Reverse Mentoring Tips and Best Practices

DBP RESEARCH REQUEST

Reverse mentoring can provide corporate leaders with valuable generational and cultural perspective, and foster inclusivity by bridging the gap between populations diverse in age, ethnicity, culture and gender.

Many companies establish reverse mentoring programs around age, with millennials helping older colleagues understand generational perspectives and learn new technology. For example, in companies where technology is advancing quickly, it's not uncommon for younger employees to be more tech-savvy than their older counterparts, in which case assigning them as mentors to provide training on social media and tech advancements to senior level mentees can be effective.

Other reverse mentoring programs focus on bringing together leaders from majority groups with more junior colleagues from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds, straight people with colleagues who are LGBTQ, or non-disabled colleagues with disabled colleagues. In these cases, mentors have unique experiences which can provide valuable insight and encourage other more senior leaders to take action to break down barriers and promote inclusivity.

Through this type of reverse mentoring process, the mentor (often junior and from diverse or underrepresented employee group), mentors the senior person about what it is like to work in the company as a member of an underrepresented community. However, conversations around ethnicity, diversity and LGBTQ issues require a level of expertise in equality, diversity and inclusion, and should be handled in a sensitive way. Companies often launch their reverse mentoring program around age and tech, then around gender, and then move on to protected characteristics.

The opportunities for learning and open discussion that reverse mentoring provides are fluid and countless, and the connections formed by mentors and mentees can improve morale and result in collegial relationships that last beyond the life of the mentoring program. Nothing says, "We value your skills and contribution to the company" quite like asking someone to share what they know, and coach and inspire others – starting with senior leaders.

Tips for Successful Mentoring

Be clear about the purpose of the program. Articulate the business case for the reverse mentoring program and the problem it seeks to solve. For example, if the organization is facing low representation of women and/or people of color in management and leadership positions, the mentoring program may be geared around increasing awareness and overcoming barriers women and minorities face in the workplace.

Duration: Mentoring typically lasts from six months to two years, with one to three hour sessions occurring at least monthly. Sessions often are structured around certain topics, although they should not be so rigid that mentees and mentors can't veer off into other areas of interest or concern.

Train both parties for their role. Junior participants need training in how to confront and challenge more senior participants, while senior participants must learn how to be open to these challenges. Mentors in particular, may not feel confident challenging a senior colleague. Providing them with some tools and guidance on this in advance can be helpful.

Start small. Developing safe and positive reverse mentoring relationships can be tricky. It is best to start with small pilot programs and then use pilot participants as a steering committee for roll out of the program on a wider scale.

Set guidelines. Trust: Reverse mentoring requires the trust of each party and a willingness to learn from each other. The goal should be to push participants beyond their comfort zones and encourage them to try new ways of thinking, working and behaving. Consider how you will prepare both parties in this respect.

Training: **Confidentiality**: The relationship should be private so avoid disclosing who the participants are unless both parties consent. Within the relationships, participants operate under the assumption that conversations are confidential unless otherwise agreed.

Assessing outcomes: Make sure your mentoring program includes measurable goals and metrics that will capture outcomes and assess progress throughout the program duration.

Reverse mentoring often involves two people with extremely different experiences, backgrounds, and cultures. Therefore, creating the ideal mentoring partnership is vital.

Pairing mentors and mentees should be based on the objectives of the reverse mentoring program. For example, if the goal is to increase diversity in management and senior ranks, or improve the experience of minority employees in the workforce, it would make sense to pair a white senior executive mentee with an employee of color that can provide insight and perspective related to barriers and obstacles. If the goal is to increase gender representation in the organization, the pair might include a male senior leader mentee and female mentor, potentially a female employee of color.

Establish parameters for reverse mentoring relationships. No matter what the purpose is for the program, help mentees and mentors understand what they are being asked to do so that they can begin their relationship with a common understanding of why they are meeting with one another.

Choose mentors who possess good social skills and have the confidence to interact with and teach senior management. As this is not a typical situation for either party, the relationship can be a little uncomfortable. It is important for everyone to leave their comfort zone and be open-minded about how to move forward. Mentoring is about learning new skills and competencies and this cannot be done in a reverse mentoring relationship unless everyone is willing and able to try something different.

Don't pair people from the same team. This enables both parties to speak freely outside of the management line.

It is all too easy for both junior and senior participants to fall back into a hierarchical pattern of behavior. Review relationships regularly to ensure they are on track.

