

EVERWISE

WHITE PAPER

# Mentoring That Works

Avoid 6 Common Mistakes

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## Executive Summary

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**77%**

of companies cite mentoring as an effective tool to increase the retention of valued employees

Source: Menttium

Mentoring can boost employee engagement and satisfaction, but only when it's done right. We look at some of the common challenges to running effective mentoring programs, and how to overcome them.

Recruiting, training, and retaining the leaders of tomorrow top the list of challenges for senior management. High achievers seek more mentoring – a process that can improve engagement and performance – and the research shows that mentoring directly affects an individual's ability to succeed as a leader. 66% of companies using mentoring programs report that they created new leaders and fostered new career development, while 77% of companies state that mentoring is an effective tool to increase the retention of valued employees.<sup>1</sup>

However, it can be hard to deliver great mentoring experiences, particularly at scale. Common challenges include ineffective matching, unmotivated mentors, and protégés who are unclear about their goals and the right approach for the process.

This paper addresses some of those common challenges, and sets out a framework for overcoming them and creating a mentoring program that achieves its full potential.

Specifically, we'll cover:

- Why your emerging leaders need mentors
- Six common challenges that make mentoring less effective
- Keys to overcoming each of these challenges

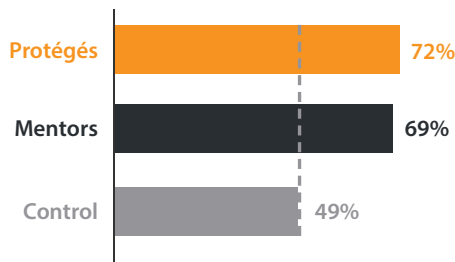
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<sup>1</sup> The Business Case for Mentoring, Menttium, 2009

# Why Your Emerging Leaders Need Mentors

A unique convergence of economic and demographic trends is creating a serious challenge for organizations in developing the next generation of leaders.

## Employee Retention (5 year)



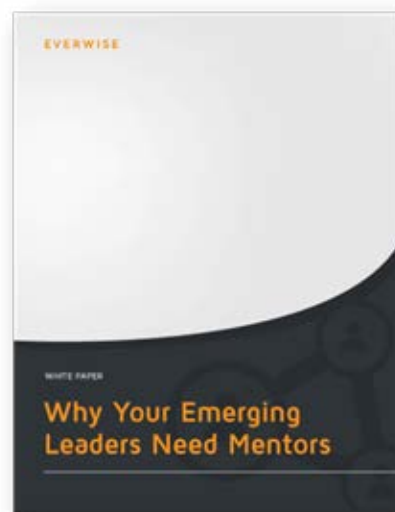
Source: Gartner

The recovering global economy means heightened competition for top talent, and at the same time there's a major generational shift going on in the workplace, as Baby Boomers retire and are replaced by Millennials. The exodus of experienced managers is creating a global shortage of talent, and at the same time organizations need to be aware that emerging leaders, especially Millennials, have different values than their predecessors, often prioritizing personal growth and purpose alongside compensation.

Mentoring gives employees the support they are looking for, improving retention and performance. And the research shows that mentors also benefit from the experience, with higher promotion frequency and reduced attrition being found among mentors as well.

In an increasingly competitive hiring environment, mentoring can give companies the edge in developing and retaining emerging leaders. This oft-overlooked and relatively inexpensive tool can deliver great results for all involved – protégés, mentors and organizations alike.

To learn more about what mentoring can do for your organization, download our companion white paper [Why Your Emerging Leaders Need Mentors](#).



## Mentorship Programs are Hard to Run

While it is clearly an effective way to drive desirable learning outcomes, mentoring is under-utilized in a majority of organizations. In fact, according to a recent global survey of more than 10,000 professionals, only one in three employees has been a part of a mentoring program.<sup>2</sup> This despite the fact that 83% of those surveyed said they would benefit.



*83% of employees say they'd benefit from a mentoring program, but only 1 in 3 has been a part of one.*

The truth is creating and managing a successful mentoring program at scale is not simple and many companies struggle to implement even the most basic offerings for their people.

