

Title: Unlocking Mentoring: Supporting Co-workers' Through Professional Experience and Workplace Knowledge Can Be the Key.

What is Mentoring?

Mentoring is a relationship built on developmental caring, sharing and helping, where one person invests time, know how and effort to enhance another person's growth, knowledge, and skills. Though its genesis may be in the library workplace, it ultimately enables the recipient's to respond positively to his/her critical needs pertaining to life. In many ways,-it prepares an individual for greater productivity and achievement in the future.

How many times have we heard co-workers expressing the need for encouragement from their colleagues? New librarians, the focus of this piece, are often dropped in without a parachute and expected to perform up to the standards of experienced librarians. But what about the brim full of institutional tacit knowledge held by the experienced librarian? Mentorship may hold the key that starts the incoming professionals on the path to self-growth. Let us therefore explore a new way forward.

Within the parameters of mentoring, staff engagement and hosting formal mentoring programs is the gateway to improving professional growth by galvanising the efforts of mentor/mentee. The time has come to listen to those stories affecting the enthusiasm and learning of new librarians and discover the benefits of mentoring. Many positives are to be derived from a mentorship program for librarians and for the organisation as a whole. There is no divorcing of these issues in the run up to the decade in which institutional knowledge will be lost through retirement of librarians.

Drawing upon the inspiration of librarians' experiences we must breathe new life into mentoring as it only takes one person to make that difference, hence the culture must be shaped for the better. Emphasis must be placed on promoting a formal mentoring program for new librarians enabling them to explore and benefit from the experience, organisational culture and talent.

Informal Mentoring

- Exists outside boundaries of a formal program
- Selection of mentee is made by mentee's own personal choice
- Accessibility and flexibility in the relationship
- Expectations choose what activities help is needed in
- Success depends heavily on the more experienced colleague

Formal Mentoring

- Based on a formal program clear purpose and direction of goals and detailed plan for assessment
- Program must link goals to the choice of mentoring activities in line with mentoring outcomes
- Support of top management for good communication and visible assistance
- Defining clear roles and responsibility for coordination of the program clearly identified
- How and whom is coordinating the program
- How will mentors/mentees be trained and matched
- Should participation be on a voluntary basis
- Mentor/mentees role needs to be identified in the process
- Pairing relationships deemed as a success
- Continuation of mentoring relationships after time has passed
- Education and training valued, encouraged and maintained to keep mentoring program active
- Guidelines and procedures must be followed for success
- Mentee undertakes advice in his professional career to achieve new skills and knowledge

Benefits to Mentee

- Mentee responsibility is to determine the way forward for mentoring
- What support is needed from the mentor
- Increased self-esteem, interpersonal bond and confidence
- An experienced person to guide through the program
- Promotion and increased compensation
- Career development and increased job satisfaction
- Developing learning opportunities, analytical and reflective skills
- Develops organisation and professional knowledge
- Reinforces ability to take risks i.e. decision making in libraries
- Building of organisational and professional knowledge
- Accelerates professional development
- Feedback for improvement throughout the organisation

Benefits to Mentor

- Personal satisfaction
- Career revitalisation
- Leadership skill development
- Supervisory and training ability
- Provides an opportunity to give back to the profession
- Mentors work closely with Library Associations in training future librarians and leaders
- New ideas brought to Library Associations from mentee
- New insights into the organisation
- Additional skills in developing a less experienced person
- Significantly improves his/her professional networks

Recommendations

Action is needed from the Library Association with exciting and innovative plans and the readiness to adapt and sustain a formal program. Ideally, the membership comprises a unique place to establish and invite meaningful relationships between both mentees and mentors.

By examining best practices from other associations to include documentation on websites, clear guidelines and the commitment to mentoring.

Library management's continued support is crucial, as within the next decade the tacit knowledge of the experienced librarian will be lost due to retirement and by placing mechanisms to ensure the organisational culture is captured.

The ushering of a mentorship program shapes professional development and offers a key role to both the organisation and librarian. The latter is well positioned to advise decision-makers as they deliver quality service to users and improve library operations.

Conclusion

From this perspective it is hoped that librarians in tandem with their Library Association will serve as a catalyst to strengthen mentorship policies affecting the profession in Trinidad and Tobago. This can happen through positive response to the redirection required and by a keen interest in shaping the delivery of mentorship. Librarians are indeed capable of resilience as they have fought in the past against other issues so as to ensure the relevance and survival of the library.

Dedication to implementing change is not an easy undertaking but a formal mentoring program cements the relationship by allowing for engagement with experience and knowledge sharing between mentor/mentee. Librarians are driven by a quest for learning and for building

institutional knowledge as well as a rich staff resource. This can all have a lasting impact during people's professional careers and long after the formal program has ended.

References

Colosimo, A. (2017). Whole-Person Mentoring For Every Stage Of Careers In Librarianship April Colosimo, Robin Elizabeth Desmeules, and Dawn McKinnon. *Library Leadership & Management*, 32(1), 1-13.

Gill, M., & Gosine-Boodoo, M. (2020). A case for purposeful mentorship in research and publishing at a Caribbean academic library. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 102302.