

1 Mentoring – learning by experience

Starting their job in a company, entrants or new employees are faced with extensive challenges: Apart from managing new tasks, they have to make out organizational structures and processes, identify profitable contacts and informal networks. Those of them who capture quickly the silent rules of the organizational etiquette are happy to avoid awkward situations. In short: To be well informed is always a great advantage. Newcomers who find their way without much detours and get to know the “right” persons, feel not only faster comfortable in the company, but can also achieve their full potential. So, the next career step won’t be out of sight any longer. The company as well makes a profit if the integration of new employees runs smoothly: the shorter the training period, the earlier new employees can start their productive work, the better networking is among colleagues, the easier knowledge transfer works. In addition high potentials can be identified and supported earlier.

A “vertical take-off” in a new job doesn’t have to be only a question of good luck. More and more companies and organizations trust therefore in the success factor of mentoring. During the period of mentoring the mentor is no superior, but a kind of “expert by experience” and advisor for vocational questions of his mentee. That means the mentor is an employee in the company, but has no authority to issue instructions towards his mentee.

In contact with his mentor the mentee as greenhorn receives support at first hand from the beginning in his new company: By contrast to external coaches or trainers the mentor is equipped with valuable inside knowledge because he has grown up in the company himself. Mentoring can provide quite constructive impulses. But for that the program has to offer more than a pat on the back or small talk participation during the next office party. Mentoring takes place in a dialogic mode: During a face to face conversation the mentee gets the opportunity to state more precisely his goals and potentials, to analyze reasons for problematical vocational challenges and to prepare long-term career decisions.

Professional mentoring is based on the mentor’s reflection skills as well as method and conversation competencies. After reflecting on personal experiences and strategies in overcoming vocational difficulties, the mentor can transfer them to the mentee. If he has learned about conversation processes, he will be able to structure a discussion purposefully without overlooking important context information. If the mentor can evoke empathetic curiosity through specific questions and can use perspective-taking methods, he will turn into a favorable person to talk to. With this background an “expert by experience” becomes a mentor with professional qualities. And besides his social competencies are refined: communication skills, understanding of self and others as well as how to deal constructively with employees and colleagues.

Mentoring has the power to turn into a success story– for this reason the implementation in your company should be well managed: Who fits into the mentor’s role? What are subjects and boundaries in the mentorship? How can mentoring competencies be trained and developed? IST offers consulting and workshops to answer these questions - for learning by experience in your company, too. Please don’t hesitate to contact us for further information. *Cornelia Herzig*