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ABSTRACT

The tradition of a mentoring relationship is embedded in a personal/business relationship between a wise teacher and someone who needs to learn a trade. Learning sessions have occurred over the years in many types of settings, including one-on-one mentoring, conferences, meetings, telephone, and fax. As society looks to technology as a vital resource in everyday life, virtual mentoring has emerged. Traditional mentoring is face-to-face communication and synchronous; time and location of mentoring can be an issue; it is all personal touch and communication, can be expensive, and is not recorded so it can be confidential. Virtual mentoring is communication via computer and asynchronous; time and location are not issues; there is no personal touch or communication, can be inexpensive, and is recorded so it cannot be confidential. Well-established virtual mentoring programs for adults can offer a starting point for individuals and organizations seeking virtual mentoring opportunities and information. Examples are HighTech Women; Ask the Employer.com; Nursing Net; Intel Corporation; Piver and Associates Civil Engineering Firm; CanadaInfoNet; Mentors in American Philanthropy; MentorNet; General Electric; Smart Mentoring Group; MIT; C.E.O. Mentor; Lincoln Financial Group; The Virtual Volunteering Project; and WEPAN. (Contains 33 references) (YLB)

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# From Traditional To Virtual Mentoring

by

James J. Kirk Ed. D. and Jennifer Olinger

Western Carolina University

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Authors

Dr. James J. Kirk Ed. D.
Professor Human Resource Development
210 Killian
Western Carolina University
Cullowhee, NC 28723
(828) 645-2420
kirk@wcu.edu

Ms. Jennifer Olinger
Graduate Student
Western Carolina University
Cullowhee, NC 28723
jkolinger@charter.net
828-298-9816

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Abstract

Throughout the ages societies have looked to mentoring as a means of passing down skills, knowledge, and wisdom held by more experienced members to less experienced members. Growing out of these traditional mentoring practices has emerged a new form of mentoring -- virtual mentoring. The primary difference between traditional and virtual mentoring programs is that in virtual mentoring face-to-face contact between the parties is replaced by virtual contact in the form of e-mails. This paper provides readers an overview of mentoring, compares and contrasts elements of traditional and virtual mentoring programs, discusses the benefits and limitations of both forms of mentoring, and describes selected adult-based virtual mentoring programs throughout the United States and Canada.

As defined in Webster's New World Dictionary (Neufeldt & Guralnik, 1988); a mentor is a wise advisor, teacher or coach: In general, mentors are usually more experienced and more senior than learners. They provide support, encouragement and guidance. The terms "learner," "protégé," and "mentee" are used to refer to persons being guided or helped by a mentor (Neufeldt &Guralnik, 1988). Regardless of the term being used, the purpose of gaining experience, knowledge, and/or skills in a specific area from the teacher or mentor is the prime role of the mentee. She/he looks to the mentor as an enabler of personal growth (Bennetts, 1994). Mentors usually do not have any line of responsibility to mentees. An existing working relationship might impede with the open learning forum that can occur between a learner and the individual who is interested in development in self as well as in others.

**Mentors and Mentees**

According to the Mentors Forum, a UK website, mentors perform four major roles in the learning relationship:

(1) Coach: to show the learner how to carry out a task

(2) Facilitate: create opportunities for learners to utilize new skills

(3) Counsel: help learners explore consequences of potential decisions

(4) Network: refer learners to others when mentor's experience is insufficient

Mentors are utilized for various reasons in the workplace. They can help a new employee acclimate to the job while facilitating better communication between various

functions or management tiers within the organization. A mentor can also be utilized to promote and support changes in the culture of an organization.

A mentor may perform a variety of roles (Council of Graduate Schools, 1995):

> "Mentors are advisors, people with career experience willing to share their knowledge; supporters, people who give emotional and moral encouragement; tutors, people who give specific feedback on one's performance; masters, in the sense of employers to whom one is apprenticed; sponsors, sources of information about and aid in obtaining opportunities; models, of identity, of the kind of person one should be to be an academic."

