

Mentoring Opens a World of Possibilities

Benefits to Business

Researchers have looked at the benefits to employees of participating in work-based youth mentoring programs.

A survey of employee volunteer programs, completed by 248 U. S. Corporations, revealed several benefits to the company and employee. ⁸

Respondents unanimously agreed that corporate volunteering helped to create healthier communities and improve the company's public image.

Ninety-seven percent said that their volunteer programs improved employee teamwork.

Dr. Susan Weinberger⁹, founder and President of the Mentor Consulting Group, recently completed a survey at Allstate Insurance Company, in which employees served as mentors to elementary school children. After seven months:

- . Seventy-five percent of the employees reported that the activity improved their attitude at work.
- . Eighty-percent felt very satisfied working as a mentor.

A study cosponsored by the Conference Board and The Points of Light Foundation of more than 450 U. S. corporations revealed the many hidden benefits to corporations and employees engaged in formal volunteer efforts. ¹⁰

Benefits to employees included building teamwork skills, exposing employees to new situations in which to apply their skills, improving morale, promoting self-worth, and improving employee retention.

Benefits to the organization included increased productivity, improved community relations and public image, and recruitment and retention of employees.

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Providing Incentives for Mentoring Time-Release: Issue Brief

Legislative Goal:

To encourage Congress to pass H. R. 3629, the MENTOR Act. This bill would provide businesses with a modest tax break if they offer mentoring time-release to their employees.

Latest Action:

Congressman Rick Keller of Florida introduced the legislation, H. R. 3629, on January 23 2002.

Summary of the Issue:

Many businesses across the country have partnerships with mentoring organizations in th communities. Some of these partnerships includes special arrangements by which the corporations offer paid time off from work to mentor a young person. These time-release policies are beneficial to both the business and to mentoring. It helps mentoring organizations recruit mentors mentor wholesale from the business, rather than one ment a time in the community in general. Businesses can offer their employees paid leave for mentoring, which increases quality of life for the employee. Corporations can benefit fror strengthened relationships with the community and by being seen as committed to community service. Workplace mentoring can also lead to increased employee morale a longer retention of employees.

The MENTOR Act would give businesses another, more tangible incentive to have a mentoring time-release policy. The Act would grant businesses a modest tax credit in exchange for giving employees one hour per week of paid release time to mentor young people. This legislation would relieve some of the financial implications of time release fo businesses, hopefully increasing the number of workplace mentoring programs and resulting in a larger pool of mentors in communities around the country.

Write to your congressman and ask him or her to cosponsor and support H. R. 3629, the MENTOR Act.

Additional resources:

The National Mentoring Partnership wrote a letter to Congressman Keller in support of th legislation.

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Source: www.mentoring.org/take_action/hot_issues/incentives-timerelease/

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What's in it for Mentors?

Research

A number of recent studies have focused specifically on the benefits of youth mentoring and other forms of volunteerism, particularly in the workplace and in the lives of older adults.

Benefits of youth mentoring:

To examine mentor's experiences in relationships, Kate Philip and Leo Hendrey ² recently conducted a series of in-depth interview with 30 mentees (aged 13 to 18) and 30 adult mentors.

Mentors perceived the experience of being identified as a mentor and the process of mentoring in highly positive terms.

Mentors' experiences provided them with a form of "cultural capital," that helped them to:

- . Make sense of their own past (sometimes difficult) experiences and current challenges;
- . Gain insight into the day-to-day lives of youth; and,
- . Develop positive, more reciprocal relationships with youth.

Cultural capital was described as a "set of recipes to deal with the challenges they [mentors] face in their day-to-day lives." These challenges included dealing with difficulties in relationships with their own children and others, and surviving on few resources.

The Commonwealth Fund, ³ surveyed a nationally representative sample of adult mentors of youth. It found:

- . Three-quarters of the 1,504 mentors surveyed reported that their experience had had a "very positive" effect on their lives. They felt that mentoring provided a break from their busy professional lives and a chance to give something back.
- . Eighty-three percent indicated that they learned or gained something personally from their mentoring experience, including feeling that they were a better person, increased patience, friendship, a feeling of effectiveness, and a chance to acquire skills.

