Mentoring Programs:
An Opportunity to

PAY IT FORWARD

Some of you may have had the opportunity to view the 2000 movie *Pay it Forward* and for those who haven't, here's a brief synopsis. The plot revolves around a young boy (Trevor) deluged with numerous life challenges. He attempts to make the world a better place via a homework assignment—think of something to change the world and put it into place. Trevor devises the notion that instead of paying a favor back, to pay it forward instead; repay good deeds not with payback, but with new good deeds done to three new people. These three people then pay it forward to nine more people, and well, you get the picture. His notion of "pay it forward" has astonishing results.

By Darcy Loy

mentor three people, and they then chose to mentor nine more people, and those went on to mentor 27 more people. The results could be prodigious.

Successful mentoring programs have become valuable, organizational assets. In a May 2012 press release, Management Training Systems stated that "Formal mentoring programs offer employers an opportunity to strategically customize employee careers within the organization in ways that are mutually beneficial to the organization and employees." Nonetheless, successful mentoring programs require a great deal of strategizing and preparation before implementation. In order to embrace the concept of pay it forward with mentoring, organizations must establish validation for the program, delineate development and implementation, and define beneficial outcomes for all key players.

PROGRAM VALIDATION

A critical factor in determining a mentoring program's success is the engagement and support of senior leadership. Commitment must be established at the top of the organization. It must be fostered as part of the institution's culture down to the frontline employee. To establish validation, a thorough needs assessment should be initiated. This is accomplished by departmental surveys, discussion with staff members, or focus groups. Establish data that reflects the number and type of participants that might be interested in long-term, career goals that would benefit from mentoring.

Input from frontline supervisors is crucial in order to gauge if workload will support the necessary time away a protégé or mentee would require. Whether the budget can sustain this type of program is a factor; program benefits vs. budget should be carefully evaluated. Program goals should be established as part of the assessment. Effectively communicate desired outcomes in order to validate the importance of mentoring.

Programs fail because the organization doesn't know what they want from the process. Dr. Lois J. Zachary, author of *Creating a Mentoring Culture*, states, "When you have fuzzy program goals, you have fuzzy outcomes." (Alsever, 2008). Regardless of how tedious the needs assessment process may seem, it plays a crucial role in substantiating the need and importance of the mentoring program.

You might be questioning what relevance or value might the concept of pay it forward have in regards to facilities management? Does it have a place within our organizations? An unknown author writes, "A lot of people have gone farther than they thought they could because someone else thought they could." Wouldn't you like to be that "someone else"—that one person who plays a significant role in someone's life that lends to their professional growth and success? What an amazing feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction that would be.

Being a mentor to young professionals embodies the pay-it-forward concept. Think of the potential impact if you chose to

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Development of a comprehensive program is essential for all key players to benefit from the mentoring process. There are so many perspectives to address, that development is best served by utilizing a diversified, focus group for design. Questions will encompass an array of areas.

Should it be a formal program with specific, organized goals and structure or should it be informal and focus on interpersonal enhancement? Should emphasis lean toward on-board mentoring for new recruits, which will result in a smooth transition and quick development of an understanding of the culture of the university and unit? Or should mentoring be streamlined toward the mid-management level, focusing on professional identity, education, and career and leadership development for successful succession planning?

Regardless of what the mentoring focus is to be, it is essential that program be structured on the foundation of mutual respect and trust between the mentor and protégé. To build trust, both parties must be in full agreement that confidences are not to be shared with others inside or outside of the organization.

Once you have determined your focus, you next need to develop a program description. This document will serve as the policy and procedure handbook for the mentoring program. It should define and outline the goals and benefits, as well as institute the intended outcomes. It will establish the group to be targeted for mentoring, basic guidelines for communicating, and rules for engagement. Program development will also address time commitment, as well as budgetary needs, and a predetermined strategy for successful marking.

SUCCESSFUL MENTORING PROGRAM COMPONENTS

Program Manager: Highly successful mentoring programs require a full-time manager. Granted this necessitates finding dollars in the facilities budget for the position, but the program has the potential to fail without a designated leader. This individual plays a key role in not only organization of the program, but the implementation and monitoring as well. They will facilitate program development with the focus group and prepare a budget plan.

The program manager will maintain the pool of interested parties, oversee the pairing of individuals, and be instrumental in helping them define what the focus and purpose of the partnership will be. Establishing meeting frequency and communication between the partners, as well as training development for mentors, workshops, and other activities will be distinct tasks.

Develop a mentoring agreement, which will outline rules and responsibilities, as well as expectations, termination procedures, and a confidentiality clause. Monitoring is critical for success, and the program must be consistently scrutinized. Feedback from mentors and their protégés, as well as supervisors, will also be needed to ascertain success of the program.

Goals must be measured to see if they are being met. If a partnership is failing, the reason must be determined and a solution implemented. This can all be accomplished with the utilization of surveys, observation, and one-on-one interviews.