In general, an effective mentoring relationship is characterized by mutual respect, trust, understanding, and empathy. Effective mentors are able to share life experiences and wisdom, as well as technical expertise. They are good listeners, good observers, and good problem-solvers (What is a Mentor, 2002). They make an effort to know, accept, and respect the goals and interests of a student. In the end, they establish an environment in which the individual's accomplishment is limited only by the extent of his or her talent.

There is considerable debate about the use of the terms "mentoring" and "coaching" (Harrington, 1999). We have defined the meaning of mentor; a coach is someone who plans an intervention that is designed to improve the performance of an individual in a specific task (Clutterbuck and Sweeney, 1997). Coaching focuses on performance of tasks, is short term, includes explicit feedback, develops learner's skills, is directed by the coach, and points out when and where a learner has gone wrong. On the other hand, mentoring focuses on progress, is usually long term, provides Intuitive

feedback, develops learner's capabilities, is driven by the learner, and empowers learners to solve their problems.

Mentoring combines the experienced individual (mentor) with a less experienced individual (mentee) in a dynamic association that benefits both involved parties (Corner, 2002). In an organization with a "learning" culture, informal mentoring occurs among its employees continually. Other organizations find it useful to assign new employees to more senior members rather than assuming the process will happen naturally. In the text, Training for Organizations, mentoring is defined as one of several types of informal learning that occurs in today's organizations. Some other methods of informal learning in this category are coaching, distance learning, audio conferencing, and videoconferencing (O'Conner, Bronner, & Delaney, 2002).

**Benefits of Mentoring**

Mentoring relationships can be beneficial to mentors, mentees, and their employing organizations (Conner, 2002). Listed below are a few of the most commonly cited benefits

Mentor Benefits

- Receives feedback and a fresh perspective from the mentee
- Frees time for new projects and ideas since mentee may assist in job responsibilities
- Receives reciprocal effects on own career by investing time in another's career
- Ensures improvement of own skills/competencies

- Identifies and grooms future successors for own position
- Acquires a renewed interest in the job

Mentee Benefits

- Receives direct information and experiences from the mentor
- Builds a degree of confidence through guidance, assistance, and support from the mentor
- Receives individualized attention
- Obtains information that may be otherwise unavailable to the Mentee
- Gains insights on formats, processes, shortcuts, and results
- Perceives the mentor as a role model, advisor, sponsor

Organization Benefits

- Helps resolve certain organizational problems such as premature departure from organization, stagnation, boredom, and lack of qualified individuals
- Aids the development of coaching talent
- Provides more satisfaction among employees
- Boosts productivity through performance, planning, and increased team effort
- Makes organization appealing to potential employees, students, or affiliates
- Increases organizational communication and understanding in regards to organizational issues

**Limitations of Mentoring**

As a planned intervention, mentoring is not a panacea for all of the challenges facing today's workers and organizations nor is it without it limitations. Organizations must carefully weigh in the limitations that mentoring may pose to ensure that the decision to incorporate this type of learning will be effective for all involved in the process. Listed below are several noteworthy limitations and how they may affect mentors, mentees, and their employing organizations (Conner, 2002).

Mentor Limitations

- The mentor expends time and energy in training the mentee that could be spent on other tasks
- The mentee could reflect poorly on the mentor and his/her reputation by performing poorly on a job that the mentor helped the mentee to acquire
- The mentee may quit and the mentor may lose his/her influence, therefore leaving a feeling of wasted time and effort for the mentor

Mentee Limitations

- The mentee may find the assigned mentor is not knowledgeable in the subject matter and provides false and/or misleading information
- The mentor may prove to be losing interest in the organization and may have a negative impact on the mentee's reputation
- The mentee may feel that only menial tasks are assigned and no learning is occurring

- The mentor does too much for the mentee and thus reduces the impact of training
- The mentee may become overly dependent, thus leading to a lessening of self-confidence and abilities

