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April 2015



CLIENT CASE STUDY: ASSOCIATION MENTORING PROGRAM DESIGN

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Association Mentoring Program Design

Introduction

The client was a professional association with approximately 8,000 members. As part of a larger focus on leadership development, the organization wanted to create a formal mentoring program to support members in their careers. The program was envisioned to be available to any member. This association had past experience with a mentoring program that was marginally successful, partly a result of insufficient structure and focus. My firm was hired to help them design and implement the program. Guiding this effort was the deputy executive director and a leadership development advisory committee comprised of six members.

Approach

The initial conversations with the executive director and his deputy focused on exploring overarching approaches to mentoring. One of the points we discussed was whether the program would be mentor or mentee-driven. A mentor-driven program would consist of first recruiting interested mentors, creating an inventory of their skills and abilities, and offering this cadre to association members interested in finding a mentor. On the other hand, a mentee-driven program would entail publicizing the program to attract interested mentees, then identifying suitable mentors. Ultimately, the decision was made to make this program mentor-driven to avoid the challenge of attracting too many mentees without enough mentors. In addition, the focus of the program was determined to focus on helping participants enhance their effectiveness in their professional roles and did not address the needs of the association to grow volunteer leaders.

We used an iterative process to clarify the design of the program as embodied in the mentoring program guide. I drafted an initial version of this deliverable and shared it with the association staff that added their edits and suggestions. The resulting version was then shared with members of the leadership development advisory committee. In order to make this process more efficient, the association staff collected the feedback from the advisory committee and integrated it into one document.

Because there were a number of other leadership development initiatives being concurrently planned, the emphasis of the design work with the mentoring program was to keep it simple and focused, improve upon past efforts to establish a mentoring program, and upgrade it with feedback from mentor/mentee participants. Also, because the program was funded by an external organization, the duration of the program was influenced by the funder's program year.

Design

The resulting design had a number of key elements and structures:

- Six-month duration for the mentor pairs
- Orientation webinars required for both the mentors and mentees to ensure they understood their role and the overall program design; this included detailed information for mentors on how to develop a mentoring contract with their mentees to ensure the relationship and outcomes were clear
- Mid-point check-in webinar session for mentors
- Flexibility for the mentor pairs to use their session time to focus on the goals and norms built into the mentoring agreement
- Expectations that the mentor pairs would meet for at least one hour per month
- Program applications for both the mentor and mentee
- Selection and matching of the pairs by the leadership development advisory committee
- Final evaluation to include feedback from mentees to their mentor about their skills, as well as feedback from mentors to mentees about their effectiveness in managing the relationship

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Feedback

The program was deemed as successful based on a survey of mentors and mentees. Overall, 90% of the participants (both mentors and mentees) were satisfied with the program. Ratings for specific elements included:

- 92% were satisfied with the application process
- 90% were satisfied with the matching process
- 84% were satisfied with the orientation materials and webinar
- 86% were satisfied with communication from the association about the program
- 92% of mentees were satisfied with the goals or outcomes they achieved; 2% were very dissatisfied potentially based on a poor match with their mentor

Mentees evaluated their mentors slightly lower on two key behaviors: (1) My mentor contacted me within two weeks of the mentor assignment and (2) My mentor honored my stated goals for the program in the mentoring sessions.

One notable finding from the post-survey evaluation was the length of the program. Participants generally wanted a longer program lasting one year.

Representative comments from mentor participants included:

- *It reminded me that I had experience to share and offer. Often you get lost in the routine~this experience reminded me of the "bigger" picture.I feel I made a difference.I had an impact.*
- *The training and support provided to mentors has been wonderful! I think I may have benefited more than the mentee with whom I've been working.*
- *The matching process was great. I was matched with a mentee that seemed to really sync with my clinical skills.*
- *By helping my mentee explore ways to support patients with developmental delays, I also got to refresh myself on these things, and also got some new resources to use as well. It also forced me to work on mentoring and coaching skills throughout such as helping my mentee to come to the answer rather than telling her, which is something I'm continually working on.*
- *Unfortunately, my mentee and I only connected on the initial phone call. She never followed up with any of the subsequent calls, even with multiple emails from me to confirm and/or reschedule. Eventually I just stopped trying to reach her.*

Representative comments from mentee participants included:

- *The time spent talking with someone who has more experience and knowledge than me! I like that it was open to my discretion as to what we discussed and that I could choose topics that were areas of weakness for me.*
- *The webinar provided standards and a framework of how to be successful with program & how to get the most out of it. Without this webinar I don't think I would have occurred to me to put guidelines in place for my mentor and I. Using the guidelines we set made things very clear for us.*
- *I felt that the matching process was great. My mentor and I were able to really see why we were paired and this helped in our project together.*
- *I was able to meet my goals of improving work/life balance, time management and leadership skills. Together, my mentor and I mapped out clear steps to meeting these goals, which I followed and reported my progress back to him. He also helped keep me accountable on these steps/projects and provided encouragement and praise.*

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- *I'm 100% confident that the success of my pilot program in the intensive care unit is contributed to my mentor's support and guidance.*
- *I was able to approach our chief of pediatrics and advocate for the needs of our program. I have become more comfortable when approaching leaders in our organization.*
- *I was very disappointed that I was not matched with someone with more experience. I should have been instructed to be a mentor not a mentee*

Lessons Learned and Potential Next Steps

Based on the feedback, there are several ways the program can be improved:

- **Program duration:** Extending the program to one year and allow mentor pairs to continue if they desire.
- **Orientation webinar:** Making this available but not requiring it for mentors; offering additional tools they can use for clarifying their role.
- **Tools and Resources:** Provide tools and resources, such as topical webinars on leadership topics that mentees can participate in and then explore with their mentor; provide podcasts that contain examples of conversations between mentors and their mentees on specific topics.
- **Marketing and Positioning** - Invite past participants to be spokespersons for the program to help generate more interest.
- **Communication with mentor pairs:** The feedback suggests that there were a couple of pairings that were not effective. One way to improve this is to give both the mentor and mentee the ability to end the relationship and be reassigned.

Professional Biography for Dr. Kevin Nourse

Dr. Nourse is a research-based executive coach and organizational development consultant with over 20 years of progressive experience in both for-profit and governmental organizations. He focuses his work on creating resilient leaders, teams, and organizations. He is also on the faculty of the Georgetown University Coaching Certificate program.

Kevin has a Ph.D. from Fielding Graduate University where he conducted research on crisis leadership among middle managers during Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. In addition, he has an MA degree in human resource development, an MA in human, and a BS degree in Information Science.

Some of Kevin's former and current clients include Abbott Pharmaceuticals, American Association of Port Authorities, AstraZeneca, American Psychological Association, American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, Child Life Council, Eli Lilly, Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA), Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, National Cancer Institute, Port of Los Angeles, Texas Instruments, U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Prior to launching his practice in 2001, Kevin worked as an HR director, financial analyst, CPA, instructional designer, training manager, and software developer.

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