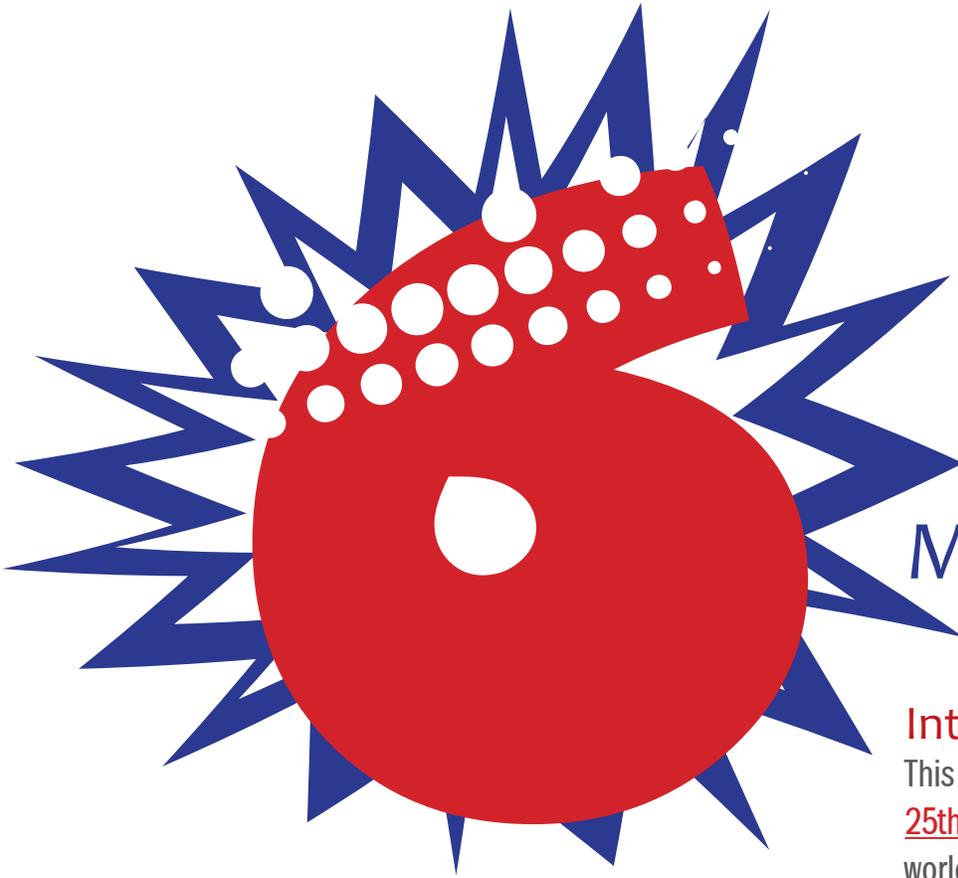


6 MENTORING
MYTHS
BUSTED



A THOUGHT PAPER BY MANAGEMENT MENTORS
SUMMER 2014



Mentoring Myths **BUSTED**

Introduction

This year, [Management Mentors is celebrating its 25th anniversary](#). While much has changed in the world in the last quarter century, the basic tenets of mentoring still hold true, as do some of the myths—myths we encounter day in and day out as we guide our newer clients, and even some of our veteran ones, on their mentoring journey.

We thought we'd take this opportunity to share six of the most popular myths and bust them, hopefully, for good.

1 MYTH #1: In order for a formal mentoring relationship to be successful, mentors and mentorees need to have chemistry.

BUSTED: We hear this one a lot. At first blush, it seems like a correct statement, doesn't it? Mentors and mentorees need chemistry in order to work together effectively, don't they?

Nope.

To understand why this is, let's first define chemistry. Chemistry is an intense, very personal feeling—an initial connection or attraction between two individuals that may develop into a strong, emotional bond. Unstructured and unpredictable, it is the basis for an [informal mentoring relationship](#), but it's not necessary for a [formal mentoring relationship](#) where people typically work together for 9-12 months.

With formal mentoring relationships, compatibility is a must-have because the mentor and mentoree need to work together towards goals they set at the beginning of the relationship.

Now, let's talk about a "c" word that does matter: **compatibility**. Compatibility occurs when individuals work together in harmony to achieve a common purpose. With formal mentoring relationships, compatibility is a must-have because the mentor and mentoree need to work together towards goals they set at the beginning of the relationship. While chemistry is nice to have, it's far from a deal breaker.

2 MYTH #2: Mentoring and coaching are essentially the same thing.
BUSTED: It's the myth that just won't die. While we can understand why people still think mentoring and coaching are similar, it's important for everyone to accept the fact they are two different things. Each one is worthy of consideration in the workplace, but mentoring and coaching are still different nonetheless.

