



High Impact Mentoring

A Maverick Institute White Paper

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In Brief

Mentoring programs can be highly effective for onboarding new employees, transferring retiring knowledge, ensuring proper behaviors in heavily-regulated or high-danger jobs, and many other uses.

However, the lack of a structured approach often means companies that invest in mentoring come up short.

This Maverick Institute white paper outlines what separates traditional mentoring from high-impact mentoring and offers specific advice for how organizations can make their mentoring programs quickly achieve significant and measurable results.

Today's companies don't have a dollar or a nanosecond to waste on ineffective, so-so knowledge transfer.

High impact mentoring needs to incorporate concepts of 'lean learning': just-in-time knowledge transfer; pull, not push; and more easily managed chunks of information.

Why Should We Care About High-Impact Mentoring?

The quick answer: *because we can't afford not to.* Today's companies don't have a dollar or a nanosecond to waste in ineffective, so-so knowledge transfer. Here are just a few of the challenges:

- For mentees, face time is harder and harder to get, especially with executives and subject matter experts. This precious time needs to be productive.
- Frequent changes to product and service offerings, regulations and organizational structure make quick learning essential.
- Employees stay in individual jobs for shorter periods of time. Getting them productive sooner is paramount.
- Younger workers are more easily discouraged and leave companies more quickly today. Building strong relationships and concrete skills through mentoring is a way to keep them longer.
- Mistakes are less and less tolerable, especially during an economic downturn when resources are already stretched thin.

What Is High-Impact Mentoring? Four Key Traits.

There are four traits that differentiate high-impact mentoring from traditional mentoring.

*“What do I do
next?”*

*For high impact,
mentees need to
learn at the exact
moment they
require the new
information or skill.*

1. A Structured Approach

The hard and soft skills a mentee needs to succeed must be well-articulated, logically arranged, and clear to both mentor and mentee.

Mentors need to gain the specific skills and resources to teach what they know efficiently and effectively. The only model most of us have for sharing what we know is K-12 education, which is basically “sit down, shut up and listen.” Mentors consistently try to teach too much at once and drown their mentees with a firehose of knowledge.

The role and expectations of the mentee need to be clearly spelled out and agreed upon.

2. Relevance and Just-in-Time Learning

Mentees need to learn at the exact moment they require the new information or skill. Retention rates go up dramatically as the gap between learning and need shrink.

Mentees need to clearly understand how what they are learning to do impacts them and the business. Younger workers today are particularly concerned with building a resume of useful skills and positively influencing their workplace.

Mentees need opportunities to practice and master new skills right away. Mentors need to make sure they get those opportunities to ‘seat’ the new learning.

3. Individualized Learning

Content and delivery need to be tailored to each mentee, and take into account the mentee's previous knowledge and experience. For example, a mentee in the software industry with only basic computer skills needs a whole different level of instruction than an experienced virtual worlds gamer.

Content and delivery also need to be framed in the context of the mentee's natural learning style. Too often we start people out by saying "Here. Read the manual first." In fact, only 10% percent of people prefer to learn by reading first. Does the mentee learn by watching? Doing? Hearing an explanation?

The mentor needs to find this out and then teach to the appropriate learning style. When we do this, receptivity, retention and mastery increase exponentially.

4. Focus on Results

A good structured mentoring program not only outlines key skills to learn, but also establishes deadlines. Deadlines make mentees more assertive about acquiring skills, and encourage mentors to spend the needed time.

What constitutes mastering a skill also needs to be clear to both the mentor and mentee. Too often mentors rely solely on seeing the mentee perform the skill to assess mastery. Then, they provide feedback to which the mentee responds "You never told me to do that." Mentors should be able to articulate what constitutes mastery before the mentee attempts the skill or task. In this way, the mentee knows clearly what to focus on and practice.

Mastering hard and soft skills that directly benefit the organization now. Short-term mastery leads to long-term development.

Frequent assessment of how much learning is taking place during the mentoring and adjusting delivery.

"It's all in the Manual."

Only 10 percent of people prefer to learn by reading first. Does the mentee learn by watching? By doing? By hearing an explanation? High-impact mentoring takes learning styles into account.

Traditional vs. High-Impact Mentoring

Traditional Mentoring	High-Impact Mentoring
Opportunistic - Driven by today's problem or situation.	Strategic - Driven by need to create mastery in key business areas.
Unstructured - No overall plan of what to teach or how best to teach it.	Structured - There is a plan of what to teach, when to teach it and how to teach it.
Weak goals and deadlines - timeline is 'years'	Strong goals and deadlines - timeline is weeks, months or quarters.
No measurable results - focus is on relationship building and exposure to abstract knowledge, not necessarily application	Measurable results - focus is on building concrete skills that incorporate abstract knowledge and experience.
Long-term career development emphasis.	Short-term skills development emphasis.
Mentors have little or no training in how to share what they know; quality of instruction varies widely.	Mentors have training in how to share what they know efficiently and effectively, so quality of instruction is consistent.
Progress depends on the mentor , largely a matter of availability and drive.	Progress is a shared responsibility between the mentor and mentee. Mentees can effectively learn on their own when needed.

Why Should Organizations Strive for High-Impact Mentoring?

✓ Low Cost

- Uses existing personnel and resources; no additional support staff necessary
- Doesn't require any special hardware or software or programming (like elearning or simulations)
- Mentor training is straightforward to learn and easy-to-apply

✓ Fast, Measurable Results

- People want to learn from others naturally. The University of Washington's Center for Workforce Development found that 78 percent of what people needed to know to do their jobs successfully they learned from the person next to them.
- Mentees learn to do things that benefit the organization right away
- Desired business results drive teaching content and timing

✓ Flexible

- Learning can take place face-to-face or remotely and at any time of day
- Order of learning can change depending on business situation
- Speed and amount of teaching are elastic based on mentee's previous knowledge and experience and innate abilities.
- More than one person can mentor another
- Updating content is simple and fast.



The Maverick Institute is a think tank for knowledge transfer innovation. The Maverick team works with organizations to 'retool' inefficient classroom-focused training with new and more effective knowledge transfer methods and technologies such as:

- Lean Learning
- One-on-one Learning
- Mentoring
- Viral Teaching
- On-Line Learning
- Simulation
- Social Networks

Maverick clients range from fast-and-furious start-ups to mid-size growth companies to the Fortune 100 and are located around the globe.

Head Maverick Todd Hudson is available for quotes, stories, keynote speaking and Maverick lunch briefs.

More information at www.maverickinstitute.com.

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