Not all pairings will be successful and this is to be expected. If challenges occur, the contact point should assess if there are ways to broker a way forward and if not facilitate a clean, no blame conclusion to the pairing, assessing whether there are options for an alternative match.

High program participation and low drop–out rate. Expect most participants to attend a launch event; by the end, program close event attendance will be lower. A drop–out rate of up to 10–15% is almost inevitable over the course of a 6 to 12–month program, as people change jobs or circumstances change. A higher rate of pairs not making it to the end, is an indicator of either poor design or insufficient contact from a program manager.

High match satisfaction. Re–matching should be rare if matching is done properly to begin with.

High mentee goal achievement. Did most mentees say they achieved what they intended?

High program satisfaction. At the end, over 80% of mentees should say it was either a good experience or one of the best things they'd ever done.

High positive impact on brand impression. Almost all participants agree the mentoring program experience reflects positively on their view of the organization.

Other measures to consider include:

- Is there a higher engagement or retention rate amongst people who have been mentors or mentored?

- Are mentees more likely than their peers to be promoted or take new stretch assignments?

- Are people who have provided mentorship to others better leaders than their peers?

- Has mentoring become a part of the culture, to the point that informal mentoring is now happening across the organization?

- Is mentoring shifting the culture dial? What changes have occurred to increase diversity and inclusion as a result of the mentoring program?

- Have the problems/issues the program was established to address and solve for improved?

Source: ArtofMentoring

Feature Case Study:
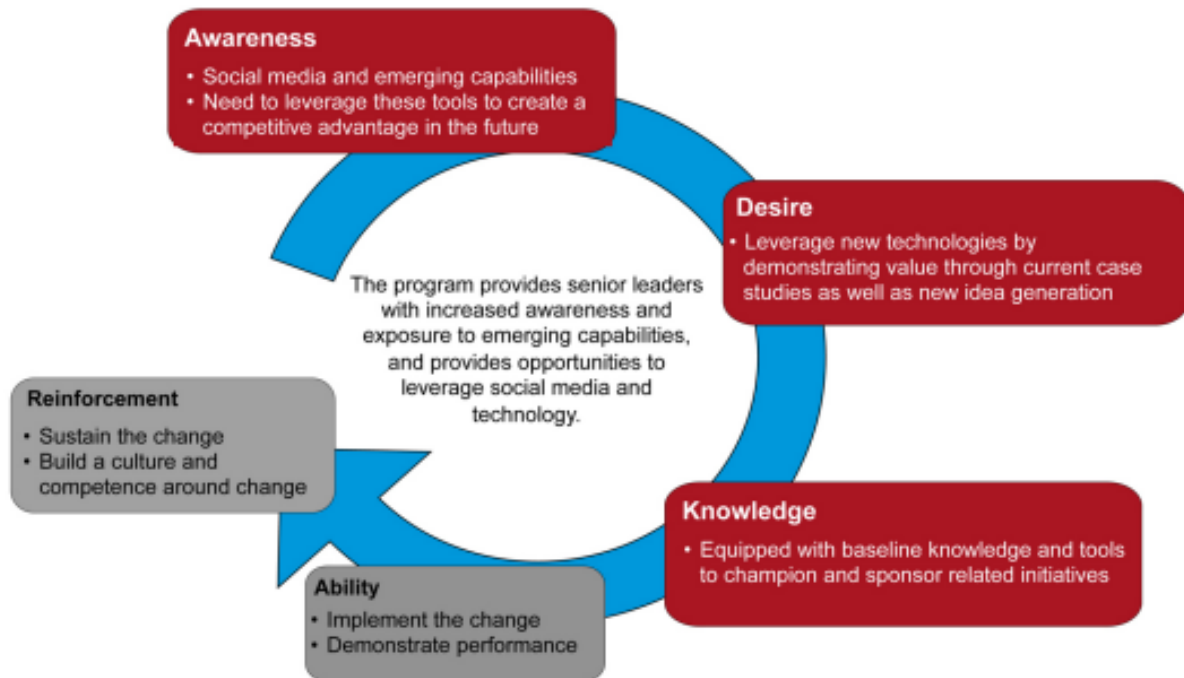# The Hartford Reverse Mentoring Program