Let's talk about two key differentiators.

Differentiator #1:

Coaching is task oriented. The focus is on concrete issues, such as managing more effectively, speaking more articulately, or learning how to think strategically. This requires a content expert (coach) who is capable of teaching the coachee how to develop these skills.

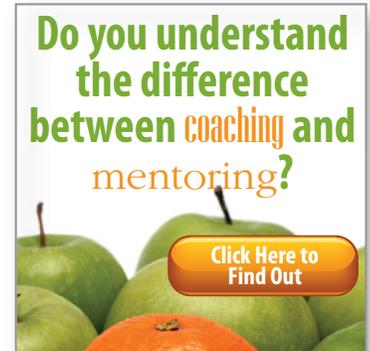
Mentoring is relationship oriented. It seeks to provide a safe environment where the mentoree shares whatever issues affect his or her professional and personal success. Although specific learning goals or competencies may be used as a basis for creating the relationship, the relationship's focus goes beyond these areas to include things such as work/life balance, self-confidence, self-perception, and how the personal influences the professional.

Differentiator #2:

Coaching is short term. A coach can successfully be involved with a coachee for a short period, maybe even just a few sessions. The coaching lasts for as long as it's needed, depending on the purpose of the coaching relationship.

Mentoring is always long term. Mentoring, to be successful, requires time in which both partners can learn about one another and build a climate of trust that creates an environment in which the mentoree can feel secure in sharing the real issues that impact his or her success. Successful mentoring relationships *typically* last nine months to a year, but you'll see why we put asterisks around the word "typically" when you get to the last myth below.

We've compiled 23 additional differentiators in [our free white paper: Coaching vs. Mentoring, which you can download right now.](#)



BUSTED!

MYTH #3: Mentoring can be used as a performance management system.

BUSTED: In the world of talent management, people often misuse words like mentoring and performance management. After all, both involve professional development and share common goals. What's different is how each one goes about achieving these goals.

Performance management is a system for measuring whether an employee is "performing" adequately on the job. Managers use this information to assist the employee in becoming a better performer.

The goal of performance management is to develop an employee in his/her current position. While performance management sometimes involves planning for future performance, most often it centers on the employee's current job performance.

Mentoring, on the other hand, promotes professional development by linking an employee with a mentor who will focus on the overall development of that employee. **Mentoring is transformational** and involves much more than simply acquiring a specific skill or knowledge. Mentoring is about a relationship and involves both the professional and the personal. In many ways, mentoring is like counseling. Mentoring will certainly help with the mentoree's current job, but it also poises the mentoree to take the next steps in his or her career.

Should Mentoring and Performance Management Be Linked?

You should absolutely link mentoring programs to performance management—meaning, you should link those competencies deemed important by an organization as employees develop for future roles. There is a difference, however, between linking mentoring to performance management and turning mentoring into a performance management *system*. Let's use an example for clarification.

MANAGEMENT
MENTORS

If I want to develop one of my employees into a true leader, then I'll probably use various approaches: seminars, training, coaching, etc. I'll want to measure progress in these areas and determine if the development is successful. This requires me, as a manager, to be "hands on" with the development of this employee into an effective leader.

Now, let's say I think it would be great for my employee to have a mentor who is experienced in leadership. I bring in this mentor, we have discussions, and the person mentors my employee. I get periodic reports from the mentor, and we discuss the results. This process has turned the mentor into a "second manager" as opposed to letting him or her simply support the employee's development. In essence, it has created a relationship that focuses on results and measurement as opposed to one of development and transformation. There's nothing wrong with this approach per se, but it isn't mentoring, and it shouldn't be called mentoring. It's more akin to coaching.

On the other hand, let's say I've identified my employee as a talented person with leadership abilities. I could recommend that he or she participate in our company's mentoring program to develop more leadership skills as well as other necessary career-building skills. Since I'm focusing on this person's long-term development—development that could move this person out of my department or even out of my company—I should not be directly involved with my employee's mentor.

Yes, it may be useful for my employee to receive feedback from me regarding what to focus on with the mentor, but this is by way of suggestion as opposed to requirement. And, yes, I should be informed of meeting schedules to ensure they don't disrupt my department, but in a mentoring program, my role is to support my employee's meeting time with the mentor, offer suggestions to my employee on areas of development, and STAND BACK and let the relationship happen.

Business
Mentoring
Fosters Career
Advancement

Learn How



MYTH #4: Buddy systems and mentoring programs are the same thing.

BUSTED: Organizations typically use buddy systems to help new employees adjust to their jobs during the first few months of employment. Buddies are most often peers in the same department. They assist new employees for short periods. Buddies don't require any specialized training.

