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Women Helping Women

By: Nancy D. O'Reilly, PhD

How Mentoring Can Help Your Business



Corporate America spends millions of dollars each year to make the workplace more efficient and productive. Finding and retaining talented and experienced workers is key to reducing turnover and high operational costs. Mentoring new employees and helping them become successful on the job is one way to reduce turnover. Women can benefit from a female mentor who has knowledge and experience and can show them "the ropes." The mentor can be a guide, a role model and a good advisor.

To find a mentor, look at your community. Is there someone you admire for her skills or success? Invite her to coffee, or on a walk, or just call and ask her advice. Everyone likes to feel admired. Developing this relationship may take some time and effort, but it will not only help you, but will help your mentor in return.

There's no shame in needing help now and then. A good mentor has so much to offer in experience and training that you are bound to learn, grow and excel in your field. For more information about mentoring or finding a coach, talk with your friends and colleagues or search the Internet.

You can also take the initiative and start a mentoring program in your company. Here are some simple ways to get started:

- 1.) Send out a questionnaire to all the women in your organization to gauge the interest in starting a women's mentoring program. This can be sent through the human resources department or from a supervisor or department leader. If there seems to be a lot of interest in such a program, find some leaders who can help put one together.
- 2.) Search the Internet for information on local women's professional organizations. See if they have any existing mentoring programs. There is no reason to re-invent the wheel. If there are local programs, you can encourage other women in your organization to come along and join with you.
- 3.) If there aren't any programs in place locally, you may want to consider starting your own. Understand the purpose of such a program and define guidelines and membership policies. This should be a voluntary, supportive group of professional women who seek to help other women coming into the profession.
- 4.) Decide the focus of the mentoring program you create. There should be regularly scheduled meetings, whether once a week or once a month, or even once a quarter. The meeting place can be as professional as the conference room or as casual as the coffee shop. Create a system or form that will allow members to pair up based on similar interests and needs.
- 5.) Foster the relationships created in the mentoring program by checking in with members for feedback. Encourage them to meet one-on-one, build relationships and meet outside the office for advice and bonding. Networking parties, local charity events and organizational meetings are ways that mentors and mentees can learn more about their industry.

Mentoring programs can also help women transition from little to no education or job experience by assisting them with educational needs, clothing, social skills and overall support. One of the more successful is the Suit Yourself Program, run by the United Way. Women are given professional clothing and accessories for job interviews, as well as training for their GED. They learn computer and communication skills that will help them advance in the workplace. This is a mentoring and assistant program where everyone involved wins.

Mentoring helps build a healthy workforce and ensures that new, excited and trained women come up through the ranks.

Nancy D. O'Reilly, PsyD, is a clinical psychologist, researcher and founder of the online resource WomenSpeak.com. She is author of "You Can't Scare Me: Women Speak About Growing Older in a Youth-Oriented Society." For more information, please visit her website: www.womenspeak.com or call: 417-860-5834.

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