

Learning on the Run 26: Introducing a Mentoring Program

What might be one way to introduce mentoring into an organization?

The Request. A Director of Engineering from an electrical utility company wanted to provide more support for the less experienced engineers in his division by creating more internal mentoring relationships. As a first step in program development, he sponsored a conference for his entire division and requested the help of a keynote speaker to help introduce mentoring to his organization.

Larger Context. Although the Utility Company had an extensive on boarding process, after that initial process, there was little in the way of ongoing support for less-tenured staff engineers. Also, the Engineering Division was hiring more and more women engineers into entry-level positions. The highly respected Director was concerned that without any ongoing formal support for newly hired engineers and women engineers in particular, these less-tenured engineers would begin to look elsewhere to build their careers. The Division might also become less competitive in hiring top tier college graduates if the organizational culture was not continually more supportive of new staff.

Consulting Intervention. Although the initial request was for a “Keynoter,” it was clear that Director wanted the Division to consider mentoring as a possible way to create more internal connection and support for both his senior and junior staff. The design for the keynote address was expanded beyond a stand-alone presentation. It included a brief participant questionnaire, a frank public interview with the Division Director about his experience in being mentored, a presentation of the current thinking about mentoring and small group discussions of the summarized questionnaire data and it’s significance for the Division.

Last line: One way to introduce a mentoring program and gain more commitment is through a more active participation by the people who will be expected to implement the program (1).

Commentary. Although this was an initial introduction, we might have done even more to acknowledge and consider the specific needs of less-tenured female engineers.

(1) A classic research study demonstrating the relationship between participation and resistance was reported by Coch, L. & French, J.P.R. Overcoming resistance to change. *Human Relations* (1) 512-532. 1948.