

Use Development Partners to Extend Your Mentoring Reach

You don't have to do all the development of your staff yourself. In fact, you shouldn't. Instead skillfully guide employees how to tap into a rich network of experts.

Jeannie Coyle and Wendy Axelrod, Talent Savvy Manager, LLC

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Wendy Axelrod and Jeannie Coyle are co-authors of *Make Talent Your Business: How Exceptional Managers Develop People While Getting Results*, published by Berrett-Koehler in May, 2011. They are also managing partners of Talent Savvy Manager, LLC, a consulting firm that helps managers and organizations drive substantial development of people to create real long term winning performance. Jeannie Coyle was formerly SVP of HR for Amex; Wendy Axelrod directed leadership development and talent management at Sunoco, Inc.

Website:
TalentSavvyManager.com

If you are like many managers who want to mentor employees, you might feel overwhelmed by the sheer demand mentoring makes on your time and mental bandwidth. Is there a solution to this dilemma?

Yes, just follow the lead of exceptional development managers (EDMs) we researched from companies such as Corning, Intel, Siemens, Merck, Xerox, Wells Fargo, Adidas and Microsoft. These managers have the answer, we call it "next generation mentoring".

While these exceptional managers take accountability for the development of their employees, they extend the mentoring footprint well beyond themselves to a rich network of development partners. They help employees put together the right mix of development partners (peers, managers higher in the organization, acknowledged experts) and teach employees how to leverage their new resources. Everyone accrues tremendous value. Employees get

fast access to what they need to learn, work with the manager to pull all the learn-

ing together, and then take on new challenges with confidence and distinction. The result? Managers get expanded "outsourced" capacity; employees get proficient at effectively using others as development partners. A winning proposition.

Take Ken for example, he hired Marta, one of six reporting managers, to lead sales support for the e-commerce division of their thriving engineering firm. Marta, very smart and with a proven record of leading excellent customer service, had a steep learning curve ahead. She needed to understand e-commerce operations in depth, as well as some customers' very unique business needs. An exceptional development manager, Ken hardly had the time, and frankly, all the expertise, to get Marta up to speed. What Ken did have was the skill to act as a superb



“general contractor” to tap the specialists to mentor Marta over three months. By the next quarter, she was already identified as a huge company asset.

So how do Ken and other exceptional development managers (EDM's) effectively practice next generation mentoring? Here are four steps for how to do it:

1. Green light and motivate people to partner up for development. Often employees think they should stick close to home for development and may even feel disloyal about going elsewhere for help. EDMs set their minds straight. They not only give employees permission to seek out new sources of learning, but also educate them about the value of development partners, frequently citing their own experiences of learning from others.

2. Give people an accurate compass. EDMs are sticklers for helping people focus on exactly what they need to learn and why. Without a clear destination, very specifically describing what they need to learn, employees will be on a wild goose chase to find the right development partners. If Ken had not helped Marta pinpoint the importance of understanding some unique customer requirements, she may have faltered right out of the gate. She was then able to describe to the development partner exactly what she needed. It comes down to EDMs conducting careful due diligence (lots of penetrating questions) to target the development destination.

3. Teach people how to get the most learning. Great learning does not flow automatically, even from the best development part-

ners. EDMs teach employees how to turn on the faucet. They help employees locate the right fit of the development partner on both knowledge and willingness to teach. Then employees create a simple contract with the development partner to meet precise learning goals. That contract includes how the partners will work together, respecting time constraints and preferred ways of communicating. A bonus is to make the partnership developmental for both. For example, Marta taught her "old pro" sales development partner how to use Twitter to connect with clients.

4. Help make learning stick. While sometimes on the sidelines of the mentoring, EDMs make sure they are centrally involved to help employees, “use it or lost it.” Because learning only matters if used to get results, the manager needs to be on point, ready to support the employee's application of the lessons. Ken had regular meetings with Marta to find out what she learned and identify best ways to shape her behaviors as she worked with customers. She was overwhelmed at times, but Ken's frequent positive feedback kept her motivation high.

What's in it for you? EDMs consider next generation mentoring an investment with a huge payoff. Like Ken, spending the small (but highly disciplined) amount of time it takes to connect employees with appropriate experts, puts EDMs in the enviable spot of sharing the development load. They also experience a reduced “time to market” effect, since employees are not lined up at their doors waiting to get in. Practice next generation mentoring and get great returns for you and your employees.

Contact Wendy Axelrod (wendy@talentsavvymanager.com) and Jeannie Coyle (jeannie@talentsavvymanager.com)

Website: www.TalentSavvyManager.com