



Mentoring the Many Faces of Diversity

This article by Marilynne Miles Gray & Dr. William A. Gray in its most current form is excerpted from: Mentoring for Diversity (eds. D. Clutterbuck & B. Rose) & International Executive Development Programmes 7th Edition (ed. R. Millar)]

Anybody can get mentoring results. However, that's not the same as successful results. Since 1978, our guiding principle, when developing each mentoring program, has always been three-fold:

1. While a mentoring program is designed for a targeted group of proteges, it is important to remember that within the group are unique individuals, with different backgrounds, needs, goals and dreams within a unique organizational context.
2. The program must be designed to accommodate these individual differences within the same program, and at the same time, not lose sight of satisfying organizational needs and goals.
3. Collaborative upfront implementation planning and design by the Mentoring Task Force (or Steering Committee) often with a mentoring expert ensures that the program addresses everybody's diversity issues, as well as common issues.

While it's customary to focus on the visual differences, such as gender and race, we have also included the unseen (and often unrecognized) differences that can potentially hinder or conversely boost a working relationship such that knowledge transfer – a one-way process -- or sharing – a two way activity -- takes place.

We do not assume, for example, that diversity issues automatically arise from differences in race or gender. Indeed, these issues may stem from partners having different working styles. Or from their different designations, such as labour, management, technical and non-technical.

In sum, we have learned, over the years, to address diversity issues very broadly and to stress the teaching of many kinds of diversity so that program participants are enabled to more accurately deal with the differences when they arise in the work place. The following sample case studies while they look back to the past illustrate how our company has provided different mentoring solutions® for the many faces of diversity.

Mentoring the Many Faces of Diversity

A. Mentoring to Facilitate Silo Busting

Like most organizations that have been around for over 20 years, CSX Transportation is hierarchically structured and has departments that were created to carry out specific functions. Add to this, CSX's history as a railroad with often-severe management-labor conflicts.

Under CEO Pete Carpenter's leadership, in the early 1990's CSX began to transform itself into a High-Performing Organization with a threefold purpose: serving customers better, enabling salaried and exempt employees at all levels to develop themselves, and increasing stock market value for shareholders.

In 1992, an Associate Development Program was launched, in which employees from all levels, from management and labor, and from all departments could participate in a **mentoring program**. Its primary purpose? -- to enable employees to develop themselves in order to pursue career options in new directions, such as moving from labor to management, from one department to another, and/or relocating into new positions, and so forth.

By allowing everybody to participate CSX combats another diversity issue: silo busting. Silo busting occurs when the silos, or different departments within the organization, are broken down. A culture of teamwork is fostered, rather than one of compartmentalization. Employees get a chance to understand the importance of each other's roles within the company, and learn from people that they may not usually have a chance to interact with. Working relationships that were previously antagonistic, due to misunderstanding a person's function or lack of communication, are smoothed over. People learn that each department is unique and is a vital part of the larger organization. They learn to work together for an essential business reason: to attract and keep valued customers.

One component that has made this mentoring program so effective since the early 90s is the Oversight Committee. This volunteer group puts more time into (a) interviewing, (b) selecting and (c) matching mentor-protégé partners — and (d) providing ongoing monitoring and (e) support for each mentoring relationship — than any other company we've worked with to date. However, that this has remained a traditional, paper-based approach for a relatively small program overall.

With the passage of time, changes in the world have mandated that not all organizations can take this same approach to mentoring. Thus, additional, new mentoring solutions must be provided. More of this aspect at a later point.

Top level support is crucial -- a senior executive made the trip, emphasizing how this mentoring program supports and enhances CSX's three-fold strategic purpose as a high-performance organization. Yet another key to success was a two-day training session at CSX's rural retreat centre in Welaka. This remote location and timeframe greatly reduced job distractions and enabled mentor-protégé partners to focus on getting to know each other and on planning how they would work together to achieve major protégé goals.

This arrangement also fostered silo busting, by allowing participants (a) to network and, through informal dialogue, (b) realize the importance of all job functions and (c) discuss how to work together more cooperatively to serve customers better. For example, one mentor-protégé pair learned about auditing and sales

Mentoring the Many Faces of Diversity

from each other, and then made presentations to each other's department. This fostered appreciation and cooperation between the departments.

The program, our materials and training consistently rated an average 4.3 out of 5 for eight years in a row on all aspects of measurement. The company sponsored several dozen Phases [group of participants] over time.