“Organizations spend significant time in planning for mentoring implementation,” Dr. Lois J. Zachary wrote in the book **Creating a Mentoring Culture**. “In some, mentoring programs continue to thrive and grow. In other organizations, mentoring efforts barely get off the ground: they are short-lived and achieve only a modicum of success.”

The top challenges, addressed on the following pages, are:

- Insufficient or improperly motivated mentors
- Poor goal definition by protégés
- Ineffective or inefficient matching
- Protégés feel guarded with their mentors
- Limited ongoing support
- Little, if any, outcome tracking

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Walters International Employee Insights Survey 2013

## Challenge #1: Mentor Motivation

Many companies struggle to recruit enough mentors with the right motivation to satisfy demand from high potential employees (let alone a broader population).



"Sure! I'd love to volunteer as a mentor."

*Voluntell,*  
v. [vol-uhn-tel]

*To apply significant pressure for compliance while outwardly stating that it's optional.*

### Recommendations:

- Articulate the benefits
- Don't pressure people to sign up
- Consider bringing in external mentors

Sometimes mentors only join because they are "voluntold" to do so. The perception that participation is mandatory can drive compelling recruitment numbers, but results tend to disappoint as checkbox-seeking mentors don't extend engagement, and protégés pick up on the lack of enthusiasm.

### Solution

When a mentoring program is set up right, ensuring motivation becomes easier. Everwise mentors, for example, regularly tell us how much they, themselves, get out of the process, often supposing it exceeds their protégés' benefits<sup>3</sup>. Research by Sun Microsystems considered career progress of about 1,000 employees over a five-year period, and found that 28% of mentors got a raise, compared with just 5% of managers who were not mentors. Mentors were also more likely than non-mentors to get promoted.<sup>4</sup>

Recruiting properly motivated mentors is based on **articulating these benefits**. Many executives are asked to mentor for organizational benefit, but personal enrichment can be a much more powerful and durable motivator.

**Don't pressure people** to sign up as mentors, or pass the message on through line managers. It's better to have a smaller number of truly committed mentors than a large pool of people who only signed up because they felt their boss expected them to. Mentoring should be completely voluntary.

In some cases, it's advisable to **bring in external mentors**, in other industries at non-competitive companies, to ensure enough qualified, enthusiastic people. Our research suggests that organizations with fewer than 3,000 – 5,000 employees may simply not have enough managers and organizational breadth to support an ongoing program. We use marketing best practices to recruit the volunteer mentors in our cross-organization pool at Everwise, ensuring that everyone is happy to opt in.

<sup>3</sup> Everwise "Why Do Mentors Choose Everwise" 2013

<sup>4</sup> Fortune "Being a Mentor Could Boost Your Own Career" 2007

## Challenge #2: Protégé Goal Setting

As with most processes, setting expectations and defining goals are critical. Unfortunately, protégés are often not able to articulate what they want to address with a mentor. Without clear goals, the mentoring relationship lacks direction, and can become little more than a talking exercise. It's also difficult to measure the effectiveness of the relationship without benchmarks for success.



*"What can a mentor help me with?"*

In many cases, protégés simply lack notions of what to work on. This is natural; most of us don't have the self-awareness to identify specific limitations, and our managers don't provide explicit, actionable feedback in performance reviews.

### Solution

One effective solution is to **suggest focus areas** based on common issues people face at similar points in their careers. This relies on access to detailed data, which Everwise and other vendors can provide, based on aggregated learning and development figures. Goals cannot be imputed based just on title, function or level, because paths taken are very different from person to person.

There are also **specific exercises** that protégés can do before being matched to help clarify and articulate goals. Developing SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-based) goals supports execution with confirmation of success. They can also enable the protégé and mentor to find a common language for their collaboration, which is often challenging.

New protégés can counsel with HR business partners or program managers for **professional perspective on worthy goals** from mentorship. Ideally this is with someone who's experienced with goal-setting and mentor-protégé relationships. They can advance goal definition and suggest common language while re-articulating what they hear from talking with the protégé.

A line manager can play this role, but protégés' goals often revolve around challenges with their manager, so this is not ideal. Sometimes peers can provide useful guidance, especially if they've been trained to help with this process.

