

# COACHING AND MENTORING

HOW SOON IS TOO SOON?

BY PAM McELVANE



All employees today are concerned about ensuring they receive every opportunity available to help them develop within their organizations. Is there a specific time in the early stages of a career when one should have the opportunity to engage in coaching and mentoring? Absolutely. It's critical, however, to understand the primary difference between training and coaching versus mentoring and development.

Training and coaching are critical success factors that should begin in the manager's current role, while mentoring and development are the critical success factors that should occur in their future role.

Diversity MBA's 2009 research results clearly show that 98 percent of our Fifty Out Front companies (a ranking of Fortune 1000 companies that have made measurable progress in promoting diverse candidates into leadership positions) understand that, in the on-boarding process, training and coaching occur early in a manager's career. However, only 21 percent of our companies provide immediate coaching to junior managers, while 35 percent provide immediate coaching and mentoring to senior management. This is likely because more senior managers have a stronger track record and therefore higher value, so contributions are readily identified and potential is obvious.

Is there anything fair about this process? Well, actually, there is. It's necessary for managers to receive training and coaching early on to ensure success in their current role. Once performance has been demonstrated, then potential is recognized. Ensuring these things occur will prevent lost time, which equates to lost talent.

Coaching should teach developing managers how to identify and navigate potential barriers; it should be a tool to understand the best strategies to develop within corporate culture, including avail-

able resources and how to manage up effectively.

Once managers have proven they're ready for the next level, it's appropriate for companies to seek the best type of mentoring. Diversity MBA's 2009 research shows that 55 percent of companies have formal mentoring programs. This means the others depend on informal networks and relationships. With diversity councils becoming established and influential within many companies, this has become a key strategy to expose junior managers to executives.

A note about senior manager opportunities for mentoring and sponsoring: As mentioned earlier, 35 percent of our companies immediately engage their senior level executives in mentoring. But if the opportunities for exposure and stretch assignments aren't available, this means very little. Typically, this level receives peer-to-peer mentoring and c-suite ownership for sponsoring. We know people of color need to have intentional strategies to ensure they have access to future key assignments and exposure to areas such as board leadership and development.

With all of this said, regardless of the level of management you're in, you and only you have to take responsibility for ensuring the trajectory of your development. Don't be afraid to initiate conversations with your leadership to understand how the coaching and mentoring process is managed within your organization. Aspiring executives must take time to consider their next assignments, and discussions with leadership on these topics is an essential part of putting intention into action. ■

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