B. Mentor Professional Transformation

Mentoring can often help people make professional transformations – shift a style or way of functioning – enabling them to be more successful.

The Sales Division of Exxon had actively recruited women and visible minorities to meet Equal Employment Opportunity Program (EEO) goals. Close tracking revealed that after five years, these valued sales people were not performing at a high enough level to justify promotion. Upon realizing this, many females and black males left. In contrast, white males had higher performance ratings and were getting promoted because they had received informal mentoring.

Recall that an earlier important point has been made to the importance of uniqueness. Our research uncovered another reason for the high turnover rate of females and black males: they were having difficulty making the transformation from being just technically oriented to becoming more people-oriented — an essential competency for sales. EEO data revealed that supervisors were providing adequate supervision to orient all new hires during the first year. However, the performance differences began to occur in the second year, when the females and black males were not getting any informal mentoring.

Organizations no longer can afford to just let informal mentoring happen even though for years the inadequacy of this approach has been clear. That's not to say informal mentoring should be discouraged. What it does mean, however, is that formalized mentoring initiatives must be established.

In the past naysayers claimed mentoring couldn't be formalized. Some still make this claim. Of course, that's been proven to be a wrong point of view. Mentoring can be formalized and it can be highly successful. It's better than a course. Better than simply reading a book or watching a video. To translate learning into on-the-job results in a way that will bring success to each partner in the mentoring relationship, there has to be some expertise brought to the mission. And that's where our company comes in.

We at Mentoring Solutions carefully co-designed a more structured approach to ensure systematic mentoring was provided so protégés become competent salespeople. At the end of the year-long relationship, quantitative surveys revealed that a very few proteges' needs were not met as expected. Why so? This was a program developed before e-mail and internet capabilities were what they are today. Thus, long-distance relationships hindered partners getting together to the degree desired. But they now knew what to do to overcome these last hurdles and, to an individual, described what they would do moving forward.

Qualitative evaluation (structured interviews) revealed that every protege felt valued and optimistic about a future with Exxon. To a person, all recommended Exxon slightly reduce the job functions of mentors so they

Mentoring the Many Faces of Diversity

had more time to assist proteges. This was done and the net result was significantly greater retention of Exxon's highly valued diversified workforce, which saved money and, in turn, increased sales!

C. Reciprocal Mentoring to overcome a perceived "Generation" Gap

The diversity issue for the Radiation Division of Varian Associates was a "generation" gap between recently hired personnel, most of whom had master's degrees, and veterans who did not. Although newer hires knew how to use the latest technology and software programs, they lacked the practical know-how and business acumen veterans had gained from years on the job. Added to this was the fact that the Radiation Division was the losing money.

Due to animosity between the generations, we thought it best to flex our existing **Mentoring Design Process** and pull from our repertoire. For instance, we know more than a dozen different ways of matching participants. In this case, proteges were allowed to nominate mentors, each of whom was then asked if s/he would like to work with that particular protege.

Curiously enough, in many instances, a protege chose a mentor s/he had difficulty working with. When asked why a mentor was nominated: *"I want to see if we learn how to work together in a formalized relationship."* Again, this comes back to the issue of unique considerations. Clearly a one design-fits-all approach would not have yielded the successful outcome of this program. Readers are cautioned not to take this approach as a recipe that might work in their organization. It might not.

So what did we do? Each mentor-protege pair worked on a six-month Mentor-Assisted Project™ (MAP) in the mentor's area of expertise -- expertise that the protege wanted to acquire. Was this beneficial? Yes. Every protege completed at least one MAP. A number of the mentor-protege pairs engaged in reciprocal mentoring. The protege taught the latest in software savvy and the mentor taught practical know-how. One mentor was chosen for his expertise in project management. This mentor identified how to quickly prepare a future project manager. This was significant because the Radiation Division had no formal training courses on project management, yet most of the work done involved working on project teams!

There's even more to report on the benefits not only for this particular pairing but also for the organization itself. After the MAP ended, this mentor and protege developed a training program that greatly improved the competencies of all future project managers, saving huge quantities of money in the process.

The pilot program was so successful that it was expanded each year. By the fifth year, the Radiation Division had moved from the bottom of 23 divisions to become a profit centre.

Mentoring the Many Faces of Diversity

D. Reverse Mentoring

At&T Global Communication Systems Mentoring is generally thought to follow the hierarchical structure of the organization: going from someone higher ranking to someone lower ranking. However, when we worked with AT&T Global Business Communication Systems, our initial mentoring solution was bottom-up or reverse mentoring because we knew this would solve some of the problems in the organization while adding value.