Pairing Mentors and Protégés: Nothing will be more significant in establishing a successful program than the pairing of mentor and protégé. It is vital that a great deal of consideration goes into identifying the "perfect" match. The partners need to be able to collaborate and share learning styles, goals, bios, and resumes. This will assist in structuring a beneficial development plan for the protégé.

The selection process will depend on the identification of the group to be mentored. If the emphasis is on new employees, than the mentor should enjoy working with younger individuals. Perhaps the mentoring focus will be toward succession and growing the next generation of departmental leaders. Protégés would then be paired with successful, top-level managers within the organization. How will the pairing be accomplished? Will you rely on your human resources unit to randomly select, or will individuals chose their own mentor—or perhaps they will fill out questionnaires that will determine pairs based on skill sets and/or personal goals?

Some organizations will encourage matches between people from different operations of the institution. This not only fosters cross training and knowledge exchange, but removes the protégé from people that they might interact with on a day-to-day basis. Retired IBM mentoring program manager Shelia Forte-Trammell states, "A perfectly sincere manager can set up an apprentice for failure by blurring the distinction between assigned tasks and mentored activities."(Alsever, 2008). Departmental separation of mentor/protégé has the potential to develop a more trust-based relationship because it lends to more speaking freedom.

Strategic Marketing: In order for a mentoring program to be successful you must have participants, so marketing will be essential. The goal will be to reach as many interested individuals that will take a vested interest in paying it forward to others. How do you market? You brand and advertise the program very much like you would a product. Emphasis must be placed on the

value of the program—value to the company, to the mentors, and to the protégés.

A more creative, knowledgeable, and connective workforce are strong selling points, as well as innovation and collaboration on all levels. Brochures can be designed and distributed within the organization or at events such as a wellness or job fair. Mass e-mailing or creating a designated website for the program provides marketing opportunities. Posting testimonials from past participants on the Web page is another strategy to utilize.

However, the simplest and least expensive means of marketing the mentoring program is personal communication. Whether it's presented at a leadership meeting or to frontline employees by their direct supervisor, it allows an opportunity for questions and, again, personal testimonials.

Once the mentoring program is fully developed a pilot program should be launched for a specified time period. Upon completion an evaluation including surveys, interviews, and general observations should be reviewed. Use this information to define what worked or didn't work and where improvement is necessary. Once this process is complete and necessary adjustments have been made, the program should again be taken to senior management for review. Upon review, and with full support and commitment from upper management, a full launch should be initiated.

PROGRAM BENEFITS

Validating and developing a mentoring program is a detailed and time-consuming process, but valuable in regards to the significant benefits gained once implemented. These benefits encompass both individuals and the organization as a whole.

For the mentor it might be a greater appreciation of different perspectives or the opportunity to sharpen their leadership and interpersonal skills. Or maybe it is way for them to develop a network of supporters as well as gain insight into other unit's operations. Perhaps it's simply the personal satisfaction of paying it forward; the fulfillment that is obtained from assisting a young professional reach their dreams and aspirations.

For the protégé, mentoring provides networking opportunities and a greater understanding of the culture of the organization. Or possibly it's gaining the ability to establish realistic career goals with guidance from a successful, senior leader. Maybe it's improved performance, or quite simply just the feeling that one obtains in knowing that someone values *you* enough

to invest their time so that you can be successful. Perhaps it's the satisfaction of knowing that from this experience, they too can pay it forward.

Personal benefits are important, but benefits to the organization will be the focus of senior management. Studies have shown that employees that participate in a mentoring program are more satisfied, therefore are more productive and happier in their positions. This in turn affects employee retention. An individual that has been mentored will tend to stay at a job longer than one that has been left to figure it out on their own.

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Research has shown that employee turnover is most often correlated to the individual not knowing how to do their job, and this leaves them frustrated. Mentoring programs are also an effective way to succession plan. It provides an avenue for organizations to cost effectively groom young professionals for future senior positions. The result of mentoring is a highly skilled, professional workforce that exudes synergy and momentum.

A successful mentoring program is a valuable tool within the facilities organization. Although it requires significant commitment in regards to time and budget, the benefits supersede the negatives. Mentoring is a cost-effective way to retain your shining talent and prepare them to lead. The ability to "customize" employee careers within the organization is an attribute that creates momentum for the future.

With assertive implementation we can effectively create a pay-it-forward matrix that has limitless results. John Crosby once wrote, "Mentoring is a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction." Let us push in the direction of the future and pay it forward with our employees. ⑤

NOTES

1. Alsever, Jennifer. (July 24, 2008). "How to Start a Mentorship Program." *www.cbsnews.com/8301-505125_162-51212133/how-to-start-a-mentorship-program*, p. 2-8.
2. United State Office of Personnel Management. (September 2008). "Best Practices: Mentoring." *www.opm.gov/hrd/lead/BestPractices-mentoring.pdf*, p. 2-20.
3. Unknown. (March 28, 2012). "Developing Employee Mentoring Programs." *www.prlog.org/11835934-developing-employee-mentoring-programs.html*, p. 1.
4. Unknown. "Benefits of Having an Organizational Mentoring Program." *www.mentorscout.com/about/mentor-benefits.cfm*, p. 1.

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