Although The Hartford's reverse mentoring program was established to build technical competency and expertise among the organization's senior leaders, the construct and implementation of the program provides a useful toolkit for any organization considering a reverse mentoring program.
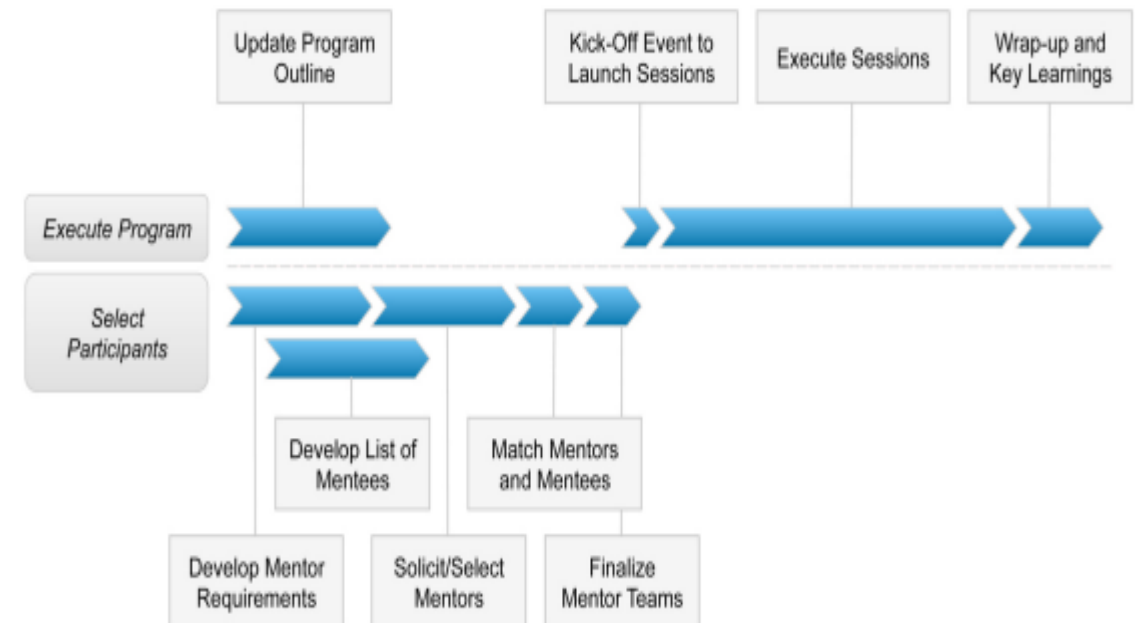

Developing a Cultural Change to Contemporary Technologies and Practices among Senior Leaders

The Reverse Mentor program is aligned with Prosci's ADKAR Model for change.

Awareness
- Social media and emerging capabilities
- Need to leverage these tools to create a competitive advantage in the future

Desire
- Leverage new technologies by demonstrating value through current case studies as well as new idea generation

The program provides senior leaders with increased awareness and exposure to emerging capabilities, and provides opportunities to leverage social media and technology.

Reinforcement
- Sustain the change
- Build a culture and competence around change

Ability
- Implement the change
- Demonstrate performance

Knowledge
- Equipped with baseline knowledge and tools to champion and sponsor related initiatives

Reverse Mentor Cycle Process

- Execute Program
- Select Participants
- Update Program Outline
- Kick-Off Event to Launch Sessions
- Execute Sessions
- Wrap-up and Key Learnings
- Develop List of Mentees
- Match Mentors and Mentees
- Develop Mentor Requirements
- Solicit/Select Mentors
- Finalize Mentor Teams

Source: BCReport

A core team of junior and senior staff at The Hartford established the program's goals:

- Develop a broad and deep understanding of the latest tools and trends impacting social media interactions.

- Experience the changing consumer marketplace and maximize communication in a variety of social media platforms—with an emphasis on listening to what consumers are saying.

- Generate a system for the mentor/mentee pairs to communicate efficiently and effectively.

- See the market through the "eyes of Millennials," getting to know that generation's distinctive perspectives on consumer behavior and business growth opportunities.

- Drive cultural change within the company to adopt and keep pace with modern technologies and practices.

