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## Focus

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### Mentoring

*For this article, I will define mentoring as a one-on-one employee development process. Do not think of mentoring as training; it is more like coaching. The mentor is usually one or more supervisory levels above the person being coached.*

Formal mentoring programs offer an opportunity to improve productivity and develop future leaders. Mentoring can be effective throughout a business, but is most often targeted at "promising" employees, either new or seasoned. An effective mentoring program should have structure and specific goals. The program can cover one person or many, and can have either limited, short term objectives or long term strategic goals.

#### What's Broken?

If employee development needs are unclear, clarify opportunity areas by asking employees. For example, a manager could meet with new employees after three months on the job and ask them for their impressions, frustrations, and suggestions for improvement. You can likewise interview newly promoted employees after three months.

#### Program Design

First, identify those you want to mentor. Next, identify the employee development goals for each individual. Then choose a willing mentor. Pay careful attention here, because interpersonal "chemistry" is vital. At this point, the program champion should work with the mentor(s) to develop a plan and specific goals for each mentee. Each plan should have a predetermined duration and measurable outcomes.

The goals for an individual mentee could include developing supervisory abilities, improving quality, becoming more effective at marketing, or gaining better understanding of business fundamentals.

#### Getting Started

The initial meeting between the mentor and mentee should cover the expected outcomes of the relationship and establish a foundation for trust and open dialog. Remember, a mentor is **not** a supervisor, even though some bosses carry out that role. When a mentee's direct supervisor serves as a mentor, the supervisor should take care to separate the mentoring and supervisory roles.

On a personal note, I was lucky to gain a formal mentor just two weeks into my first job after college. My mentor and his wonderful secretary quickly guided me through this period of "business adolescence," and I am grateful to this day.

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*Tom Wagner*

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