

OHRPA MENTORING PROGRAM:

Making the Most of the Mentor-Protégé Partnership

By Karen Iddon, CHRP

In September of each year many of you see the annual call for those interested in either being an HR Protégé or a Mentor. This month, the 2006-07 OHRPA Mentoring Program is wrapping up. Before we launch the 2007-08 program, and approach another set of eager Protégés and dedicated Mentors, we asked our teams about what worked- and what did not - in the 2006-07 program. Teams were eager to share their ideas and insights. Many of suggestions will be incorporated into next year's program. What seemed to work best? We asked one team, Jeff Singer of Transition Resources Group (Mentor) and Kate Underhill of Canada Post (Protégé) for their thoughts:

Jeff Singer:

Why were you interested in becoming an HR mentor?

I was interested by the opportunity to learn; to learn about the experiences of someone who has recently entered the workplace and the profession; to learn about his/her perspectives on organizational life and what is important to them. As well, I welcomed the opportunity to share my experiences and learnings over years. We all benefit from the opportunity to connect.

What does the mentor-protégé relationship involve?

The genius of the program for me lies in its flexibility. There are program guidelines and an expectation that you meet together regularly over the course of the program. Beyond that each mentor-protégé relationship will



define itself based upon the needs and interests of the two involved within the broad topic of working within the human resources profession.

My current protégé-mentor relationship has been rewarding because Kate is curious about careers within the profession and about specific topics. She wants to build her capacity. She is open to sharing ideas. As a mentor, knowing how I can be of service makes our meetings easy. She comes prepared to share and explore. We generate energy from each other. It's great fun.

What do you see as the benefits to the program?

You learn about the kinds of issues other professionals and their organizations are facing. You learn about how different people approach the challenges they face. In the process you learn more about yourself as well.

How did you prepare for your meetings with your protégé?

In our first meetings we got to know each other better; our backgrounds and interests; what was important to the other. From those discussions we developed informal agendas which

informed my preparation. Mid-way through the mentorship program I began to learn a new coaching model and Kate has agreed to let me practice the model with her. She has identified a 'topic' and we are working through it. The model has contributed to our preparation for the meetings.

What are your tips?

Take the time to learn about each other. Ask questions. What would make this relationship a success for you? This awareness will guide you to the topics of greatest interest and benefit to both.

Kate Underhill:

Why were you interested in becoming a protégé?

The opportunity to learn from a seasoned HR professional through a mentor/protégé relationship cannot be replicated through any other working experience – it's hard to pass up! People who volunteer to be a mentor are giving back to the community and investing in the HR professionals of tomorrow. As a protégé I also have the opportunity to share perspectives, experiences, challenges and theoretical concepts in a safe environment with instant feedback. What a great way to learn!

What does the mentor-protégé relationship involve?

I think the details are really up to the two individuals involved in the relationship. As one might expect, it depends on the personality style and expectations that each person brings to the table. For me, the real beauty is

in the flexibility. Although both people must commit to the basic mentoring premise of meeting regularly, over a certain period time – each pair really has a blank slate to work with and can create an experience that will be mutually beneficial. The sky's the limit – the more you put into it, the more you get out of it!

What do you see as the benefits to the program?

Learn and absorb. I often refer to myself as an HR sponge, so for me the true benefits lie in the opportunity to absorb and learn from Jeff's experiences. I am extremely fortunate, as Jeff has had a dream career, a fantastic educational background, a wealth of business and human resources knowledge, and he openly shares his experience. Due to the flexibility of the program and successful match, we have been able to adapt our own styles and come up with a great formula.

How did you prepare for your meetings with your mentor?

Before our first meeting, I took time to reflect on my expectations. Being a naturally open, talkative, and curious person, I approached each meeting with inquisitive interest; asked lots of questions, shared stories, experiences and goals. I fully intended to lay out a structured approach to our meetings, determining a topic of discussion before each meeting, and preparing accordingly. However, when minutes turned into hours and our meetings flew by, we both realized that the structure wasn't necessary. We were both getting what we wanted out of the experience. I must admit though, that compatibility levels were not the same for all teams, so greater structure does help to bring purpose to the meeting, ensuring each person's investment is maximized.

Jeff and I now prepare for our meetings based on the coaching model/process

that we've embarked on. We both leave with 'assignments' and come back the following meeting and discuss. It's been a truly fantastic experience, and great learning opportunity! For me, a mixture of structure and natural dialogue works really well!

What are your tips?

Be open about your expectations, interests, and career goals. Take the time to prepare, to invest, and to engage. As I said earlier, what you get out of the experience is truly relative to what you put into it. 🌟

For more information on the OHRPA Mentoring Program contact Karen Iddon, CHRP, Mentoring Committee Chair, Pearlman Iddon Associates, Karen@pearlmaniddon.com or call (613) 286-5134.