



Multiple Mentoring

Discover alternatives to a one-on-one learning relationship
By Larry Ambrose

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Larry Ambrose is a managing partner of Perrone-Ambrose Associates, Inc., and the author of *A Mentor's Companion*.

E-mail: info@perrone-ambrose.com

One-on-one mentoring is the most common form of mentoring, but it is not always possible in every organization. There are, however, alternative mentoring models to consider with their own unique benefits. Such models include mentoring in peer groupings, mentoring within unit teams, and mentoring circles, where a single leader mentors several proteges at one time.

Benefits of Multiple Mentoring

The traditional mentoring model is one mentor working with a single protege. The strength of this one-on-one model is that it addresses the individual's needs with no set agenda. But depending on the needs of your organization, multiple mentoring may be a more appropriate model.

Multiple mentoring is best used to:

- Capitalize on the unique skills of many individuals who can strategically share them with their peers. An additional use of this type of mentoring is to encourage and instill the spirit of teaching, sharing, and helping within the organization.
- Support team building and mutual competency development within a team. Team mentoring is great for cross-training on specific skills. This form of multiple mentoring supports team building by developing the spirit of giving and requesting help among team members.
- Take advantage of the seasoned expertise of one knowledgeable individual in your organization and make it available to multiple learners at one time.

Mentoring circles. The mentoring circle model involves

one mentor working with a group of proteges. This option is effective in situations where the number of available mentors is limited. Mentoring circles typically feature a seasoned mentor who focuses the group and provides technical and organizational advice and guidance. The mentor assists the circle members in utilizing their combined energies and experiences to help one another go beyond what any member knows or contributes as an individual. The benefit of mentoring circles is that they generate many different perspectives rather than a single point of view.

Peer and team mentoring. Peer or team mentoring groups are not always led by a formal mentor. The group members themselves usually provide mentoring to each other. They may form temporary pairs or subgroups to address a particular organizational or departmental issue, then disband and re-form around a different issue. Peer and team mentoring works best for cross-training, team building, and bringing new staff up to speed quickly. Other benefits of these types of mentoring groups include improved consistency in product or service delivery, smoother business transitions, such as reorganizations and new IT systems, and lower formal training costs.

Group Mentoring Considerations

Mentoring circles and peer or team mentoring should provide a learning environment that encourages the sharing of knowledge, experience, and insight. Following are some questions to consider before you become involved in a mentoring circle or contemplate joining or forming a peer or team mentoring group:

- What outcomes do you expect from the mentoring group experience?
- What three things do you want the mentoring group to be known for?
- What professional growth and development issues do you want the mentoring group to focus on?
- What do you believe could get in the way of the mentoring group's effectiveness?
- When it comes to facilitating ideas in a group, where are you the strongest? Where are you the least effective?
- What do you expect of other participants in your group?
- How will you know if the mentoring group is working? What will indicate success?



Making It Work

No matter which multiple mentoring model is used, the concerns for establishing the group, or circle, and setting mutually shared expectations are essentially the same.

The initial group meeting should:

- Clarify expectations
- Review topics to be covered
- Set ground rules for working together
- Outline desired outcomes
- Raise potential concerns such as teamwork, confidentiality within groups, developing trust among participants, and preventing meetings from becoming "complaint" sessions

As sessions continue, participants must commit to the process by honoring designated meeting dates and times. Participants should also address discussions from previous sessions, share weekly learnings, and discuss outcomes of previously identified action items.

During the final session, the group should evaluate the relationship in a formal fashion--discussing whether the goals and objectives of the sessions were met, what worked especially well, and what could be done to make the process work better.