After top-level management mandated that everyone would receive diversity training, the group representing the diversified workforce, approached the decision-makers and offered to mentor them. This lower-ranking group helped these corporate leaders understand the frustrations of being different and the unique contribution that diversity could bring to the organization. For example, leaders decided to target minority small-businesses – something they had never previously thought of. They now had direct access to people who represented the diversified workforce and could contribute to these new initiatives. As a result of this unique approach, the decision-making process became more collaborative. To add value to the initial mentoring initiative, we suggested reciprocal mentoring relationships be established on a wider basis. Corporate leaders continued to receive mentoring about diversity issues from the diversified workforce, which, in turn, now received mentoring to guide career development.

E. Mentoring Teams to improve Management-Labor Relations

Management-labor conflicts have historically plagued many corporations, especially the railroad industry. The Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad was no exception. General Manager Al Crown wanted to resolve this age-old conflict.

In this case, we went in to guide the development of a mentoring program with a series of five-person Mentoring Teams comprised of three proteges plus management and labor co-mentors. On each team, the three proteges had common work experience. For example, one group of proteges had all been working as computer programmers. They did such a good job technically that this qualified them to supervise other people doing these same jobs.

For this organization, the diversity challenge entailed dramatically changing working style to become less detail-oriented and better able to see the big picture, as well as working towards becoming more people-oriented. Clearly this would take both practice and time.

A second group had earned promotions from the Operations side of railroading that required assertive decisions and actions to keep the trains rolling out of the yard on time. Now, these proteges were learning to supervise other Operations workers, and needed to become more people-oriented and motivating. The co-mentors were willing to work together to help the proteges make this major style-shift transformation.

Was this of value? Absolutely.

During the mentoring process, the proteges were able to observe the role model of cooperation between the co-mentors, which furthered C&O's initiative to improve management-labor relations.

Mentoring the Many Faces of Diversity

Update

As stressed at the outset, anybody can get mentoring results. However, that's not the same as successful results.

When we work with organizations, we suggest it's not necessary to have Mentoring Certification or specialized knowledge -- just an appreciation for the fact that mentoring is a sophisticated concept requiring a focus on creating a process that closely resembles all the best qualities of informal mentoring so that knowledge sharing and transfer can take place as desired.

The preceding five examples illustrate concepts about thoughtful design, meeting diverse needs, and mentoring program achievements. Since 1986, as a company, globally we have provided a wide variety of Corporate Mentoring Solutions®.

This is our more recent mentoring story. After 13 successful years providing on-site training for hundreds of blue chip clients and selling hundreds of thousands of copies of our paper-based products, in 1997 we decided the internet and technology had advanced sufficiently for us to take our tools online.

Our first generation online mentoring product -- the Online Mentoring System® morphed into a second generation product: Colaboro® Mentoring Management System. We can rightfully claim to have invented sophisticated online mentoring which is much more than telementoring, or e-mentoring. In 1990, we began to write about the concept of self-directed mentoring in our newsletter, *MentorInk*. We understood that this concept had to also be put into Colaboro. As a result, Colaboro can facilitate two types of mentoring: Formal Coordinated and Self-Directed.

Our research on mentoring trends (again published in *MentorInk Newsletter* in 2000-2001 issues), pointed to a need for programs to not only match mentor-protégé partners quickly with a high degree of accuracy and satisfaction, but also to do this for larger numbers in what we called a Mentoring Pools©. We know too, from past experience, that clients want to track relational progress -- as would be expected with any well-designed program, and evaluate benefits gained.

Want to know more about Colaboro? Give us a call and visit our web site: www.mentoring-solutions.com

Think Colaboro for - competency development - succession planning - career development - leadership - newer hires - engineering -breaking the glass ceiling - employee retention - diversity - banking - technology transfer - intellectual capital - emotional intelligence - re-skilling - sales - innovation - paradigm shifting - healthcare - knowledge transfer - high tech - silo busting - distance human resource development - petrochemical - diplomats - expertise - globalization - individual development plans - government - legal field - project management - employee recruitment - major transitions - career shifting - non-profits - athletes - food services - career exploration - military - style shifting - manager development - communications - lateral deployment - commerce - youth - social workers - the media - retirees - problem solving - librarians - entrepreneurship - internship enhancement - clergy - the gifted/talented - electronics - apprenticeships - volunteers - higher education - architects - joint ventures - and much, much more