How The Hartford spread the word about its Reverse Mentoring program:

weConnect	The Hartford's internal social media network; lists business areas and group categories for Hartford employees to search
Career Connect	A category on the weConnect site; provides links to employment opportunities and career management information
Reverse Mentoring	New category on weConnect created for all Hartford employees to view; program participants used the site to access session schedules, forms, assignments, and data on the project's progress

Source: BCReport

The **mentees were the CEO and key leaders** from such business units as digital commerce, consumer markets, technology, law, operations and claims. All of the mentees had some familiarity with social media and emerging technology. What the mentors offered them was the chance to explore applications of the technology to their own lines of business within The Hartford, and also the chance to get to know representatives of a new generation of customers.

To recruit mentors, the core team sought people across the enterprise who had strong technical and communication skills and who were early in their careers, top performers in their positions, and at ease with social media. Applicants were required to submit a talent profile, to complete a short questionnaire on their skills and experience, and to solicit recommendations from their teammates and manager.

As the core team culled the applications, they paid close attention to candidates' backgrounds, hobbies, and personal interests, looking for any that intersected with those of the mentees. The hope was that common interests would keep the mentor/mentee pairs engaged in personal conversation throughout the program— thus building morale and collegial relationships that would last beyond the life of the project.

To avoid conflicts of interest, mentors had to be multiple levels below their assigned mentees in the corporate hierarchy and in a different line of business or function

In the end, the core team chose a group of mentors with focus on diversity of geographic location, backgrounds, and gender. **A coach from the company's human resources department was designated to support each pair.**

Source: BCReport

A **talent profile template** is used at The Hartford for internal talent management purposes, especially to highlight top talent. Because it is easier to absorb than a traditional resume, the reverse mentoring team adopted the template as a way for mentors to introduce themselves to mentees.

Each mentor filled out a talent profile, complete with a photograph. The core reverse mentoring team collected and used the profiles to pair mentees and mentors in consideration of their lines of business, current and past work experience, hobbies, and personal backgrounds.

In reviewing references, the core team wanted to know, among other things, if candidates were trustworthy and had a reputation for keeping information confidential—traits that would be reassuring to the mentees.

TALENT PROFILE FORM

Current role (3 to 5 statements)

Job title

Length of time at The Hartford

Development goals (summarize 3 to 4)

Competencies (list 3 to 4)

Past experience (titles and accomplishments)

Education (schools, years of attendance, and areas of distinction)

Background (birthplace, hobbies, and personal interests)

Source: BCReport

Guidelines for Mentoring Sessions

Formal guidelines were established by the core team to provide structure and accountability for the program.

This document served as a companion for the mentors, establishing their responsibilities for the project, tips on content, and advice on professional behavior.

For example, guidelines for the project reminded mentors to dress appropriately, arrive for appointments 10 minutes early, be ready to offer a two-minute "elevator pitch" about their own career aspirations, study the mentee's experience and accomplishments, and—basically—not to do all the talking.

MENTOR GUIDELINES FOR REVERSE MENTOR PROGRAM (excerpt)
Session #1
Preparatory activities
Research the mentee's background using Google, Hartford internal resources, LinkedIn, etc.
Research the mentee's line of business
Review program curriculum
Dress professionally
Think through career aspirations and development goals and prepare a two- minute elevator pitch
Bring the following materials: • laptop • relevant mobile devices • talent profile and full-length resume • program curriculum • any other reference materials

Source: BCReport

Session Guidelines

During the session

Introduction (establish rapport)

- Family life, hobbies, professional and personal interests
- Be sure that you and the mentee share information equally, with a focus on learning about each other

Ask generic questions to determine the mentee's familiarity with the Internet

- Do you have a Facebook account? A LinkedIn account?
- Do you pay bills online? Shop online? Get statements online?
- Do you watch YouTube? What's your favorite?
- Do you read blogs? Any RSS feeds? (etc.)

Review curriculum with the mentee

Determine the mentee's familiarity with and level of interest in the following:

- Technology and devices
- Networking, connections, and communication
- Finding Information (search engines)
- Sharing and collaboration
- Multimedia

(After this session, mentors will complete a survey tool noting the mentee's responses. At the end of the project, pre- and post- program data will be collected and compared.)

Discuss the mentee's business priorities for the year in terms of this question:

- Where are the technology and social media opportunities to aid employees and connect with customers?

After the session

Write session notes within three days, and post them on project discussion board

Send a follow-up email message to your mentee

- Mention a topic of interest to your mentee
- Give links to readings for the next session
- Detail any outstanding items/questions deferred to the next session
- Suggest topics for future sessions

Source: BCReport

A prerequisite for mentors was assurance that they could give the project several hours a month during their regular work schedules. For each monthly session, mentors were expected to need an hour for research and for meetings with other mentors, an hour to prepare the session, an hour to conduct the session, and an hour for notes and other follow-up.

