Tips for Creating a Successful Mentoring Program

You think you'd like to try out the idea of a formal mentoring program at your company. What can you do to increase the odds for success?

■ **Have a clear purpose.** Do you want the program solely to support leadership development, or are you interested in encouraging the advancement of high-potential women and minorities? When a program has a specific purpose, it is more likely to have top management's support.

■ **Set realistic goals for the program.** You will only be able to measure the program's success if you establish quantifiable objectives.

■ **Identify a program champion.** The mentoring program director position need not be a full-time job, but the individual responsible for the program's startup should be dedicated to the concept.

■ **Start small**. Begin with a pilot program—20 or so pairs—so the results can be studied. Adapt the program based on results.

■ **Prepare mentors and mentees for their roles.** At the very least, you need to provide both with an understanding of their responsibilities.

■ **Interview mentors and mentees together and individually about progress.** Such reviews, ideally held quarterly, should yield information on how to improve the program.

For information about AMA's mentoring program, visit www.amanet.org

Choosing the Right Growth Strategy

BY ANDREW J. SHERMAN

Business growth is truly a double-edged sword. When it is controlled and well-managed, it has the potential of providing tremendous rewards. When growth is poorly planned and uncontrolled, it often leads to financial distress and failure.
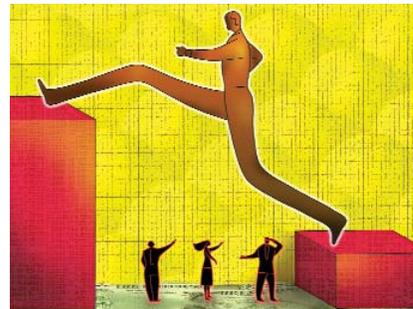
Common Business Growth Obstacles

The challenge for a company is to determine *how to overcome specific growth obstacles*. The first step is to develop a game plan for growth, which should be built around the answers to the following questions:

■ What strategies should be used to facilitate growth?

■ How do you know whether these strategies will be effective for your company?

■ Are there problems with your business structure that need resolving before you can implement your growth strategy?

■ How can you build on your strengths and compensate for your weaknesses?

■ How might the growth strategy selected present new risks or make you vulnerable and, if so, to whom?

■ Are market conditions ripe for growth opportunities?

Typical Growth Obstacles and Solutions

Different growth obstacles require different approaches and solutions. Here are some hurdles and questions to help you find solutions.

Human capital/ inability to recruit talented personnel. Re-examine your recruitment, motivation, retention and reward systems. Ask yourself what changes can be made to make your organization more competitive.

Financial capital/inability to attract capital to fuel growth. Some of the questions here to consider are: Do you need equity or debt capital? For what purposes? Do you have a business plan in place (including an allocation of proceeds scheduled under a best- and worst-case scenario)?

Strategy misdirection/inability to determine the right growth path. Take a

AMA Soundings

The *AMA/HRI Customer Focus Study* identified the following five factors driving companies to be customer-focused:

1. Customer demands

2. Demands of end users

3. Need to be innovative

4. Competitive pressures

5. Perceived competitive advantage

For information about how companies are developing a customer-focused culture and customer-focus strategies, visit www.amanet.org/research

Large-Scale Change Via Short-Term Projects

Too often, big improvement efforts fail because too little attention was given to the project on a micro level. According to Robert H. Schaffer, founder of Robert H. Schaffer & Associates, successful implementation on a micro level can multiply the likelihood of completion of the larger, long-term change by building staff confidence and project competence and creation and fine-tuning of innovation processes.

In an interview with *Executive Matters,* Schaffer identified seven factors important to rapid-cycle success and therefore big change, including:

■ **Existence of an important goal.** Just as a big change must be important to everyone, from senior managers to shop-floor workers, micro-level projects must be critical to everyone. Their completion must be a high-priority business imperative. If they are tied to some key strategic objective of the firm, they will move the organization forward on a larger, critical effort. For instance, if quality improvement is the long-term goal, a rapid-cycle project could produce some actual improvements in quality.

■ **Measurable stretch results.** Milestone projects mean little unless the goals are real, measurable and, most important, beyond what would have been considered possible. If quality improvement is the big change, then the 100-day project must have a measurable goal, maintaining enthusiasm for the larger-scale effort.

■ **Short-term perspective.** According to Schaffer, "short term" is anything from a few weeks to three or four months. Such a focus arouses continued interest, something that wouldn't be the case in a 12-month or 18-month project.

■ **Clear accountability.** While the effort may be under the direction of a team, one individual should have ultimate accountability for the project. "You need someone on the hot seat," said Schaffer, "an individual who refuses to let organizational barriers and constraints stop him or his team."

