



DiversityInc MEETING IN A BOX

Mentoring/Sponsorship

►► For D&I Staff, Executive Leadership Council, HR Leaders and Business Partners, Resource-Group Leaders, Mentors/Mentees, Sponsors/Protégés

This month, we are giving you information on how to implement successful cross-cultural mentoring and sponsorship programs for high-potential employees from underrepresented groups. We include best practices from DiversityInc Top 50 companies with demonstrable results in management promotions and retention.

Our research of DiversityInc Top 50 data shows a high correlation between formal cross-cultural mentoring programs that reach a broad base of managers and management retention and promotion of Blacks, Latinos, Asians and women. Anecdotal evidence supports the connection between mentoring and increased promotion and retention of LGBT people and people with disabilities. For more information, see our [Web Seminar on Mentoring](#), featuring Deloitte and BASF.

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I Formal Mentoring

The most important aspects of a successful mentoring program are that it is formal and cross-cultural, that mentors and mentees be given cultural-competence training, and that there are checkpoints and metrics to assess success.

- **Formal vs. Informal:** All of the DiversityInc Top 50 companies now have formal mentoring (compared with 72 percent in 2005). They have learned that informal mentoring can't be controlled and can lead to employees' getting the wrong messages from disgruntled mentors. [Formal mentoring](#) means the company assigns and monitors pairs, creating cross-cultural (by race, ethnicity, gender, orientation and disability) pairings as much as possible to ensure bidirectional learning. It's also important to reach the maximum number of managers so the program has significant impact.
- **Checkpoints and Metrics:** Without metrics to assess success, your organization has no way to understand what is working and what is not or to make the case for more resources for the initiative. The most successful metrics are engagement, retention and promotions compared with those not participating in the program, broken down by race, ethnicity and gender. For a blueprint of successful metrics, watch this video: [How to Start a Cross-Cultural Mentoring Program With Sodexo](#).
- **Understand Demographics:** It's important to track the demographics of mentees especially to ensure that the groups that need the most promotions are well represented. For a better understanding of how to do this, see [Is Our Mentoring Program Working?](#)

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Guided Questions for Staff

- »» **Does your company understand the differences between formal and informal mentoring?**
Discuss the business benefits of tracking formal mentoring and how informal mentoring, while sometimes beneficial, cannot be controlled by the company.
- »» **What percentage of your managers does your mentoring program reach? Are you able to include virtual mentoring to reach managers in remote locations?**
Assess whether your program has maximum impact or is just affecting a few people. If you have limited mentees, are you ensuring that those who are not invited to participate remain engaged?
- »» **How are you ensuring as many cross-cultural pairings as possible?**
Examine the racial/gender breakdown of your pairings and whether there is sufficient mix. Also factor in orientation and disability if possible. Assess the type of training you are offering and whether it is effectively eliminating cultural barriers. Examine the engagement, retention and promotion rates of mentees versus those who have not participated and share the results with senior management.

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III Training for Mentors/Mentees

Without proper advance training in both how to communicate with people who are different and how to be the best mentor, mentors can inadvertently sabotage relationships.

- **Cultural-Competence Training:** If mentors and mentees aren't aware of pitfalls, as demonstrated in our popular [Things NOT to Say](#) series, they can inadvertently offend each other and torpedo the relationship. Effective cultural-competence training, including an examination of micro-inequities, is critical to relationship success.
- **Give Mentors Goals and Mentoring Training:** When selecting mentors, ensure they understand the purpose, the goals and the milestones they need to reach during the framework of the mentoring relationship.
- **Have Formal Process to Evaluate Pairings and Discontinue Toxic Relationships:** Be realistic that not every relationship will be successful and move quickly to reassign those that aren't gelling. Ensure through follow-up and increased training that mistakes aren't repeated.

Guided Questions for Staff

»» **What type of diversity training do you now have?**

Is it virtual or does it require people to sit together in a room? Is it mandatory for all managers and for the workplace? Do you understand the difference between compliance training, which focuses on meeting legal requirements and not being sued, and real diversity-and-inclusion training, which encourages people to understand and appreciate difference?

»» **How do you measure success of your training?**

Do you have mandatory follow-up? Do you use your employee engagement surveys and resource groups to see if you are creating a more inclusive workforce?

»» **How involved are your senior executives?**

Are they participating in training and understanding how important their roles as mentors are? Do you communicate their involvement internally?

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▮ Sponsorship

Sponsorship, which is political advocacy, is increasing in popularity these days in corporate America. The debate is whether it can be formalized and whether you can insist executives sponsor people from underrepresented groups.

- **Senior Executives Need to Understand [The Difference Between Mentoring, Coaching and Sponsorship](#).** While an executive can be all three—to the same person—the need for pure advocacy in a sponsor is critical to not always having people from the majority group take executive openings.
- **Maximize Executive Exposure to High-Potentials From Underrepresented Groups:** While you can't assign protégés, companies increasingly are mandating that their senior executives [must sponsor](#) at least one high-potential from an underrepresented group, and linking that to the executives' compensation. The key to this is having formal exposure to potential protégés on a regular basis.
- **Encourage Protégés, Especially Women, to Have More Than One Sponsor:** As Sue Chevins, a Principal at EY, says in [this article](#): “Many women are overmentored and undersponsored. It's important to encourage all people from underrepresented groups to seek out sponsors and learn to brand and market themselves.”

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Guided Questions for Staff

»» **How are you exposing your potential sponsors to potential protégés from underrepresented groups? Is willingness to sponsor part of their performance review?**

If the case isn't made to senior executives about the benefits of cross-cultural sponsorship, they will informally sponsor people more likely to be of the same demographic group as they are. Since most senior executives are white men, that means protégés most likely will continue to be white men. Both frequent exposure to high-potentials from underrepresented groups and a tie-in to evaluations/compensation make cross-cultural sponsorship more likely.

»» **Are you monitoring who gets promoted after sponsorship?**

Are you carefully assessing the pipeline into management and senior management and how diverse it is? If your sponsorship isn't having the desired impact, assess who the sponsors—and the protégés—are.

»» **Are you helping protégés be aware of the corporate culture?**

Often, high-potentials from underrepresented groups don't fully understand the nuances of the corporate culture and can make mistakes that hurt their career. For an example of how a company addressed this, see [Kraft Foods' Jump Start Development Training](#).

NEXT MONTH

Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month for all employees and Talent Pipeline for diversity, recruitment, talent development and HR staff, as well as resource-group leaders and diversity-council members.