Next the core team set up a master schedule. The core team responsible for managing the reverse mentoring program decided not to deploy all of the pairs at once, but instead in two waves with a period for review and evaluation in between. The pairs met for a half-hour or an hour every three to four weeks, generally in the offices of the mentees. A master schedule for the sessions and interim meetings held the participants accountable for the reverse mentoring project's orderly conduct and completion. The sessions were posted to everyone's calendar in advance.

Each session had a formal agenda, which the mentors set in response to their mentees' knowledge, needs, and interests—information that the mentors were tasked to research before the project started. Before each session, mentors met briefly with mentees to review and update what was expected during that session.

Between sessions, the mentees completed reading assignments and the mentors met with their coaches to discuss session topics, approaches, and activities. Mentors met with their coaches from the human resources department at least three times during the first wave of the project.

SharePoint was used for communication. This efficient tool allowed participants to communicate between sessions and coaching meetings without having to schedule an appointment or find a conference room. A leaderboard on the site provided project statistics, sortable by mentee/mentor pair, by department, and by session. Keeping track of whose sessions were up to date, whose were behind, who was posting their session notes, and who was not developed into a friendly competition among the teams as the project continued. The SharePoint site also allowed the core team to monitor each pair throughout the project, and use what they learned to inform their plans for the project's second wave.

Source: BCReport

Program Success Factors

Throughout the project, mentors and mentees reported having "aha" moments and eye-opening ideas that led them to embark on new activities or conduct business in new ways.

In a recent marketing campaign, for example, management planned to contact prospective customers by telephone. One of the mentors informed a senior executive that most Millennials use mobile phones, not landlines—thus saving the company time and money and making the campaign more likely to succeed with its target clientele.

Following a mentoring session late in the project, an executive mentee walked his mentor down the hall to introduce him to senior-level colleagues. The mentee said, "This is my reverse mentor, and I want you to talk with him about your career. He's doing amazing things for me right now in mine." As a result of the mentee's support and introductions, within two weeks the Millennial mentor had scheduled appointments with senior leaders who were not yet in the program. At the end of the first wave, the mentor was promoted.

Influences	Descriptions
Executive support	• The Chairman is one of the mentees • Leadership admits they have something to learn • Leadership believes in and supports the core concept
Commitment	• Practice what is preached • Walk-the-talk • Apply the new skills and use them today
Posting on SharePoint	• No hallway meetings • No hallway decisions • Hallways don't exist on SharePoint
Living with a leaderboard	• What team is currently ahead • What team is currently behind • Assess the competition, right now
Remaining flexible	• Stay open to change • Listen to feedback • Use changes and feedback to improve

Source: BCReport

More than 50 mentees in seven states participated; 70 percent completed at least five of the seven sessions. Of 12 mentees who participated in the first wave, 80 percent rated the project "extremely effective/effective" for Business and 97 percent rated it "extremely effective/effective" for Personal.

Many mentees said they realized part way through the project's first wave that their mentors were some of the company's best and brightest adopters of new communication technology. They saw that retaining these employees going forward would be a critical factor in sustaining The Hartford's talent pipeline.

The mentors gained the chance to make a difference at The Hartford beyond the scope of the jobs they had been hired to do, and also the chance to have direct, working relationships with people in the company's top echelons. Along the way, they acquired fundamental training in professional comportment.

Of the 12 mentors in the project's first wave, 11 were promoted within a year of the program's inception. While these promotions were not a direct result of participation in the reverse mentoring program, these top-talented junior employees benefited from a significant amount of exposure, sponsorship and stretch development.

As a result of multigenerational collaboration that evolved from conversations during the reverse mentoring project, two patents were written and filed. Work on both is confidential and continues. Anecdotal evidence of the project's impact is also strong. Throughout the project, mentors and mentees reported having "aha" moments and eye-opening ideas that led them to embark on new activities or conduct business in new ways.

Source: BCReport

One welcome decision for the company's tech-savvy employees was not only to allow but also to support the use of social media by employees to do their work. This decision required an update of the organization's Electronic Usage policy, and was explicitly linked to the reverse mentoring project.