■ **Experimentation.** Ideally, the 100-day process will identify new, more effective ways to accomplish the initiative as a whole. The most productive sub-projects include action plans that take participants outside their comfort zone, teaching them new ways to get the work done.

■ **Planning and discipline.** While a group should be free to test new techniques, it should have a plan laid out. As Schaffer observed, projects with short time frames cannot afford to miss a step or to assume that something is getting done when it is not. Consequently, there is a need for a plan and regular review of progress against plan.

■ **Educational goals.** To create momentum on large-scale change, projects need to provide developmental experiences as well as tangible successes. "Explicit learning goals for the project and the kinds of learning that may be possible need to be defined," said Schaffer.

Choosing the Right Growth Strategy

hard look at your board of directors, advisory board and outside professional advisors—if you are not getting the right guidance, get some new advisors and mentors.

Leadership and governance/real or perceived inability to guide and lead the company's growth. One problem may be that the current team is incapable of taking the company to the next level. In that instance, ask yourself: What leadership and succession plans do you have in place?

Intellectual capital/inability to identify, protect and harvest the company's intangible assets. Ask yourself: Have systems and best practices been adopted to properly protect and leverage the company's intellectual property?

Your answers to these questions will give you an idea of where your company is strong and where it could improve as well as which type of growth strategy would be best. Consider the questions carefully and respond as if your company's future

growth depends upon your answering them thoughtfully—because it does.

Becoming a Horizontal Organization

Most organizations remain vertical: that is, organized by function and made up of the multiple layers—and all the turf battles and bureaucracy—that accompany such a structure. But the trend toward flatter organizations is increasing. Such organizations are characterized by self-directed work teams, in which the old boss-subordinate dynamic is replaced by players who hold themselves—and one another—accountable for team and organization success. We term these "horizontal organizations."

Horizontal organizations are led by executives who work together as a kind of mini board of directors. The good of the corporation, not functional self-interest, is their primary driver. Below the top team, virtually everyone else in the company works together in multi-disciplinary teams that manage core responsibilities from product development to sales. Rather than being organized around multiple layers, such organizations are organized around processes.

The journey to a horizontal organization requires both structural and cultural transformation, along with an approach to talent management that includes developing a new portfolio of capabilities, such as influencing, conflict management, and decision-making skills. But such change promises greater focus on customer satisfaction and increased productivity.
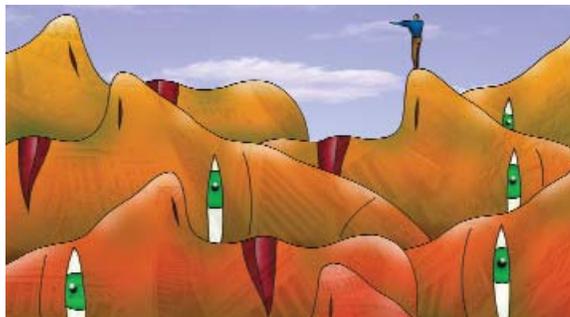
According to Howard M. Guttman, founder and principal of the Ledgewood, NJ-based consulting firm, Guttman Development Strategies, Inc., the benefits of horizontal organizations stem from the redirection of corporate effort from an inward focus aimed at sustaining interactions across disciplines to a focus on customers and the marketplace.

"Moving to a horizontal organization," Guttman told *Executive Matters,* "represents a radical change. It means moving to an action- and results-driven workforce, where people understand what they are accountable for and then own the results." They succeed because they are clear about the organization's goals, strategies and decision-making protocols.

As the first steps in evolving into a horizontal organization, Guttman identified the following:

■ **Align the senior team.** Get agreement on strategy, goals, roles and responsibilities, rules of engagement and business relationships. If the organization is "going horizontal," then the business case and desired results need to be clarified.

■ **Convey goals to the organization.** Explain the case for going horizontal and the desired results to those who will serve on teams.

■ **Construct ground rules.** Agree on the number and composition of teams, responsibilities and accountabilities and rules for going forward, including links to performance management and compensation.

■ **Provide skills.** Anticipate potential conflicts and teach managers how to approach and resolve them head-on, rather than avoid confrontation.

■ **Align business teams.** Cascade the senior-team model down through the organization.

■ **Monitor the team process.** The company needs to check progress against the goals set in the first stages of the transformation.

■ **Provide additional training.** Based on the assessment, fill skill gaps to achieve best practices in four areas critical to horizontal management: conflict management, persuasive communication, performance management, and problem solving.

For help in developing the skills critical to a horizontal organization, check out AMA's management and leadership seminars at www.amanet.org

Criticism vs. Feedback

Some executives use the term "constructive criticism" in place of the word "feedback," but criticism is criticism is criticism. By its nature, it isn't constructive. Certainly, if you tell an employee, "You are never on time. This is really irresponsible. Unless you get your act together, you will be gone from here," it isn't constructive. It puts cracks in the foundations of any team you are building.