### Recommendations:

- Suggest focus areas
- Conduct goal-setting exercises
- Let the protégé discuss mentorship goals

## Challenge #3: Effective Matching

Matchmaking is notoriously difficult. For smaller cohorts, with all participants known to a program manager, matching can be based on judgment, but when programs scale beyond a few dozen participants, the process becomes unmanageable.



*"I'm a perfect mentor for you.  
We've got so much in common!"*

When protégés find their own mentors based on filtering and sifting through mentor profiles, they tend to go for the people with the most impressive titles, overlooking people who might be great mentors because they don't seem senior enough or they work in an un-sexy group.

### Solution

While people often talk about the need for “good chemistry” between partners, our data suggests that automated and semi-automated matching can be extremely successful. But effective matching is about more than just skills, interests and job descriptions. The key is to **develop a rounded picture** of each mentor and protégé, and make a match based on affinities that may not be obvious at first.

It's similar to online dating – making a good match is about more than just finding someone who shares the same hobby. The best sites ask a lot of questions, incorporate the results in the matching process, and fine-tune the process over time. Good mentor matching needs to be just as sophisticated.

### Recommendations:

- Develop a full, rounded picture of each mentor and protégé
- Use mentoring software
- Expand the mentoring pool to ensure sufficient breadth and depth

For groups larger than 30 – 40 participants, **mentoring software** can help. A number of platforms employ algorithmic approaches to matching that range from basic filtering to robust, machine-learning processes. And beyond matching, good mentoring software can gather information, dynamically survey, track outcomes, and learn to improve future matching.

**A larger pool of mentors** can provide a better chance of finding the right match. Use some of the solutions we mentioned in Challenge #1 to recruit more mentors, ensuring sufficient breadth and depth of the pool. We've found that at least two or three potential mentors for each protégé is necessary to ensure good matching.

## Challenge #4: Protégé Openness

In some cases, protégés may be guarded with their mentors. It may occur when they need to discuss particularly sensitive issues – like problems with a boss or coworker – and they fear comments coming back to haunt them. It can also be simply because protégés want to make a good impression and are afraid of discussing weaknesses with a mentor.



*"Thanks for asking. Everything's going great!"*

In these cases, protégés will not get as much out of their partnership by talking around issues versus digging into thorny challenges.

### Solution

Confidentiality is critical for honest communications, and it's incumbent upon the mentor to reiterate what will be shared and what won't. In many cases, program managers should **provide guidance on confidentiality** in mentor training.

It's also important to **carefully select mentors** who ensure that protégés feel as safe as possible. Make sure that mentors aren't in the protégés' reporting line or, ideally, division or group. This mitigates the risk of word making its way back to a manager, peer or HR partner. And it's critical to get the right seniority gap between partners to avoid "level anxiety" where the protégé is too focused on impressing the mentor due to his or her seniority.

Many organizations are starting to **look outside of their company walls** for mentors, from non-competitive companies and often from other industries. This approach dramatically reduces fear of retribution – the mentors simply don't know many players in the protégé's company. There are, of course, other benefits to this model, e.g., protégé and mentor learn about their partner's organizational culture.

One company working with Everwise found that when it gave employees a choice between internal and external mentors, two thirds chose to partner with mentors from outside the organization. Those who chose external mentors liked the idea of being completely open and not having any fears of retribution.

### Recommendations:

- Provide guidance on confidentiality
- Select mentors carefully
- Look outside the company walls



## Challenge #5: Providing Structure

Most mentorship programs provide information and guidance to mentors and protégés at the outset, but there's often a lack of ongoing support and structure during the mentorship. As we saw in our companion [white paper](#), typically people only retain 10% of what they learn in training so tools provided initially can get forgotten. If problems develop during the partnership, as they often will, the participants don't know where to turn. Relationships can flounder due to problems that could have been quickly resolved with the right support.



"Now that we've covered every aspect of the weather, any idea how we should actually get started?"

### Solution

Many programs have an official contact person, but when it's just one responsibility among many, mentoring doesn't always get the priority it deserves. It's better to have a **dedicated relationship manager** for either mentor or protégé to turn to when they run into problems, someone who has the time to check in with them on a regular basis and help them resolve any issues.