Mentor Limitations

- Where there are limited opportunities for advancement, a Mentoring Process designed only to support succession planning may lead to frustration and missed expectations
- Financial and time commitments must be considerations of challenges
- Due to the lack of published data in this topic area, it may be difficult to sell the process to organization leaders

**Traditional Mentoring Relationships**

Mentoring is not only a modern employee development intervention but is also an age-old tradition, valued by countless generations. It is a powerful and popular way for people to learn a variety of personal and professional skills. In fact, mentoring is one of the oldest forms of influence. Popular mentoring literature attributes the origin of the term mentoring to Homer, one of the ancient Greek story tellers. In his classic tale Homer tells of the King of Ithaca, who asked his friend mentor to look after his son Telemachus while he fought to win the Trojan War. However, the modern use of the term mentoring more likely comes from the work of 18th century French writer Fenelon who was also an

educator. African scholars have noted that mentors were commonplace in Africa, long before the ancient Greek civilization (National Mentoring Network, 2002).

Throughout the ages, the tradition of a mentoring relationship is imbedded in a personal/business relationship between a wise teacher (mentor) and someone who needs to learn a trade (mentee). These learning sessions have taken place over the years in many types of settings: one-on-one mentoring, conferences, meetings, telephone, and fax.

Over the years several myths have surrounded the practice of mentoring (Learn About Mentoring, 2002). Listed below are some of the most persistent myths:

1) **Myth**: Mentoring only happens on a one-to-one, long-term, face-to-face basis.
   **Fact**: With modern technology mentoring can take place by e-mail, telephone, or fax and may only need a few hours.
2) **Myth**: Taking time to mentor decreases productivity.
   **Fact**: Mentoring improves productivity through better communication, goal clarity, increased commitment, and succession planning.
3) **Myth**: A mentor needs to be 5-10 years older than the person he/she mentors.
   **Fact:** Innovations happen so rapidly or personal experience is such a great teacher that younger people often have opportunities to mentor older workers; peers are often effective mentors.

4) **Myth**: Mentoring requires a greater time commitment than most workers can afford.

   **Fact**: Being mentored or being a mentor does not guarantee career advancement, but it does significantly increase on-the-job learning, accelerating career opportunities.

5) **Myth**: The person being mentored is the only one who benefits from the relationship.

   **Fact**: For mentoring to be effective, all parties must perceive benefits; this is the principle of mutuality.

6) **Myth**: Corporations do not have time for mentorship because they are too busy reorganizing, restructuring, downsizing, rightsizing and surviving.

   **Fact**: The changing economy and globalization place great strains on time, but a focus on learning increases stability, change management, and financial growth.

One can see that mentoring, in the traditional sense, has offered its users many rewards over the centuries it has been in use. As the world enters a new electronic age, a less traditional style of mentoring can be considered – "virtual Mentoring."

**Virtual Mentoring**

As society looks to technology, especially the Internet, as a vital resource in everyday life, one cannot help but to imagine the conveniences that are presented by mentoring in the virtual sense. Hence, the emergence of virtual mentoring. Virtual mentoring is very similar to traditional mentoring with one significant difference – the use a computer as the primary mode of communication between the mentor and mentee (Hansen, 2000). Virtual mentoring is also known by such names as "E-mentoring," "telementoring," and "online mentoring." All such mentoring modes are grounded in the same learning concept as traditional mentoring (i.e., providing assistance to a mentee from a mentor for the mutual benefit of learning. However, in virtual mentoring face-to-face contact between the parties is replaced by virtual contact.

As with E-learning in general, physical barriers of space and time are not permitted to stand in the way of a quality learning relationship. The distance between different corporate locations around the globe can be substantial. Such distances can greatly reduce the possibilities of mentoring in the traditional sense. However, virtual mentoring enables mentoring relationships to be established and flourish among employees who are in opposite corners of the world. The time involved with a mentoring relationship becomes more appealing in a virtual relationship. Because virtual mentoring can occur synchronously or asynchronously, the time involved by either the mentor or mentee can be disregarded as a barrier to a mutually beneficial mentoring relationship. With virtual mentoring, the pool of mentors to which mentees can be match is greatly expanded and thus increases the possibility of highly successful mentoring relationships.

