

Member Communication Experience

Easy Mentoring: Build a Program That Works

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Mentoring is one of the simplest, most powerful tools we have to grow talent, pass on hard-earned wisdom, and build strong teams. And the best part is, you don't need a complicated program to make it work. Whether you lead a large firm or a tight-knit crew, you can start mentoring in a way that's practical, meaningful, and easy to implement. It's not about policy — it's about connection.

Mentoring vs. Coaching: What's the Difference?

First, let's get clear on terms.

Coaching is performance-focused. It's often short-term, task-specific, and delivered by a supervisor or outside expert. A coach helps someone improve a skill or meet a goal.

Mentoring is development-focused. It's about growing a person, not just improving a skill. Mentors share experience, offer perspective, and help mentees think through decisions over time. The relationship is usually voluntary and built on rapport, not hierarchy. A mentor doesn't need to be a part of your company or even your industry — their job is not to give job advice per se, but rather to focus on long-term growth and achievement.

In short: Coaches help people do better work. Mentors help people become better professionals.



Why Mentoring Matters (Now More Than Ever)

There are three big reasons why mentoring isn't just a nice-to-have:

- 1. It makes economic sense.** Training new talent is expensive. Replacing experienced workers is even more expensive. Mentoring helps reduce turnover, ramp up new hires faster, and transfer knowledge before it walks out the door.
- 2. It strengthens your culture.** Construction is a relationship business. Mentoring builds cross-generational respect, reinforces company values, and creates a sense of belonging. People stay where they feel seen, supported, and challenged.

3. It fuels learning and growth. Formal training can only go so far. Mentors help younger employees understand how things really work—onsite, in meetings, with clients. They provide context you can't get from a class or course.

How to Build a Mentoring Program That Works

You don't need HR to roll out a formal curriculum. Start small, keep it human, and make it easy for people to connect.

Here are three ways to find and utilize mentors:

Invite retirees back in a new role.

Your former superintendents, project managers, and estimators are gold mines of practical knowledge. Don't let that walk away with their final paycheck. Ask select retirees to come back for a few hours — or a full day — a week. Their only job? Mentor younger employees. Walk the site. Join meetings. Answer questions. Watch for teachable moments.

This is a low-risk, high-reward way to keep institutional knowledge alive and make younger workers feel supported.

Tap into local colleges and universities.

Many construction programs have professors with deep field experience. Some are willing to consult or mentor part-time. Reach out and ask if they'd be open to mentoring your junior staff, especially on technical topics like project planning, safety, or sustainability.

This connection also helps you stay plugged into the next generation of talent coming out of those programs.

Make it part of the job.

At a large regional construction management firm, project executives noticed their younger engineers were technically sharp but struggled with client communication and decision-making. Instead of formal training, they launched a peer mentoring pilot.

Each junior engineer was paired with a mid-level team member just a few years ahead of them — not a manager, but someone close enough in experience to relate. The mentors weren't asked to add formal sessions to their schedules.

They were simply expected to check in weekly, ask about the junior engineers' work, and be available to answer impromptu questions.

Over the next year, the firm saw stronger client satisfaction scores and faster promotion readiness among mentees. Mentors reported benefits too — more confidence, leadership growth, and stronger ties across departments.

Don't leave mentoring to chance. Build mentoring into roles, especially for mid- and senior-level staff. Frame it as a professional responsibility, not a favor. Provide simple guidance (monthly check-ins, job shadowing, informal coffees) and pair people with intention: don't just match based on title — look for personality fit, career interest, and availability.

And remember: Not every match will be perfect. Allow for movement and feedback.

Final Thought

You don't need a formal "program" to start mentoring. You just need a few good people and the intention to make mentoring a value-add of being employed at your company. Start small. Make it easy. And keep it going. The benefits of mentoring accrue over time. 



About the Author

Dr. Nanette Miner is an expert in building ready and capable leadership teams for succession and exit.

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