



Human Resources Notes

"The aim of Human Resources Notes is to provide concise information on topical human resource management issues to guide effective people management practices." Peter Fisher, Executive HR Consultant (THCS)

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Mentorship – cultivating the unique strengths of managers

Mentorship is a partnership in which a competent and seasoned person with a successful track record gives regular guidance to an employee (known as a mentee or protégé) to develop the mentee's professional and personal success in a current job and for the future.

There are many reasons why you may include a mentorship programme in your people development strategy, such as: to ensure a strong pipeline of leaders to grow and sustain the success of your company; underpin an approach of promoting from within; enrich new-employee initiation; make your company more appealing to recruits; accelerate diversity and employment equity progress; improve employee retention; enhance the competency base of the organisation and to cost effectively develop high potential employees.

There are three aspects of the mentor mentee partnership which make it a powerful way to develop people:

Firstly, the mentor provides an independent perspective to the mentee. (LGPro Mentoring) Mentors are outside of the boss subordinate relationship. They give feedback that is specific, constructive and in real time. Mentors draw on their expert knowledge and long experience. They build and don't break down the mentee.

Secondly, a mentor accelerates the development of a mentee. (Potgieter, A.) A company chooses mentees because they are individuals with good prospects of climbing the leadership ladder. If left alone, these employees would grow their careers and it is likely that they would reach higher levels in the organisation. The timely and insightful feedback from mentors helps them move their careers forward faster.

Thirdly, a mentorship programme develops the mentee's unique capabilities. Successful organisations have learnt that you need to customise leadership development to suit the unique talents of individuals. Mentorship allows mentees to base their development on their individual strengths and to discover their own recipe for success in work and life. Steven Spielberg said it succinctly: "The delicate balance of mentoring someone is not creating them in your own image, but giving them the opportunity to create themselves."¹

If you decide to start a mentoring programme you need to incorporate the following in your planning and implementation. To begin, define the primary objectives, which will inform the curriculum. Once the objectives are in place, you can start selecting and pairing mentors and mentees. There is no one best way of pairing, but it is suggested that giving the participants a say in who they will partner with contributes to a programme's success. There are bound to be some cases where the mentor and mentee do not gel. Your planning should cater for this by having a mechanism for a mentorship partnership to be dissolved without hurt feelings. I

recommend that you provide upfront training for mentors and mentees to help them understand the process and convey responsibilities. You will also need to implement evaluation processes to determine whether your organisation is getting value out of the mentorship programme. (Kessler S, 2010)

The value of a mentorship programme will be enhanced if you draw on the expertise of a human capital professional to help design and implement the programme.

The role of a mentee is not that of passive participant. I end this note with three ways a mentee can get the most benefit out of having a mentor.

[1] Be fully committed. Entering a mentoring relationship is a stepping stone towards higher levels of leadership. A mentee must make time for mentorship meetings; ask lots of questions; practice what he learns and look for opportunities to take on more complex responsibilities. As the famous golfer Gary Player once said, "The harder I try, the luckier I get."

[2] Focus on strengths. Everyone has certain qualities which are stronger than their other qualities. To change your weaknesses takes huge energy. A mentee should be aware of her weaknesses but rather devote most of her developmental activity to building on her strengths.

[3] Find his unique leadership success recipe. A mentee should not try to be something he is not. If, for example, he is more an introvert than extrovert, draw on the inherent strengths of an introvert. No amount of attending courses will change his nature. Many managers hear or read about a famous business leader like Richard Branson and aspire to be like him. Forget it. There is only one Richard Branson. You can learn techniques from him but you cannot learn to be like him. ■

¹<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/mentoring.html> Accessed 31 October 2016

References:

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Kessler, S. (2010) How to start a mentoring programme. Inc.com [Online] Available at: <http://www.inc.com/guides/2010/04/start-mentoring-program.html> (Accessed 31 October 2016)

Potgieter, A. Human Resources Mentoring programme for SU staff Frequently asked questions and answers. Stellenbosch University Website [Online] Available at: <http://www.sun.ac.za/english/policy/Documents/Frequently%20asked%20questions%20on%20mentoring.pdf> (Accessed 31 October 2016)

"Zero tolerance" does not mean automatic dismissal

Many employers correctly adopt a "zero tolerance" policy towards intoxication at work. The duty of employers to provide a safe working environment provides a strong justification for such an approach.

