

Dear Dr. Mazie,

**My director has tasked me with developing a mentoring program at work. Can you give me some guidance and tips? I would rather not reinvent the wheel!**

-William B. in St. Louis

Your director is wise in wanting to start a mentoring program. With the growing number of infrastructure projects and a significant number of people retiring, the demand for new right of way professionals will continue to grow.

Although the right of way industry has many experienced professionals, we must now focus on attracting new blood and demonstrate our willingness to train those who embrace our values – being responsible, ethical, honest, hard-working, independent and able to think innovatively while focusing on the organization's best interests.

Let's review the primary goals of the mentor, which are:

- 1) Provide insight into the organization's structure, culture, mission, values and goals;
- 2) Nurture, teach and demonstrate specific functions or skills that will maximize their performance and advancement opportunities;
- 3) Foster independence and professional development by encouraging, affirming and giving constructive feedback;
- 4) Help the mentee envision the future of the organization, as well as anticipate its needs and what their future role in the organization can be.

With these goals in mind, it is easy to see what a positive impact a mentoring program can have on an organization's growth. So how do you get going?

First, identify who will make a good mentor. It takes a unique person who is by nature a nurturer. They must

love to teach, be a good listener, be ethical and honest, motivating, non-autocratic, discreet, support the organization's values, mission and goals, and be willing to commit time and energy. In short, a very special person!

Next, identify who will make a good mentee. In addition to being ethical, honest and responsible, they should also be eager to learn and grow, bright, industrious and committed to the process.

Regardless of their level of knowledge or experience, not all new hires have the willingness and motivation to establish a mentoring relationship. The mentee must be willing to be vulnerable, and this is not an easy trait to uncover. They're going to reveal a lot of themselves, admitting to what they don't know or understand, analyzing their mistakes, and willing to accept direction and positive correction. If a person is the least bit arrogant or has a know-it-all attitude, it will never work. I also encourage you to pick employees who will be loyal. There is nothing more disappointing than investing time and energy only to watch the employee leave your organization.

Then outline the primary needs of your company and tailor the program to your specific corporate culture. You'll want to present the program to management and build consensus. Identify some potential mentors whose characteristics fit the profile, and discuss their willingness to participate in the program.

You can either select the mentees or announce the program and invite employees to apply. Each employee should be pre-screened before

matching them to a mentor. Finding the ideal match may be trial and error, and in some cases, you may need to change mentors due to different temperaments or work styles.

Once matched, it then becomes the job of the mentor to determine how often to meet, where to meet and if there are any specific goals to be accomplished. The mentee's direct supervisor may want to be involved in establishing goals and measurement criteria. I recommend developing a procedure and/or forms that help make this easier to accomplish.

Remember that mentoring isn't remedial. And it's not that a person can't find resources for themselves. Successful people are those who don't feel they have to go it alone. They've identified people they admire in the workplace and have the desire to build relationships that will maximize their opportunities and career potential. Research has shown that some of the most highly-effective professionals have had four or five mentors in different areas, both professionally and personally, along the way.



**Dr. Mazie Leftwich, Psy.D**

A nationally recognized speaker, workshop leader and trainer, Mazie has a clinical background in applied psychology with expertise in organizational and personal development. She is Senior Vice President of Contract Land Staff, LLC where she oversees training and team excellence programs.