

## THE BENEFITS OF BEING A MENTOR

### ***Mentoring enhances your professional life as well as your protégé's.***

To be successful in any field, aspiring leaders require role models and guidance. This is especially true in healthcare as an increasing number of its managers opt for work outside of the traditional healthcare setting or leave to start careers in different fields. At some point during your career, you may have considered becoming a mentor but dismissed the idea, thinking it would not be worth the time and energy you put into it. It is time to rethink your decision. Being a mentor is more important than ever-and you will get more out of the relationship than you think.

#### **What is a mentor?**

A mentor affects the professional life of a protégé by fostering insight, identifying needed knowledge, and expanding growth opportunities. This assistance supplements the coaching an individual already receives from his or her supervisor. Traditionally, the mentoring relationship consists of an experienced executive providing guidance and advice to an associate with less experience. The associate is looking to move up the career ladder, usually by learning from someone who is successful and well respected.

#### **Why become a mentor?**

Mentoring gives you the extraordinary opportunity to facilitate a protégé's personal and professional growth by sharing knowledge you learned through years of experience. While the primary intent of your mentoring role is to challenge the protégé to think in new and different ways, the protégé is not the only one who gains from the arrangement. As a mentor, there are various ways you can benefit as well.

- **Enhance your skills.** The experience you gain by mentoring someone can facilitate your own professional growth, making you more of an asset to your organization. Mentoring allows you to strengthen your coaching and leadership skills by working with individuals from different backgrounds and with different personality types. For example, as a mentor you can help bridge the gap between generations that have varying workplace values and styles, such as Baby Boomers and Gen Xers. Your ability to manage people different from you is a valuable skill, especially as the workplace continues to grow more diverse. Besides enhancing your skills, mentoring can improve your performance.

One of your roles as a mentor is to set a good example for your protégé. Knowing that you are responsible for providing appropriate and accurate guidance to him or her motivates you to work harder. Furthermore, mentoring can give you a fresh perspective on your performance. One of my healthcare clients discovered that her mentoring experience gave her new insight into her job. "My protégé always asked 'Why?'-- why do we do things a certain way and why do I think and act the way I do," she said. "The questions helped me to take a critical look at how I was leading and what areas I needed to adjust for improvement."

- **Develop and retain talent in your organization.** Your role as a mentor can contribute to the success of your entire organization. As a healthcare manager, you know the importance of developing and retaining good employees. By priming promising employees to become top-performing executives and by providing them with the challenges, support, and commitment needed to keep them in your organization, your mentoring efforts effectively address issues of succession planning and retention. For example, I worked with an organization that continually hired outside of the organization whenever management positions were available. The practice was costly for the organization as well as risky since a cultural fit between the new employee and the organization was not guaranteed. Establishing a mentoring program helped them to develop talent within the organization and gave them the confidence to promote from within. In fact, since they established the mentoring program, internal hires increased from 11 percent to 50 percent.
- **Create a legacy.** By becoming a mentor, you create a legacy that has a lasting impact on your protégé and the healthcare field. Not only will you gain the satisfaction of helping to develop future talent, the knowledge you foster in your protégé can inspire new ideas for generations to come. Furthermore, through mentoring, you can help carry on your organization's legacy by passing on its values and mission to your protégé. As one nurse executive I worked with said, "It's up to us as leaders to show how our organization's cultural expectations affect our decisions in budgets, patient care, and leadership. Without mentoring, our mission could get lost."

Hollister, L. Rose. March/April 2001. The Benefits of Being a Mentor. *Healthcare Executive*. Retrieved from <http://www.ache.org/newclub/CAREER/MentorArticles/Benefits.cfm>.