Another study ⁴ interviewed mentors regarding their perceptions of the personal benefits of the relationship. Respondents identified several benefits.

- . Enhanced self-images. Mentors saw themselves as being competent, helpful, visionary and loved.
- . Feelings of accomplishment and the creation of networks of other volunteers.
- . Fulfilling expression of the mentor's spiritual values.

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Source: www.mentoring.org/research_corner/jan_research.adp

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What's in it for Mentors - cont'd.?

Studies ⁵ have discussed benefits to mentors, including:

- . Improved health and self-esteem;
- . Insight into one's own childhood or children;
- . Public recognition; and,
- . Enriching mentors' family life, (e.g., when mentees provide support and companionship to the mentors' children).

Interestingly, the experience of being a mentee, appears to help pave the way for later mentoring.

In a recent study, researchers found that individuals who had been mentored in the past anticipated fewer costs and more benefits than those who were never mentored. ⁶ Thus in addition to helping today's youth, mentoring programs may be helping to develop a pool of future mentors.

As Schulz ⁷ noted, "There is a pure enjoyment in working with someone who is open to learning and who values what the mentor has to say. Mentoring is positive and infectious: the reasons why many protégés eventually take on the role of mentor."

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Benefits to Older Adults

In addition to being well-suited for the mentoring role, older adults stand to benefit a great deal from mentoring.

An enormous volunteer potential exists among retired adults.

Nearly 30 million Americans (12 percent of the population) are over 65, and this number will double in the next thirty years.

Older adults today are enjoying good health and longevity, and are often looking for part-time volunteer opportunities to keep their bodies and minds active.¹⁰

Since older adults often have more time available to them, they are ideally positioned to provide the level of personal attention and emotional support that many youth need.

Psychologist Erik Erikson described the importance of “generativity” -give loving care to others and making societal contributions-for healthy development in later life. ¹¹

Through the process of guiding the next generation, older adults can blend their past experiences and wisdom and feel a greater sense of accomplishment.

A recent study revealed that older adult volunteers actually derive more personal benefits from volunteering than younger adult volunteers.¹²

Using nationally representative panel data, researchers assessed the long-term impact of volunteering on the life satisfaction and perceived health of adults 60 years and over, as compared to adults aged 25-59. Older volunteers experienced greater increases in life satisfaction over time as a result of their volunteering than did younger adult volunteers. They also experienced greater positive changes in their perceived health.

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Societal Benefits

Although we have focused on benefits to mentors, society also benefits when mentors work with mentees.

Mentoring can create a common fabric in communities -a breaking down of the artificial w them distinctions between more and less privileged members of society.

Mentoring can also provide a lens through which middle-class adults can see the difficult circumstances confronting many of today's youth.

Support for a coordinated, public response to the out-of-school needs of school-aged youth is more likely to emerge when mentors see how their protégés problems multiply during unsupervised hours.

Another beneficial byproduct of mentoring is its role in garnering support for other youth-development initiatives.

Mentoring is intuitively appealing. Familiar, well-regarded organizations, such as Big Brothers Big Sisters and the National Mentoring Partnership, bring credibility and public support to other less-known youth programs. In this sense, successful mentoring plays a role as a gateway toward the public's expanding commitment to youth policies, programs and institutions. 13

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What Makes Mentoring Work?

How does mentoring work? Few researchers have directly examined this question. However, a substantial body of research on helping relationships in counseling and therapeutic settings does exist and is relevant to mentoring relationships.

Psychotherapy and mentoring are quite different from each other. Mentors are not professionals - and, importantly, do not require extensive training or expertise to be effective. Yet, both involve a caring relationship with the explicit goal of fostering the positive development of one of the members. Therefore, we may be able to learn from therapy.

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What is School Based Mentoring?

Mentoring - the presence of caring individuals who, along with parents or guardians, provide young people with support, counsel, friendship, reinforcement and a constructive example. It is a strategy that can help young people of all circumstances to achieve.

