



Reciprocal Mentoring

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A guide to creating a more equal, diverse and inclusive culture through mentoring

What is Reciprocal Mentoring?

Most traditional mentoring scenarios assume the pairing of an experienced leader or professional with a younger person to achieve a goal or overcome a challenge.

The “reciprocal or reverse mentoring” process turns this on its head and is where individuals – older and younger - encourage mutual growth and each gain new knowledge and expertise as a result. This knowledge and expertise need not be constrained to traditional workplace skills but often extends to understanding the workplace from another viewpoint, be this another culture, gender or generation.

A reciprocal mentoring programme will enable participants to learn about the experiences of colleagues who come from diverse backgrounds regardless of their, job title, salary band, or department.

These areas could include:

- **Race & Ethnicity**
- **LGBTQ+ Identity at work**
- **Women at work**
- **Disability at work**
- **Religion, Faith & Belief**

The Benefits of Reciprocal Mentoring for an Organisation

- Supporting Inclusion and Diversity
- Improved Workforce Motivation
- Improved Workforce Retention and Development – particularly among the millennials
- Enhanced Knowledge Transfer
- Development of a Learning Culture
- Closing of Generational Gaps
- Modelling Positive Values and Behaviours
- Widening Perspectives
- Improving Communication skills
- Improving Self-awareness
- Improving Self-confidence

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How Does Reciprocal Mentoring Work?

As part of the reciprocal mentoring process participants will share experiences, learn and just as importantly, unlearn from each other. The mutual nature of reciprocal mentoring helps break down barriers and prejudices, allowing the relationship to dispel unconscious biases. This can be very powerful in affecting real change.

The launch of a Reciprocal Mentoring Programme will enable and empower participants to learn from and understand the perspectives and experiences of colleagues from other backgrounds. It will provide an effective way to build a genuine awareness of the barriers and challenges that face colleagues, with the ability to build new connections, improve staff experiences and dissipate inequalities.

In this way, mentoring will foster a positive dialogue and allow participants to explore different ways of thinking and develop approaches to improve the way they and their colleagues work together. It will connect a diverse workforce and provide an opportunity to network and build inclusive relationships.

For Reciprocal Mentoring to work, mentor participants need to feel confident enough to share their experiences and opinions and give feedback. Likewise, the often more senior mentee participant may need to overcome their pride and fears and be open with their mentor, revealing areas where they lack skills and knowledge and be open to receiving feedback. This could take them way out of their comfort zone.

Like all mentoring relationships reciprocal mentoring requires an open dialogue so it is essential that both parties are comfortable about revealing their thoughts and concerns. It is vital that the relationship is such that they both feel they can challenge each other's assumptions, behaviours and actions and suspend judgement about each other, though this can sometimes be difficult.

It is therefore important that when planning and organising a reciprocal mentoring programme that resources are made available to support both mentor and mentee in their journey, giving them the tools to confidently navigate issues that are often avoided.



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Getting the Conversation Started

One of the main challenges in any mentoring relationship is how to get the conversation started. In a reverse mentoring relationship there is the added dimension that the mentor may be of a more junior level than the mentee so you may need to ensure that the initial meeting is aimed at breaking down barriers, culturally, generationally and hierarchically, putting the mentor at ease so that they are confident to take on their role.

A good starting point is to try to identify some common interests and values, making an effort to learn about each other.

For many, talking about diversity and inclusion can be an uncomfortable process as they may be concerned that they say the wrong thing or that their experience doesn't belong in the conversation.

Here are 3 ways to get those conversations started.

1. Define and think about how they each interpret the term diversity. This is a good way to get the conversation going and to see what their individual perspectives are.
2. Discuss a news story – whether it is a gender pay gap story, a paralympic sporting success, a racial injustice or a story relating to the global struggle for LGBT equality, there are plenty to choose from.
3. Learn from each other's experiences. Swap stories about how they each got to where they are, their current challenges and their ambitions for the future, and any worries they have around the things that could de-rail these ambitions.

Participants need to be able to have a respectful curiosity of each other's worlds and each other's perspectives, allowing the exploration of different ways of thinking and behaving and in turn encouraging mutual learning and growth.

Set A Goal To Give Purpose and Direction

One of the key factors in getting any mentoring relationship off to a good start is to set clearly defined goals around what they want to achieve from the relationship. Without a clear purpose, conversations will just drift and stall. The goal needs to be specific, achievable, measurable, relevant and have a timeframe.

Ground Rules

It is important to set some ground rules before embarking on a mentoring relationship, these will:

1. Provide a structure for developing the mentoring relationship
2. Clarify expectations for mentoring
3. Clarify roles and responsibilities
4. Encourage discussion around any boundaries to mentoring
5. Clarify any issues of confidentiality within the mentoring relationship

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Developing A Reciprocal Mentoring Programme – Top Tips

- Participants need to be clear about each other's needs and expectations
- Participants may need to risk discomfort to make the relationship work – some issues they discuss may be uncomfortable, but they should be encouraged not to avoid them.
- Participants need to recognise and respond appropriately to slip ups they make that offends or are inappropriate. No matter how much we want to bury or displace stereotypes, remnants can still surface from time to time.
- Participants need to accept feedback – the more senior you become the more difficult it becomes to accept feedback, particularly from a more junior colleague, but it is important for personal and organisational growth.
- Participants need to be prepared to be held accountable by their mentor for any actions or commitments they make
- Participants need to treat each other with respect and work to develop a relationship based on trust by being prepared to let down some of their barriers.
- Participants need to be authentic – be willing to discuss hardships, mistakes and failures.
- Participants need to actively listen – remain engaged in the listening process, try to suspend formulating a reply until their mentoring partner has finished speaking.

For all of the above reasons it is important that a Reciprocal Mentoring programme is well planned and provides plenty of support and guidance to participants, to help them develop a successful relationship.



If you would like to see how we have designed our [mentoring platform](#) to deliver successful mentoring relationships give us a call on **01625 251 055** or email **hello@pldmentoring.com** or visit **www.pldmentoring.com**