Another outcome was The Hartford workforce's rising comfort with the company's internal electronic communications network. Instead of scheduling meetings first to present information and then to follow up, the staff became accustomed to putting information "out there on the network" where others could consider it and comment on it. As a result, meetings that did need to be held were more productive. If The Hartford had not conducted the reverse mentoring project, one might ask how long it would have taken employees—senior managers in particular—to pick up these new communication habits.

The senior leadership and junior staff adopted reverse mentoring for one purpose: as a strategy that would position The Hartford to use social media and emerging technology to drive innovation. Once the project got the two groups talking, though, creative ideas began to surface about new topics that reverse mentoring pairs might profitably explore: diversity, green corporate practices, and sustainability, for example. The core team is deciding how to incorporate some of these topics in Wave III of the program.

One testament to the project's success at The Hartford is a push from mentors and mentees to create an alumni group so they can nurture and maintain their relationships and knowledge—a development that was extremely encouraging to the core team.

Source: BCReport

Programs at other Top Companies

Cisco: 10 Tips for Reverse Mentoring

Business Challenge – The first thing to consider is "What is the Business Challenge(s) you are trying to solve/reduce with a reverse mentoring program?" In other words, how is this program going to help your business achieve its strategic objectives? Without this, it is hard to: convince your business to invest in the program (from a time, money and resource perspective); encourage people to get involved as a mentor and mentee; and keep track of how the program is doing from a metrics standpoint.

Metrics – As an example, if your program is going to address the Business Challenge of "The total number of women who work for in my organization is X% lower than other organizations in the company and/or industry average", then metrics for your program could include: matching all 30 leaders in the leadership team with a female mentor who is a Manager or below; raising awareness in the leadership team of the challenges females face at your company and in your industry (you'd need to measure this awareness in the leadership team at the beginning, middle and end of the program); and having leaders and female mentors to generate at least 2 ideas of how to address this challenge.

Executive Sponsorship – An Executive Sponsor is someone high enough up in the organization who will champion the program and encourage his/her leaders to get involved, whose name gives weight to communications, etc. It is helpful if the Executive Sponsor is willing to tie this program with the leadership team's development goals so that leaders are measured on their involvement and contribution.

Attract Mentees first, then Mentors – First get your Executive sponsor secured, then work with him/her to encourage the leadership team to get involved, and then reach out to the Mentor community. Using this approach, it is possible that both the number of Leadership Mentees and the number of Mentors increase because Mentors know that this is something their Leadership team and their business is passionate about. It also reduces the chances of disappointing potential Mentors who want to get involved in the program as you are very clear from the start about how many places you have available. If you have more Mentors than Mentees, you can create a waiting list.

Executive-Leader Introduction Call – Once you have secured your Mentees and Mentors, work with your Executive sponsor for him/her to host a call with the Leadership Mentees. Your Executive Sponsor should recap on why this Reverse Mentoring program is important to the business, what business objective it is trying to solve/reduce and lay out the metrics that will be used to measure the program. These calls are more effective in the Executive Sponsor can add some personal touches too – for example stories of when s/he participated in a Reverse Mentoring program in the past and their personal experience.

Cisco: 10 Tips for Reverse Mentoring

Resource Materials – Set up a similar call with the Mentors and in addition to covering the points above, you should also provide them with resource materials to help them with their Mentorship. These resource materials should include, but are not limited to: What is mentoring; Mentor and Mentee Responsibilities; Top tips on being a mentor; Areas to Mentor on; Proposed Timelines; Limitations; Challenges you may face and how to overcome them; Where to go if you need help

Mid-Point Checkpoint – After the mentors and mentees have been matched and start their meetings, it's important to set up a mid-point checkpoint with both mentors and mentees (ideally separately) to see how they are getting on. Of course, you should be available to both mentors and mentees to help them on their journey, but a mid-point checkpoint are formal meetings to discuss how the mentoring is going, what's working, what's not working, what changes you need to make to ensure the program is successful, etc. All mentors and mentees should be encouraged to attend these meetings and it's a good idea to do a mid-point checkpoint on your metrics too!

Meeting Review – At the end of your mentorship, host another call with your mentors and mentees for a final review on how well the program has gone, what they achieved, what they weren't able to achieve, ideas for improvements for next time, etc. This will also provide you with context for your metrics (see point 9 for more info)

Metric Review Time – Have you solved/reduced the business challenge you set out to tackle and have you met your metrics? Once you have this information, it's important this is presented to the Executive Sponsor and the leadership team. You can use the information you gathered in the Mid-Point Checkpoint and Final Meeting Review for context on both why things worked well and why things didn't work well

Decide Next Steps – Did you mentorship achieve everything you set out to achieve? If not, could you set up another mentoring program (either with the same group or another group) to achieve the remaining objectives? What would you do differently next time?