Mentoring is a more complex relationship and focuses on both short- and long-term professional development goals. Though a mentor may be an employee's peer, most often a mentor is a person who is at least one level higher in the organization and who is not within the mentoree's direct supervisory line of management.

We recommend training for [mentors](#), [mentorees](#), and [mentoring program managers](#).



MYTH #5: It's impossible to measure mentoring ROI.

BUSTED: When we speak to prospective clients, the issue of return on investment (ROI) often comes up. People want to know what evidence we can offer to justify that mentoring is a wise business investment.

While the case for mentoring is largely anecdotal (i.e. people reporting on their experiences), some resources do exist for those seeking more objective data.

Below, you'll find links to valid research, theories, and case studies. We're also including articles about how much it costs to replace employees (a problem that a solid mentoring program can help diminish).

This is not an exhaustive list, but it's a good place to start:

- [The Handbook of Mentoring At Work edited by Belle Rose Ragins and Kathy E. Kram](#)
- [Gartner Study on Mentoring at Sun Microsystems](#)

- [Why Employee Turnover Is So Costly](#) – Inc.com
- [How Much Does It Cost Companies To Lose Employees](#) – CBS News
- [There Are Significant Business Costs To Replacing Employees](#) – Center for American Progress
- [Reverse Mentoring Cracks Workplace](#) – from The Wall Street Journal
- [Keeping Great People with Three Kinds of Mentors](#) – Harvard Business Review
- [Mentors Help Young Professionals Get Ahead](#) – The Wall Street Journal
- [You're Probably Wrong About Millennials](#) – Harvard Business Review

For us, however, the more important measurement is how our mentors and mentorees talk about their mentoring experiences and how the experience truly transformed them.

What dollar value would your company put on statements like these made by our mentorees?

- "My mentor helped me gain self-confidence that made me much more effective in managing my employees."
- "I would not be here today were it not for my mentor. I had become very frustrated with my job and the organization and my mentor helped me to look at things differently and how I could make changes to enjoy my work more."
- "I am so grateful for this company for having provided me with this really amazing relationship. It's wonderful how the mentoring experience can transform you."
- "I love the company but thought that my career here had reached its peak. My mentor ignited a fire under me to see new opportunities and map out a plan to apply for those opportunities in the future."

[Read our in depth case studies here.](#)

Certainly do your homework and research mentoring ROI, but don't dismiss anecdotal evidence, which, in our view, can be more powerful and more persuasive than the written and statistical research.



MYTH #6: The best type of mentoring program is a formal, managed program that lasts 9-12 months.

BUSTED: Ha! Bet you're confused about this one, considering [Management Mentors](#) advocates formal, managed programs.

Here's the thing: in a perfect world, all organizations would offer formal business mentoring to its employees and members. These managed programs would last the recommended 9-12 months. But we don't live in a perfect world, do we?

We understand that, for a variety of reasons, not all organizations can support formal, managed programs. And sometimes, depending on the nature of the people who make up the organization, a formal, managed program might not be the "best" solution.



Mentoring isn't one-size-fits-all, which is why there are so many variations to the managed model. Think reverse mentoring, speed mentoring, group mentoring, self-directed mentoring... the list goes on. ([Download our free white paper on all the different mentoring models to learn more.](#))

In our minds, the most important thing you can do is offer some form of mentoring and create a culture that fosters personal and professional transformation. Because that's what mentoring is all about.

Here's to your mentoring success! We wish you much luck.

We hope you found this white paper helpful and that you feel more confident about mentoring realities vs. the myths. If you have general questions about mentoring, be sure to check out our website, specifically our many [free resources](#).

And, of course, if you have a question that we haven't addressed, [feel free to contact us](#).

ABOUT MANAGEMENT MENTORS

For over two decades, [Management Mentors](#) has been designing and implementing world-class business mentoring programs and helping companies attract and retain high potential employees. Based outside of Boston, Mass., Management Mentors' corporate mentoring programs develop future leaders and create a more diverse workforce by removing the barriers to equal opportunity. Management Mentors has achieved a 90% success rate with pairs it matches using a thoughtful, proven process. Current and past clients include Enterprise Rent-A-Car, U.S. Fish & Wildlife, The New York Times Corporation, The City of Tallahassee, Cooper Tire, FedEx Kinkos, Quaker Oats, Schering Plough, TJX Corporation, and Sony Music Corporation. For more information on how your firm can enjoy greater success through mentoring, contact us at 617.789.4622 or visit us at www.management-mentors.com.



Management Mentors

P.O. Box 67291 | Chestnut Hill, MA 02167

617-789-4622 | www.management-mentors.com