However, such a policy does not translate into an automatic right to dismiss when an employee is proven to be intoxicated at work. In a case dealing with this principle, the material facts which led an employer to dismiss an employee were as follows.

The employee went to work whilst still under the influence of alcohol on a Monday morning. He drank a lot the night before at a traditional function. It is common cause that he did not drink any alcohol on duty or at the workplace; but the effects of the previous day's festivities were such that, when he underwent a breathalyser test at work, his blood alcohol level was found to be three times over the legal driving limit. The employer dismissed the employee.

The employer is an express parcel delivery company. The employee was employed as a general worker. On the Monday in question, he was loading tyres onto trucks.

The employee, represented by a trade union referred an unfair dismissal dispute to the relevant bargaining council. The arbitrator found that dismissal was too harsh a sanction. He ordered the employee's reinstatement with limited backpay. In

effect, it meant that the employee was suspended without pay for four months.

The arbitrator regarded the employer's "zero tolerance" policy towards intoxication as unfair. He said that a [intoxicated] clerk for example, would not be a danger to himself or to others and would not tarnish the image of the company as he would seldom, if ever, deal directly with clients or customers. However, this would be totally different for an individual who held the position of a driver, a pilot or a managing director.

Contrary to the testimony at arbitration of a senior line manager, the employer's disciplinary code did not provide for "automatic" dismissal of intoxicated employees. Rather it states that being under the influence of alcohol "...could result in summary dismissal".

The arbitrator also considered the employee's six to seven years' service, clean disciplinary record, his remorse and the absence of evidence that the trust relationship had irretrievably broken down. The arbitrator concluded that had the employer applied progressive discipline and had the employee been given a lighter sanction this would have been sufficient to change his behaviour. In the arbitrator's opinion, the employee was unlikely to repeat this type of misconduct.

The employer was unhappy with the arbitrator's award and applied to the Labour Court to review and set aside the arbitrator's award.

The labour court found that the arbitrator correctly drew a distinction between different job functions. Despite the employer's legitimate concerns about safety, the functions of a general worker loading goods simply cannot be equated to that of the employer's drivers in applying its "zero tolerance" policy regarding being under the influence of alcohol at work.

The labour court held that being review proceedings, it had to decide whether the conclusion reached by the arbitrator was so unreasonable that no other arbitrator could have

come to the same conclusion. The court said that had it being sitting in an arbitration or even on appeal, it may have come to a different conclusion to that of the arbitrator. However, the arbitrator's conclusion that dismissal was too harsh a sanction under the circumstances was one that a reasonable arbitrator could have come to. Accordingly, the employer's review application failed and the arbitrator's decision to reinstate the employee was upheld. ■

Taxi-Trucks Parcel Express (Pty) Ltd v National Bargaining Council for the Road Freight Industry and 2 others (C24/2011) (LC) 6 June 2012. Steenkamp J

Triggers to investigate absenteeism

When a manager believes that an employee has an attendance problem she must investigate the case. Six triggers to start an investigation are:

1. A suspicious (possibly fraudulent) medical certificate
2. Frequent absence (e.g. more than twice in eight weeks; more than 12 days in a twelve-month period)
3. A long period of absence
4. A recurring medical condition
5. Suspicion of drug / alcohol dependence
6. Absence linked to weekends, public holidays and annual leave. ■

Fisher, P (2016) Essential Supervisory Skills (training course)

The contents of Human Resources Notes do not constitute legal advice. For specific professional assistance tailored to your needs, always consult an expert.



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