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Mentoring Programs Branching Into Focused Tracks

Mentoring programs, once embraced as a general initiative to polish employee performance and boost morale, are now sprouting specialty niches.

“Today, we are starting to see multiple mentoring programs for different goals and objectives,” said Beth Carvin, CEO of Kailua, Hawaii-based HR consulting firm Nobscot Corp., in an interview with PeopleTalk.

There are a growing number of mentorships targeting high performers, diversity groups, new hires and even new supervisors, she noted.

When it comes to high performers, Carvin said, “We are finding that organizations are identifying high performers and taking special care to get them the best mentor to help attain the needed skills to move into a leadership position.”

New-hire programs are one of the fastest-growing mentorship areas. “People are much more transient than they used to be, so we are seeing new-hire programs getting a heavy-duty focus. Employees don’t come in with a plan of staying 10 or 20 years.” As a result, HR departments are spending more time helping these employees get acclimated to the organizational culture, according to Carvin.

Other developing efforts include special mentoring groups, such as for women or African-Americans, which link employees with mentors to bridge barriers and help in career advancement. And for the new supervisors, who may not be accustomed to managing workers, there are programs to partner them with mentors who can advise them and nurture the skills needed to succeed, such as dealing with personnel conflicts.

Under best practices, mentorship programs typically run from six months to a year, with a recommended maximum of 18 months. Companies are starting to step in to use technology to help organize such programs. Nobscot has been offering its Mentor Scout solution since 2003 to aid in the matching process.

Carvin noted that numerous case studies have shown that mentoring programs can increase employee retention.

In general, she said, Nobscot’s retailer clients have exhibited the most interest in new-hire and new-manager programs. “Retail organizations by definition are spread out

geographically, so there is interest in the opportunity to connect people throughout the organization and with people at corporate.”

PeopleTalk, a product of Chain Store Age, is edited by Laura Klepacki (lauraklep@aol.com).