

*Mentoring: Golden Opportunity or Lost Cause* by Karen Brown, Manager Mentoring Services, AMC, 2008.



**‘Mentoring is an Opportunity’** – this line has been delivered countless times by enthusiastic Program Coordinators over the years to mentees (and to a lesser extent mentors) yet somehow the positive message is quite often lost. Despite the fortuitous definition that is worn by the word ‘opportunity’ we are finding that some mentees don’t know how to take advantage of what is being given to them. Why is this? Let’s take a moment to reflect on a couple of known factors:

- Australian mentoring programs are typically seen as development and growth opportunities – not a form of remedial intervention.
  - As a mentee, there is an opportunity to bring your ideas, thoughts and questions to the table and discuss them with an interested and encouraging third party (the mentor).
  - Increasingly, workplace programs allow mentoring participants the opportunity to meet within work time, thus reducing the impact of the program outside of work hours.
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- Programs working at the optimal level provide all participants with the opportunity to attend education sessions to prepare them for their involvement – no surprises!
  - Our experience has shown us that modern workplace mentoring programs are conducted over a period of at least nine – twelve months which provides mentees with an opportunity to get their teeth into areas of interest and follow up with strong actions.

That’s quite a lot of opportunity, isn’t it? So why do we find that so many mentees turn this opportunity into a lost cause?

**‘Opportunity is missed by most people because it’s dressed in overalls and looks like work.’**

Thomas Edison, Inventor

Perhaps Edison was on to something here. Opportunity is, or can, lead to hard work; it’s not something that you are given in the hope that it will turn into something bigger and better. It needs your input to develop it and change it into something more tangible. Mentoring is a perfect example of this. Your organisation may provide you with the initiative, the mentor and the support, but unless you are willing to get in, roll your sleeves up and get a little bit dirty nothing is going to change.

Over the years I have found that the mentees who succeed are those with their sleeves rolled up. It doesn’t matter if they are ‘volunteered’ for the program or if they sought it out. It doesn’t matter if they are already up to their necks in daily tasks and paperwork. It doesn’t even matter if they don’t have the time. They recognise that mentoring is an opportunity for them to develop and grow so they commit themselves to the process and take advantage of all that it offers. They don’t waste time complaining that mentoring is being ‘done to them’ or that they haven’t got time to take part right now. When the opportunity presented itself they grabbed it with both hands and as a result took ownership of an element of their own growth.

So, what can you do to make sure you don’t miss out on a golden mentoring opportunity?



# Mentoring: Golden Opportunity or Lost Cause

Short Article

1. **Commit to the process** – everything takes time, so make sure that you schedule time to meet with your mentor and action your goals.
2. **Just do it** – don't talk yourself out of it because you can't see it. Sometimes development needs an opportunity for you to discuss ideas and reflect on actions/thoughts before you can turn it into something more tangible.
3. **Roll your sleeves up** – be prepared to do some work. If your mentor sees that you're putting in some effort so will they. Try and remember Edison – put on your metaphorical overalls and provide the effort.
4. **Celebrate** – take time to celebrate your successes no matter how big. Your achievements should be recognised, especially by yourself. Share it with others; show them how to recognise opportunities.

Next time you get tapped on the shoulder by a golden opportunity take a second look and make sure that you recognise it for what it is worth – don't turn it into a lost cause.

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