Source: Cisco

Multinational company AXA, assigned younger employees as mentors to hundreds of its top executives to help those executives understand and leverage social media platforms and strategy.

Executives (mentees) are paired with younger mentors for six one-hour sessions. The first session, "getting started," is designed to allow the mentee to express their interests and needs, so that each mentor can customize the content they share with their mentee. Many mentees request to cover social media apps to optimize their LinkedIn or Twitter accounts and to be more in touch with the digital generations (Generations X and Y).

One of the most common challenges in administering the program is simply finding available meeting time slots. This is an important task for project leaders, who connect mentor/mentees and rearrange calendars often to accommodate busy executives. AXA has found that maintaining a cadence of one hour-long session every few weeks is ideal for effectiveness and also realistic. The typical mentorship formally spans six months, but these professional relationships are encouraged to continue informally.

The point is to give the older generation, who are used to feeling like wise masters of their domains, the confidence they need to work with the both the latest and most popular technologies, for example, Twitter and Snapchat. They perform tasks on mobile, tablet and laptop and use apps such as WhatsApp and Instagram. In the process, executives start to realize which products attract and retain significant daily audiences and how they can use these tools in their daily lives. In addition to social media, hot topics include privacy and data protection.

AXA emphasizes that this program isn't benefiting just mentees. Mentors are able to ask mentees about everything from personal development to topics related to business or management. Younger generation mentors also gets direct access to top leaders and can benefit from their advice and insights. After two years, the company counts more than 1,500 employees in 28 countries as program alumni. Internal surveys show that 97% of the mentors and mentees voiced approval of the reverse mentoring program.

Source: Grasshopperheader

At **Procter & Gamble**, reverse mentoring was used to pair senior leaders with employees with disabilities to better understand obstacles within and beyond the workplace. The company also used the approach as part of its D&I strategy. When a division of Procter and Gamble wanted to reverse a growing turnover amongst women in junior and middle management posts they recognized that the traditional hierarchical approach to mentoring would only reinforce a potentially patriarchal culture that may be at the heart of the problem. Instead they implemented the "Mentoring Up" program that matched senior male managers with junior female mentors, who were tasked with providing informal, non-threatening feedback on issues specific to women. In other words, their job was to help management to understand diversity issues at a human level. The program enabled women to develop quality relationships with senior executives, to become more visible within the organization, and to be heard: not surprisingly retention rates amongst women increased.

In 2015**, Estee Lauder** established The CEO Global Reverse Mentor Program, which pairs senior leaders with digitally savvy Millennial and Gen Z employees to learn from one another. The mission of this program is to help leaders understand the next generation of consumers and to create a global sharing network of young talent that is empowered, engaged, and making an impact on the business. The company credits its reverse mentoring program with helping executives understand what young consumers want. That insight led to multiple acquisitions of beauty brands preferred by Millennials and Generation Z.

Caterpillar's program pairs a male leader with a female employee to facilitate a "candid conversation on issues such as inclusiveness, gender-bias, transparency, and opportunity."

Pershing, a financial services company, implemented reverse mentoring program – and saw significant improved retention rates among millennials. By inverting the hierarchy, and allowing millennials to act as mentors, millennials feel valued for their contributions, gain unparalleled access to networking with senior leaders, and benefit from exposure to alternative career paths. Following implementation of the company-wide initiative, Pershing experienced a 96% retention rate for the 77 millennials who were involved.

The **United Kingdom's Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)** is pioneering a reverse mentoring scheme based entirely on ethnic minority employees coaching their white counterparts on unconscious bias and racial stereotypes. Reverse mentoring programs such as FCO's allow for the discussion and subsequent education to be extended beyond demographic silos and spread into the wider workplace culture. The program will pair senior figures from across the FCO with ethnic minority staff in junior grades within the Department, to help challenge ingrained views on what talent looks like, break down stereotypes and biases, get fresh perspectives and help improve diversity in middle and senior grades.

Law firm **Shook, Hardy & Bacon** paired minority lawyers with senior leaders to learn about each other's challenges and have "difficult conversations on diversity."