Employees at the end of such criticism are not motivated to support any subsequent effort of the individual criticizing their work.

Feedback is designed to improve performance, whereas criticism is too often a means of unloading anger. Delivery often reflects this. Most important, whereas feedback is tough talk about an issue, criticism too frequently is tough talk about the person. Further, feedback is a form of coaching in which there is a search for underlying causes and solutions, while criticism is solely finger-pointing and a search for a scapegoat.

Perfecting feedback skills is comparable to perfecting coaching skills. So if you want to improve the quality of your feedback:

■ Give it as close to the incident as possible, good and bad.

■ Be specific, and discuss not only the behavior, but the impact of the behavior on work output and co-worker performance.

■ Look for opportunities to offer positive feedback. Employees need to receive good feedback as well as negative feedback.

To perfect feedback, check out AMA's management seminars at www.amanet.org

MANAGEMENT

Managing Peter Pan. Experts have identified the latest trend: Workers who, like Peter Pan, just don't want to grow up. However, their search for passion and meaning just may change the workplace for the better.

Want More from Your Employees? Try Raising Your Expectations. It's called the "Pygmalion Effect"—employees raise or lower their performance according to management's expectations.

LEADERSHIP

Making Strategic Alliances Work—the Cisco Way. Cisco's director of marketing explains how the company has successfully created a culture that encourages and nourishes collaboration and partnership. Strategic alliances now account for 13% of the company's total business.

HR/TRAINING

Diversity: It's Right, but That Doesn't Mean It's Easy. The basic ideas underlying a conscious commitment to diversity apply to any business or industry. A managing partner at Deloitte & Touche USA shares the best practices that help his organization build inclusion into the "DNA" of the business.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Things People Do to Get Fired (and How to Avoid Doing Them). Want to keep your job and advance your career? For starters, avoid these five common workplace blunders. Number one: be careful how you use your computer.

Book of the Month:
The Wisdom Network: An 8-Step Process for Identifying, Sharing and Leveraging Individual Expertise (AMACOM, 2006) by Steve Benton and Melissa Giovagnoli. Your company has gold hidden within its walls—a huge cache of untapped employee knowledge and creativity. Learn how to identify and leverage your organization's wisdom network.
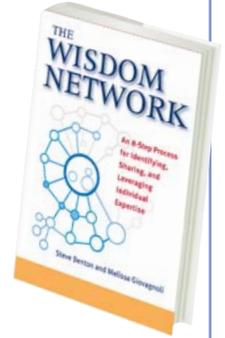
To learn more about AMACOM's extensive catalog of business books, visit www.amanet.org/books

AMA Conferences/Special Events Calendar

SEPTEMBER 11-15, SAN FRANCISCO • AMA's Course for Presidents and CEOs. Here's a rare opportunity for presidents and CEOs to reflect, regain their focus and hone the leadership skills that will move their business forward. This comprehensive, self-directed 4½-day learning experience also presents a great opportunity for frank and honest feedback from fellow leaders.

SEPTEMBER 12-13, NEW YORK • HSM World Business Forum. Bill Clinton, Colin Powell, Michelle Peluso, Kenichi Ohmae, Rudy Giuliani and more stellar speakers will be at this key event. Call 1-800-262-9699 to register.

SEPTEMBER 27, SAN FRANCISCO • Structuring Alliances to Make Strategic Sense: Getting to Win-Win-Win. Best practices from Cisco and other major organizations. Here's your blueprint for developing partnering as a core competency. Call 1-800-262-9699.

SEPTEMBER 28-29, SAN FRANCISCO • Corporate Branding 2006 Conference. Network with market leaders from top global and growth brands. To register, call 1-800-262-9699.

OCTOBER 4, CHICAGO • Growth Strategies for the Middle Market. Learn alternative financial capital and deployment of resource strategies and intellectual asset management. To register, call 1-800-262-9699.

OCTOBER 26-27, LAS VEGAS, NV • Sales Leadership 2006. This is the place to get the latest information on trends, opportunities and cutting-edge developments to ensure maximum results for your sales organization. Interact and hear success stories from corporate leaders from The Trane Company, Citizen Systems America, FedEx, M3 Learning and more at this exciting two-day event.

STOP BY OUR BOOTH: Visit AMA at the HSM World Business Forum, September 12, New York City; Corporate Branding 2006 Conference, September 27-29, San Francisco; IPMA-HR Federal Conference 2006, October 7-11, Las Vegas; Administrative Professionals Conference, October 15, Orlando, Florida; Association of Financial Professionals, October 15-18, Las Vegas; and Project Management Institute 2006, October 21-24, Seattle, Washington.

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