Does Mentoring New Faculty Make a Difference?

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In the town square of a small mountain village, two travelers became acquainted and began to discuss how they had arrived at their remote location. Each had traveled alone and had followed a similar path from the same city but their experiences were quite different. For the first traveler, the journey was a long and frustrating ordeal. He found his map of limited use because of detours and uncharted obstacles and it took considerably longer than anticipated to cross the various mountain passes. At times he felt as though he were wandering in circles. He prayed he would never need to make the trip again. The second traveler's experience was much different. She described her trip as enjoyable and eagerly anticipated return trips "up the mountain." Upon further questioning, the second traveler revealed a key distinction. As she had made her final preparations for the journey, she happened upon an individual who frequently traveled to and from the village. This individual took the time to explain some of the important geographical features that would be encountered on the journey. Not only did the experienced individual counsel the traveler on how to prepare and plan for the required changes in route, he pointed out interesting sites to see along the way, places to rest, and what to anticipate upon arrival as well. This information was accurate and useful.

Newby, T. J. & Corner, J. (1997). *Mentoring for increased performance: Foundations and methods. Performance Improvement,* 36(2), 11-15.

The primary purpose of a mentoring program is to help new faculty to fully develop their professional careers, support professional identity and build competence (Toal-Sullivan, 2002). Mentoring programs also facilitate professional learning, socialization and adaptation of new faculty into their professions (Kalbfleisch & Bach, 1998). This can be effectively accomplished through the implementation of a support system that augments guidance with experienced colleagues. Business and industry have applied the philosophy and principles of mentoring to attract, retain, and promote junior employees – which also improve individual and corporate performance and effectiveness. More recently, institutions of higher education are applying these same mentoring concepts and achieving many of the same benefits as business and industry.

Why bother with mentoring programs?

At the core of the mentoring process is an interpersonal relationship between an experienced faculty member and a new faculty member – or faculty members who are at different stages in their professional development – whereby the experienced faculty member takes an active role in the career development of the new faculty member (Newby & Corner, 1997). The experienced faculty member may serve as a role model, adviser, and/or guide in various formats that range from highly structured and planned interactions to *ad hoc* and informal interactions (Jipson & Paley, 2000). The underpinning assumption of mentoring as a form of learning and professional development originates from the belief that learning occurs through observing, role modeling and/or apprenticeship, and questioning.

Recently, there has been a surge of interest in mentoring for professional development within higher education settings. While the reasons for this are varied, there is a fairly extensive body of literature that suggests mentoring programs lead to important benefits in university settings for new faculty, senior faculty, and the institution in general. Specifically, mentoring programs can help develop more collegial and compassionate departments and institutions (Boyle & Boice, 1998). It is a process where tacit knowledge may be passed on to less experienced faculty (Blanford, 2000) and is a means for making explicit the ethics, rules and skills that are necessary for productive performance within the university culture (Nicholls, 2000). Making tacit knowledge explicit is necessary for new faculty to become initiated into the traditions, habits, rules, cultures, and practices of the department and/or faculty they have joined. Simply making explicit what faculty do is a powerful means for preparing new faculty for their new roles.

How does mentoring benefit new faculty?

Through mentoring, it is more likely that new faculty will gain an understanding of the organizational culture (Kram, 1986), access informal networks of communication that carry significant professional information (Luna & Cullen, 1995), and receive assistance in defining and achieving career goals (Bogat & Redner, 1985). New faculty members have reported they feel that they are welcomed and valued through the initiation ritual of mentoring (Boyle & Boice, 1998). In academic settings, Queralt (1982) found that faculty with mentors demonstrated greater productivity as leaders in professional associations, received more competitive grants, and published more books and articles than faculty without mentors. Mentored faculty members also reported greater career and job satisfaction.

Experts in the field of mentoring maintain that mentoring programs attend to a variety of faculty needs over a period of time (Kram, 1986). For example, mentoring programs help new faculty to develop as leaders through the receipt of professional and institutional information, sponsorship, advice, and guidance. As such, new faculty involved in mentoring are more likely to have opportunities to develop not only professionally (career orientation) but also personally (psycho-social needs) throughout their careers. In addition to creating new incentives and career opportunities, assigning mentors to work with new faculty provides a smoother transition – rather than an abrupt and unassisted entry into the professorial that characterizes the experiences of most new faculty.

How does mentoring benefit senior faculty?

New faculty members are not the only ones to benefit from mentoring programs. Mentors gain satisfaction from assisting new colleagues, improving their own managerial skills, and increasing stimulation from bright and creative new faculty members (Reich, 1986). Experienced faculty members who mentor new faculty may also derive enhanced status and self-esteem from being seen as successful and as having something to offer new faculty.

Research has also revealed that mentors find the mentoring experience to provide opportunities for reflection and renewal of their own teaching and research career (Boyle & Boice, 1998). Nicholls (2002) further asserts that mentoring plays a crucial role for the mentor through the systematic critical reflection that occurs during the mentoring process.

How does mentoring benefit the institution?

In the last decade universities have become more concerned with enhancing productivity to survive in an increasingly competitive environment. Inherent within the concept of productivity in academic circles is the need to develop faculty, enabling them to make full use of their knowledge and skills. While most, if not all, new faculty members have spent many years in a university environment learning the content of their subject areas, they typically receive little, if any, formal preparation and guidance in the knowledge, skills, and procedures necessary for them to become successful in their professorial roles. Recent recognition and acknowledgement of this void by institutions of higher education are motivating universities to initiate mentoring programs as a means to address this problem.

While many academic institutions have some form of mentoring activities (most often through informal collegial friends), only a few have instituted formal mentoring programs. Institutions that have successfully implemented mentoring programs have demonstrated that they are not only of benefit to new and senior faculty members, but also contribute to the general stability and health of the organization. In particular, mentoring programs have been found to be effective at facilitating the development of future organizational leadership and developing potential leaders (Luna & Cullen, 1995).

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