Growing out of the need for individuals to easily communicate in a more convenient fashion than that offered by traditional mentoring programs virtual mentoring has become a popular program; something many potential volunteers want to participate in for non-profit organizations. Furthermore, many corporations are looking to utilize this resource for business purposes. The Virtual Volunteering Project website at http://www.serviceleader.org/vv/orgs/mentor.html reveals a number of mentoring options available in both for-profit and non-profit organizations. Today there are thousands of mentors, mentees, and program organizers benefiting from various forms of online mentoring.

According to the National Mentoring Center, the growth of virtual mentoring has also produced some negative outcomes. The bad news is that many corporations and organizations want to own online mentoring. Rather than sharing information about what works and what doesn't, many organizations, particularly for-profit companies, are competing to be the online mentoring provider, and to define the one-and-only online mentoring model. Many organizers are also under the mistaken belief that online mentoring is so easy to undertake that it takes just a few minutes per week, and that the key component is a snazzy web site (Cravens, 2002).

Meaningful online mentoring, that will produce results for all participants, takes real time, and real commitment, just as face-to-face mentoring does. It's not just about clicking around a web site and dashing off a short email once a week. Organizations must be cautious when implementing virtual mentoring to ensure that mentors and mentees are prepared to begin and follow through with the task ahead.

While considering the meaning of virtual mentoring and its advantages, it is important to weigh in the disadvantages to this practice. Anytime personal contact is removed from a situation, whether it is through training, meetings, or mentoring, the loss of cues from body language occurs. According to an article on the National Mentoring Network website, 40% of communication is said to be non-verbal (Mentoring, Supporting, 2002). When considering a mentoring relationship, personal contact plays an important role in the affiliation of the mentor and mentee. On the converse, the ability to communicate electronically may promote conversation that would normally be uncomfortable to discuss in person. Another clear disadvantage that virtual mentoring presents is the issue of confidentiality. When mentoring discussions are transmitted via the Internet, they are written down, or "recorded." This may pose a concern to participants.

Before beginning a virtual mentoring program within any organization, it is important to make sure some housekeeping homework is completed. The first step in seeking to establish a virtual mentoring program is to determine if/how this type of program will fit into the business. In other words, does it match the mission and values of the organization? Secondly, assess the mentoring experience of the group. Does the organization already participate in some sort of organized mentoring? This type of offline expertise is necessary before beginning a virtual mentoring program. Next, ensure that the concept of mentoring is openly accepted by all those who will be participating. If those who will be participating have an aversion to using email, virtual mentoring may not be right for those individuals. Finally, there are surveys and checklists that are available for use prior to implementation to ensure that the organization has the elements

needed to conduct a successful virtual mentoring program (The Virtual Volunteering Project, 2002).

**How Virtual Mentoring Differs from Traditional Mentoring**

To date there has been a great amount of research into mentoring programs both in education and business, however most of the research has focused on traditional face-to-face mentoring with relatively little research conducted on virtual mentoring (Harrington, 1999).

One of the challenges of any mentoring program is the availability of time. Face-to-face mentoring requires that both people involved must be available at the same time. In a virtual mentoring program, while time is still a factor, it is not necessary for both participants to be available at the same time. However, if possible, it is advisable to provide some face-to-face contact to help establish a common bond and a real desire to make the virtual mentoring project a success.

Not only does a virtual mentoring program provide for greater flexibility in regards to time, it is also place independent. It does not require that mentor and mentee live within close proximity to each other, as does face-to-face mentoring. Virtual mentoring allows interested participants from rural or remote areas opportunities that would not otherwise be available if face-to-face mentoring were the only option (Harrington, 1999).