Effective programs also provide **context-specific tools** to both partners based on where they are in the partnership. Here are some of the resources that we recommend:

#### Recommendations:

- A dedicated relationship manager
- Context-specific tools provided at the right time

For protégés:

- Career reflection exercise
- Suggested focus areas
- Goal setting guide
- How-to guide for driving the partnership
- Notes templates for various activities (e.g. agendas, homework)

For mentors:

- Mentor self-assessment
- Mentor training
- Insightful guides for particular contextual circumstances

For both:

- Kickoff Guide (e.g. first call agenda, suggested guidelines, feedback skills training, templates for organization and interaction)
- Regular dispatches (e.g. typical milestones for particular stages of partnership, suggestions for overcoming common obstacles)

#### Mentoring Program in a Box



[Download the Kit](#)

## Challenge #6: Tracking Outcomes

Tracking results is critical for the partners to feel as if they're making progress, and also for program sponsors to understand the impact of the program and to improve it. Unfortunately, mentoring program results are rarely measured. This can make it difficult to justify the program for resource allocation in subsequent years, and also can impede the program's evolution over time.



*"It's so fun to catch up! Now what were we supposed to be covering again?"*

### Solution

Keeping track of the relationship and its progress not only helps the partners get the most out of it, but also enables the organization to measure the success of the program and justify continuing investment.

First, it's important to **track progress at the partnership level** to ensure that things are going well. This is where the clear goal-setting we talked about earlier is important, as well as the need for a relationship manager to check in throughout the process. If participants have established clear partnership-level objectives, then the relationship manager can track progress, and help them stay on track.

Effective programs also **track progress at the group level** to ensure that there's a good return on the continued investment. Mentoring software can help with this. Common metrics to track include engagement, progress against goals, match satisfaction, and participants' desire to continue in the mentoring program.

### Recommendations:

- Track partnership-level progress
- Track group-level progress
- Baseline and benchmark year over year

Finally, you need to **baseline and benchmark year over year** to ensure that you're improving over time. If the metrics don't show an improvement, you may need to revisit aspects of the program design to ensure that it's still meeting the needs both of the participants and of the organization. New approaches to mentoring are always being developed, and new tools become available all the time. So it's important to keep learning from peer organizations and listening to feedback in order to keep the program fresh.

## Mentoring in Action: A Case Study

Here's how one large technology company recently implemented a mentorship program. The program resulted in better matches and more successful relationships, while helping the women in its 36,000-employee division advance in both managerial and technical roles.



*Most L&D programs don't have an impact until years down the road. Everwise provides immediate, relevant impact and value.*

The company partnered with Everwise to gain instant access to a pool of deeply experienced business executives to mentor its female employees, with a fully managed mentorship program.

By matching mentors based on protégé goals, and then using Everwise's Relationship Managers to oversee each mentorship, Everwise helped the employees develop the skills they wanted to build. Everwise's machine learning technology and data from 60,000 successful corporate mentoring partnerships ensured that protégés were paired with the ideal mentor, including:

- a partner at a Big 5 management consulting firm
- an executive director at a global telecom firm
- the president of a regional telecom provider

The SaaS-based solution allows mentors and protégés to manage their relationships and keep track of goals, while allowing the company to track the success of the program and measure outcomes.

The program has achieved a high degree of success, in terms of satisfaction with mentorship matches, progress towards protégé goals, and likelihood of recommending Everwise to peers.

## About Everwise

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Whether you choose to implement an out-of-the-box approach to developing tomorrow's leaders or whether you are seeking to scale a traditional mentorship program to boost the performance of all employees, mentorship delivers what you need to stay competitive in the global war for talent.

The Everwise data-driven approach and global pool of mentors (experienced operating executives spanning more than 125 industries and 45 countries) deliver remarkably effective matches and our specialized software and dedicated relationship managers help track and ensure partnership success.

We're trusted by some of the most progressive companies in the world such as:



We also power learning communities for social sector leaders such as Coach Across America.

If you'd like to find out more about implementing a successful mentoring program in your organization, please learn more at:

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