.

### **Building Networks and Reputation**

Mentees are aware that they need to build a network of people for career success and manage their reputation online and in real life. For many of them this can be overwhelming in particular dealing with diversity in real life.

Are your mentors prepared for these conversations? Do they know how to support a person to develop resilience? Do they have the skills to have an effective career conversation? Can they help the mentee to think through their options and make a good choice? In most cases they are not. Businesses need to support the mentors to gain the skills they need and require them to operate at a much higher level. The business needs to transform the mentoring effort to add real value and support talent in the new world of work.

Maybe some individuals in the business will remain old fashioned mentors – people who just seem to be wise and seem to know the answers. These people are hard to find and are often in great demand. The business needs to consider creating a new breed of mentors – possibly development facilitators – who are well equipped to support, develop and guide junior talent in the new world of work. Maybe some of these development facilitators sit within HR and L&D but in most cases the business managers need to be this new breed of mentors to ensure that the business retain and grows the resources it needs for the future.

Written by Kerry Dawkins from Potential At Work. [Contact us](#) to discuss our *Mobilising Mentors* programme and our Grit mentoring programme particularly suitable for HiPos.