Researchers have concluded that a lack of time is the most commonly-cited problem of both Mentors and Mentees (Willbur, 1989, cited in Harrington, 1999).

Making sure that a mentoring program is well-structured, with concise directions and time lines, assures that both participants precious time will be spent on task. With the variety of electronic resources being used for teaching tools, it is advisable to blend different types of learning, or mentoring, for the sake of the individuals involved as well as for the organization.

For a summary of the key differences between traditional and virtual mentoring view Figure One below.

**Figure One: Virtual Versus Traditional Mentoring**

| Virtual Mentoring | Traditional Mentoring |
|---|---|
| Communication via computer | Communication face-to-face |
| Mentoring is asynchronous | Mentoring is synchronous |
| Time is not a major issue | Time can be a major issue |
| Location of mentoring is not an issue | Location of mentoring can be an issue |
| No personal touch, communication | All personal touch, communication |
| Can be inexpensive | Can be expensive |
| Is recorded, so cannot be confidential | Is not recorded, so can be confidential |

**Virtual Mentoring Programs for Adults**

Locating virtual mentoring programs that are adult specific can be challenging. As Cravens points out (2002), many corporations are "stingy" in sharing their virtual

mentoring secrets. Conversely, the amount of student/child programs is impressive. Listed below are several well establish virtual mentoring programs for adults. They are offered as a starting point for individuals and organizations seeking virtual mentoring opportunities and/or information.

HighTech Women ("About High Tech")

HighTech Women is geared towards bringing together women in a congenial community to meet people involved in the technology industry. The object of HighTech Women is to mentor, encourage, teach, and share, facilitating the advancement of women in technology and technology related fields.

The program was established in March 2000. Numerous articles are presented on the site by the more than 1400 members and are free to those who would like to utilize the information for educational purposes. In addition to this information, on-site roundtable events are planned and conducted by this organization. There is also a registration opportunity for upper management individuals to be a mentor. This program is known as a "Pool of Directors" and exists to ensure that a strong and diverse population exists to provide mentoring to women who may be starting a business.

Ask the Employer.com

Ask the Employer.com, an innovative E-mentoring and career advancement Web site, was selected as one of *Working Woman's* Top 5 Career "Tried and True" sites on the Web, specializing in career development and mentoring. Details were listed in the article, 'ASK THE EMPLOYER "TRIED & TRUE" Favorite Career Resource'

Ask the Employer.com was created in 1998 as an E-mentoring partnership site with the intent of establishing a connection between mentor and mentee based upon mutual career interests. Experienced business professionals offer their advice to those they mentor based on registration profiles posted on the askanemployer.com website. The site has expanded to include all aspects of career management and human resources that specialize in mentor relationships and expert career advice. In addition to the mentoring program, Ask the Employer.com also publishes the Career Finder's Guide to E-newsletter that includes information in major areas of career advancement, including mentoring relationships.

Nursing Net

There is often more to be learned from a health care provider than from a book. Especially focusing on the changes constantly occurring today in the healthcare industry, one can see why an online nursing mentoring program would be effective and efficient for educational purposes. Nurses from anywhere are encouraged to

utilize this site to converse with one another in regards to current medical issues and questions.

Because time is especially precious in the medical field, individuals have partnered to establish two collaborative websites: nursingnet (www.nursingnet.org) and virtual nurse (www.virtualnurse.com). Individuals who use either of these sites have the opportunity to become a mentee or mentor, asking or giving advice in the nursing field.

Intel Corporation

Started in 1997, this mentoring program is like none other: it has nothing to do with individual career advancement as it is conducted with the mentor who is an "old-timer" and the mentee who is an Intel manager. From the on-line article, "Inside Intel's Mentoring Movement", we see that Intel's idea is the ability to do the right things right away, regardless of who is mentoring whom. Therefore, they match people by what skills are in demand. Intel uses an intranet and email to perform the matchmaking.

