# Switching it up - reverse mentorship a modern alternative to traditional model

By Roland Innes

2 Jun 2021

Traditionally, mentoring involved a more experienced individual providing guidance, motivation and role modeling for a newer, younger individual in the workplace. This transfer of knowledge and industry insights entails a power relationship, where the mentor has authority over the person in the protégé role. Given the extraordinary rate of change in the last decade, this model of mentorship has changed. No longer is it just the protégé who has something to learn, and the mentor who can impart this wisdom. Now, the dynamic is completely different and younger entrants to the workplace can make a valuable contribution with the right structures in place, such as reverse mentorship. By pairing younger employees with experienced executives with the purpose of mentoring on trending topics of strategic and cultural relevance, it is clear that the power relationship has equalised. Both sides of the generation gap stand to learn important lessons from the other in addition to delivering real benefits to the business.



© Katarzyna Bialasiewicz – 123RF.com

## Reverse mentoring: future proofing

The biggest threat to business is the phrase "we've always done it this way". Reworking the traditional mentoring hierarchy is an important tactic that companies can use to ensure that they remain relevant by keeping up with the pace of change. First utilised in the late 1990s, General Electric's CEO Jack Welch used reverse mentoring to teach his senior executives about the internet. Modern reverse mentoring goes beyond the sharing of technological skills, with today's programmes exploring how senior executives approach strategic issues, leadership, and the working mindset.

Reverse mentoring has been utilised by global corporations such as Cisco Systems, MasterCard, Estée Lauder and PwC, with some companies even setting rules on confidentiality and allowing pairings only outside reporting lines.

## Which companies would benefit from reverse mentoring?

Today, every business is a digital business. Driven by the pandemic, new skills are required in order to adapt to work from home (WFH). This has been particularly challenging for older employees, highlighting an increased need for skills development and training. However, it is not just technology skills that are necessary, as the entire business outlook needs to change to facilitate this new way of living. Customer needs have changed, working conditions have changed, and business survival depends on the ability of the executive leadership to respond to all of these changes. Because of this, every business stands to benefit from reverse mentoring, as there isn't a single business out there that has not been affected in some way by the pandemic.

As the largest generation currently occupying the labour force, millennials are known for job hopping. Improving millennial retention is a key challenge for many organisations with studies showing that 43% of millennials plan to find a new job in the next two years. So how can businesses attract the best millennial talent, and retain it? Reverse mentorship is proving exceptionally effective in this regard. Millennials are not as flighty as they appear. Their willingness to jump ship can be eliminated by creating the feeling of working for a company that makes a difference, and that their contribution to the workplace is valued.



Baker McKenzie SA launches mentorship programme
1 Jun 2021

## Benefits of reverse mentorship

The millennial generation wants to work for a company with a conscience, and they're prepared to look around until they find it. In addition to flexible environments and socially responsible missions. Millennials seek continuous learning and skills development, personal fulfillment, and clear opportunities for career advancement. Reverse mentorship takes care of the three Rs: Retention, Relevant conversations and Real trends. Through such mentorship programs, millennials can be properly engaged in the workplace with a platform that allows them to make a significant contribution to the organisation. Their contribution to the workplace harnesses their personal experiences, unique skills and insights.

## Additional benefits include:

- **Improves connection to company culture:** By pairing a junior with a senior leader, it's possible to gain new insight into the organisation which can reinvigorate executive management and get them excited about work again.
- **Drives technological change:** Change is tough, and technological change may be the most challenging of all. Reverse mentoring can be used to shake things up and encourage junior employees to challenge existing strategies and processes by finding better ways to do things.
- **Fosters deeper inclusion:** Reverse mentoring allows for the building of working relationships in such a way that people's differences are valued and accommodated. In the long term, such mentoring relationships will facilitate a critical boost to diversity in upper-level management roles.

## The right partner to facilitate reverse mentorship

Like any relationship, reverse mentorship requires the participants to be properly paired. There needs to be a willingness on both sides to foster and build that relationship because the number one reason that reverse-mentoring programs fail is that executives (the mentees) fail to prioritise the relationship. This makes it critical to bring in the right training partner to facilitate the reverse mentorship program by ensuring that the necessary supporting frameworks are in place. Both mentor and mentee will require training on approaching and discussing uncomfortable topics, empathy, self-awareness, and what to do if the sessions are not productive. If approached correctly, reverse mentoring can provide the space for all employees to challenge the status quo and reexamine their thinking. Ultimately, reverse mentoring is an effective tool to bridge the generation gap, fuel innovation and business growth.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Roland Innes, CEO at DYNA Training

For more, visit: https://www.bizcommunity.com