The Education Commission of the States listed mentoring as one of the five short-term imperatives for reversing the high dropout rate among high school students in 1988.

School-based mentoring:

- . Offers students the chance to develop a relationship with one or more adults, other than parents and teachers, who become friends, role models and advocates for them.
- . Typically takes place at school, either during or immediately after school hours.
- . Typically asks the mentor for a commitment of at least one school year.

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Mentoring in Schools

Most adolescents are on the healthy path to productive adult lives. There is evidence, however, that 25 percent of adolescents are at significant risk of veering off that path because they frequently engage in behaviors with negative consequences, such as alcohol or other drug abuse, sexual activity with its potential for sexually transmitted diseases and teen pregnancy, truancy, delinquency, or violence. Another 25 percent of adolescents, who engage in fewer of these behaviors, are at moderate risk. ¹

A 1992 study conducted by the Carnegie Foundation determined that only 60 percent of an adolescent's non sleeping time is taken up by school, homework, chores, meals or employment. Many adolescents spend the remaining 40 percent of their non sleeping time alone, with peers without adult supervision, or with adults who might negatively influence their behavior.² A recent study found that 27 percent of eight-graders spend 2 more hours a day alone after school and that low-income youth were more likely than others to be home alone for 3 or more hours.³

Similarly, the Study of Causes and Correlates of Delinquency, sponsored by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), found the influence of peers and lack of supervision by parents to be strong risk factors in the causes of delinquency. ⁴

There is growing belief that mentoring can, in many instances, help young people change direction and do better academically and socially. Mentoring has been defined as a sustained, close, developmental relationship between an older, more experienced individual and a younger person, with the goal of building character and competence on the part of the protege. Usually the relationship involves regular contact over a sustained period of time and involves mutual commitment, respect and loyalty. Mentors need not be experts in drug prevention, remedial tutoring, antisocial behavior, or family counseling. Studies have shown that individuals who gain the trust of youth through interaction and time can have great influence on their lives.

End notes:

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Your Role as a Mentor

What will you do? Well, what do you want to do? There are a lot of options!

Be a friend! How about a coach? Someone to help get the mentee motivated! Maybe an advisor? A supporter? Or maybe even a career model? You can be any of these. Most of what you do will provide falls into three areas.

- . You can provide *advice* to help evaluate the mentee's options and make better decisions.
- . You can also provide *access* to a new world of ideas and experiences a mentee may never have thought of.
- . Depending on your relationship, you could also provide *advocacy*. That is, speak up for your mentee in important situations.

What Your Mentor Won't Do

While there are a lot of things you will be able to do, there are also some things you won't be able to do. You won't:

- . buy expensive gifts;
- . make critical decisions for the mentee;
- . help you do things you both know you shouldn't do;
- . take the place of parents, social worker or legal guardian; or,
- . force the mentee into anything.

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What's in it for mentors?

"Why did you do all this for me? [Wilbur] asked.

"I don't deserve it. I've never done anything for you." "You have been a friend," replied Charlotte. ..."By helping you, perhaps I was trying to lift my life a trifle. Heaven knows, anyone's life can stand a little of that."

--E. B. White, *Charlotte's Web*

Background

This quotation raises, and then helps us answer, the question, "Do volunteers derive any benefits from mentoring?" The potential rewards to mentors are rarely considered in you mentoring. Instead relationships are conveyed mainly in terms of the mentor selflessly giving to the mentee in a decidedly one-sided relationship. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that mentors stand nothing to gain. In fact, when mentor don't derive benefits, relationships are at greater risk for early termination. One-sided relationships drain mentors of enthusiasm and leave mounts feeling burdened by the imbalance. Alternatively, when mounts see that admired adults find it personally rewarding to spend time with them, they feel anew surge of self-worth and empowerment.

Frank Riessman's helper-therapy principle-that people help themselves through the process of being genuinely helpful to others-is particularly applicable to understanding the considerable rewards of mentoring. ¹ The sense of efficacy and pride that can come from being admired and helpful may well be a driving force in the positive changes commonly observed in mentors' lives. As the saying goes, "if you help someone up the hill, you get closer to the top yourself."

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