This mentoring program was started out of necessity. The Albuquerque plant was losing its seasoned employees to other Intel locations, and they were continually left to "reinvent the wheel" with new employees. Intel wanted its program to be about how well knowledge was passed along to a new generation of employees.

The matches are made based upon a database which contains the preferences of the mentor and mentee candidates from anywhere in the Intel corporation. Once the

match is made, an automatic email is sent to the mentor and that individual is in charge of contacting the mentee to get the process started.

Piver and Associates Civil Engineering Firm

The article, "Role Reversal Older Workers Mentored by Tech-Savvy Newcomers" discusses the abilities of younger employees mentoring seasoned workers in the engineering field. Experience in the field once meant everything to the owner, Bill Piver, from Raleigh. However, when computer-aided design came along, experience suddenly meant little if the engineer couldn't use a computer. The program has been very successful and instrumental in providing mentoring to the older, more seasoned workforce, in order to capitalize on both their technical and non-technical skills.

CanadaInfoNet

If someone is looking relocating to Canada, this site would be worth visiting. This mentoring opportunity is a web-based forum that pairs Canadians with newcomers to help match occupational goals.

The program works by incorporating a variety of Internet forums that are fun and easy to use. The forums are used to create matches between like-minded individuals in order to establish a mentoring relationship that respects members' privacy and accommodates schedules from both sides of the mentoring relationship.

CanadaInfoNet is a non-profit initiative created and operated by JVS Toronto (which was founded in 1947) in conjunction with JIAS (Jewish Immigrant Aid Services), Hewlett-Packard Canada, and Aerowood Media Inc.

Mentors in American Philanthropy

Established in October, 1997, this is a web-based forum which brings together some of America's most experienced fund development professionals so they are available to mentor their newer colleagues. The "On-line Mentoring Forum" is not an email discussion list. Rather, it is a fully-threaded web-based forum that will assist Mentors and Protégés in strengthening nonprofit organizations when visiting the Mentors in American Philanthropy website.

MentorNet

An Internet-based mentoring program for women pursuing careers in engineering and the sciences is making it easier for female students to connect with mentors and learn about opportunities in industry. Purdue University has paired up with MentorNet, a partnership which involves universities, corporations, and professional societies to link students and professionals by email.

The MentorNet and Purdue University relationship was founded in 1998. Topping the list for needing this program was that the students were not finding time to participate in the formal. Face-to face programs which were in existence. Another

important reason for the program to exist is the fact that women are still underrepresented in many scientific areas. MentorNet can assist in breaking through that trend by connecting female students with mentors who understand the challenges.

To become active in the program, a simple registration on the MentorNet website is required. The site will match the mentor and mentee based upon field of study and experience.

General Electric

In June 1999, Jack Welch asked GE's top 600 managers to become students and find Mentors for themselves. The program is informal, driven by the Protégés' needs and structured by the mentoring pair and is done in the spirit of the 'E' environment: fast and adaptable to schedules.

This virtual mentoring program is able to connect employees of GE across the locations so the Protégés can learn about Websites, the Internet, and e-commerce. There is typically no hierarchy relationship involved, so the e-mentoring is occurring across business lines.

Air Force

EVector, an on-line mentoring tool, is a quick and easy way for Air Force commanders and supervisor to track their officers. The eVector format contains

information on military pay, service dates, promotion eligibility and career progression guidance.

Started in February 2001, eVector pulls all necessary military information into one place and allows for Mentors and Protégés to communicate. The mentor can refer to programs when counseling the mentee in areas such as career advancement. Mentors can be either direct supervisors or can also be higher ranking officials based in another location and/or another area of the Air Force.

Smart Mentoring Group

For the past four years, the Smart Mentoring Group has been offering on-line mentoring to individuals around the world. Smart Mentors are available for contact, 24 hours a day and 365 days a year. In addition to these mentors, topic-specific group chat and daily emails containing relevant questions are available to the mentee. This service is part of eno.com, an e-learning company.

MIT

Improving the lives of low-income adults is the focus of this program. Camfield Estates is a predominantly African-American, low to moderate income housing development. A partnership between Camfield Estates and MIT Creating Community Connections Project provided the resources to establish a technological

infrastructure. Offered to each family were a new computer, software, Internet connection, and comprehensive courses.

In addition to that contribution, a web-based community building system was created for communication, or mentoring purposes. The system was named "Creating Community Connections (C3) System". The purpose was to create connections between residents, local associations and institutions, and neighborhood businesses. These efforts were combined to achieve a social and cultural integration between the low-income adults and business leaders to create cultural resonance.

The purpose and outcome of the project included and expansion of local ties, a heightened awareness of community resources, improved communication, and a positive shift in participants' perceptions of themselves as learners.

C.E.O. Mentor

Information shared in this program is to be utilized for the business leaders in an organization: C.E.O.'s, business founders, owner-managers, or Board members. Participants both mentor and are mentored by others in the group. A wide variety of industries are represented-from manufacturing to retail to professional services. Together, this group constitutes a virtual board of 14-18 non-competing roundtable members.

Since business leaders have an opportunity to meet with their mentors this program can be considered a "blended" mentoring program. The obvious advantage,

however, is the fact that these busy industry leaders have the opportunity to participate in virtual mentoring with one another, sharing scenarios and suggestions.

The European site in which this information was derived is a network of 300 interlinked, information-rich business web sites. These sites are sponsored in part by private investment bankers, "Fast Track Assets Pty Ltd", by business and life mentors, "CEO Mentor Pty Ltd", and by The "Enterprise Board", who consists of CEO's who work together to create added value to the business they lead.

Exxon's Sales Division

Corporate Mentoring Solutions was hired by Exxon to help find retention solutions for those employees who were leaving the company after a four to five year period. Exxon found itself spending huge quantities of money in recruiting and training women and minorities for its Sales Division. Exit interviews showed that there was a need for mentoring in years two and three of the employment relationship.

Enter Corporate Mentoring Solutions. After extensive research to find where the downfalls were with the Exxon organization, a mentoring solution was incorporated that carefully matched veteran salespeople with female and minority protégés who were entering the second year of sales. To build a comfortable working relationship, the partners were trained together for two days. The focus of the training was for the mentor to discover the protégé's individual needs.

The relationship continued for a year in the blended environment of virtual mentoring as well as face-to-face mentoring when possible. It was recommended to Exxon that the normal job functions be reduced slightly to accommodate the mentors' time in assisting the protégés. The results included a greater retention in Exxon's highly diversified workforce, money savings and an increase in sales.

National Cash Register (NCR) Group

1996-1998 was the first mentoring program that was trained by Corporate Mentoring Solutions for the National Cash Register group. It was a traditional mentor/ mentee relationship and helped high potential technical staff within the organization to shift into effective leadership roles for the business unit.

The paradigm shift occurred in 1998, when NCR merged with another organization and therefore became a full business solutions provider. The sales division was greatly affected by this merger. Before the merger, the salespeople were dealing with tangible items. After the merger, veteran salespeople were finding virtual sales too difficult to be successful.

Corporate Mentoring Solutions discovered that they could utilize those salespeople who were not affected by the paradigm shift to assist those salespeople who were affected by the merger. Through all this training and mentoring, another solution was discovered, PNI: Protégé Needs Inventory for New Hires. The mentoring program started from group interaction and has led to an online mentoring system which meets the mentoring needs of the new hires.

General Motors

Tom Gottschalk, the senior vice-president for General Motors, was the origin for this virtual mentoring program. He was scared by the functions of computers, and for a long time, relied on his administrative assistant for his technical needs. He and other executives were in the same boat and knew they have to get updated on technology. They incorporated a reverse-mentoring program to learn computer use from a mentor.

The mentoring relationship began with a personal meeting between the Mentors and Protégés. These top executives had to learn even the most basic skills. The coaches were available as a 24-hour help desk would be: via computer or phone. The Protégés were encouraged to contact the mentors if there was ever a question which needed immediate attention.

This program changed the way that executives interacted with one another as well as with their staff. Their one-on-one and virtual mentoring meetings have given them the skills to focus on more strategic discussions. Similarly, communication within the staff has become more efficient and improved morale company-wide.

Lincoln Financial Group

A story from the Computer World website tells the tale of how the virtual mentoring program began at Lincoln Financial Group. The Director of Enterprise Technology Services, Jeff Albert, realized that he would be able to help impact the outcome of his organization by committing to an objective and carrying it out. The Lincoln group incorporated the assistance of the Dooly Group to establish the mentoring program.

The program has been in existence for about 8 years and is geared towards 24 committed IT participants each year. This group meets once a month to discuss materials they have been studying. They also use a virtual corporate university called the Center for Breakthrough Business to communicate electronically.

The objective of the program is to develop IT business leaders to exceed their potential in the workplace environment. The Lincoln group has a strong commitment to executive education.

The Virtual Volunteering Project

Launched in 1996, The Virtual Volunteering Project encourages and assists in the development of volunteer activities that can be completed off-site via the Internet. It is a nationally recognize resource, as it has been featured in the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, and the Los Angeles Times.

It was discovered that many people would like to volunteer their time to be a mentor, but could not due to time constraints or other reasons that prevented them from leaving their homes. Virtual volunteering, however, made it possible for these individuals to give their time to those in schools, government offices, and other agencies which may utilize volunteer services.

There is a website that has been built specifically for these mentors. The site contains resources for online mentoring and information about virtual volunteering. It has been funded with grant money from organizations such as the Dell Foundation and eBay Foundation.

## WEPAN

WEPAN (Women in Engineering Programs & Advocates Network) has launched an initiative called MentorNet that uses E-mail to connect college female engineering, science, and math students across the country with volunteer mentors who are employed in these fields. The program was launched in 1998 at Dartmouth College.

The purpose of this program is to increase women in these fields, which are typically dominated with men. Mentoring is a proven strategy in encouraging the retention of women in these fields. E-mail allows mentoring relationships to occur where geography, time, or financial constraints would make mentoring difficult. Requirements for mentor volunteers include a commitment to the protégé for an entire academic year and 2-4 e-mail exchanges per month. The program provides

ongoing communication to assist mentors and protégés in creating an effective mentoring relationship.

**Summary**

Throughout the ages societies have looked to mentoring as a means of passing down skills, knowledge, and wisdom held by more experienced members to less experienced members. A healthy mentoring relationship is characterized by mutual respect, trust, understanding, and empathy. Effective mentors are able to share life experiences and wisdom, as well as technical expertise. They are good listeners, good observers, and good problem-solvers. They make an effort to know, accept, and respect the goals and interests of protégés. In the end, good mentors establish an environment in which a mentee's accomplishments are limited only by the extent of his or her talent.

Growing out of the need for individuals to easily communicate in a more convenient fashion than that offered by traditional mentoring programs virtual mentoring has become a popular workplace intervention; something many potential volunteers want to participate in for non-profit organizations. Furthermore, many corporations are looking to utilize this resource for business purposes. Today there are thousands of mentors, mentees, and program organizers benefiting from various forms of online mentoring. The primary difference between these programs and traditional mentoring programs is that in virtual mentoring face-to-face contact between the parties is replaced by virtual contact in the form of e-mails. Both traditional and virtual mentoring programs have their respective mentee, mentor, and organization benefits and limitations.

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Signature

James J Kirk

Organization: Western Carolina University

Position: Professor of Human Resources

Address: 108c Killian Building Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC

Zip Code: 28723

Telephone No: 828-645-2420

Fax: 828-232-2277

E-mail: kirk@wcu.edu

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