



MENTORING



MENTORING - A VALUABLE TRAINING TOOL FOR THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY?

Mentoring is a long-term relationship between two people, which follows an open and evolving agenda. It deals with a range of issues with the overall objective of the mentor, who offers knowledge and experience and a willingness to share, guiding the protégé's development and encouraging the protégé to reappraise and progress. Results are measured in the competencies gained by the protégé rather than subject areas covered.

For the protégé, mentoring can improve self-confidence and self esteem, increase motivation, broaden horizons and experience and raise achievements and aspirations. For the mentor there is the opportunity to further develop skills and understanding as part of their personal development, to feel valued and to put something back into the community. For businesses, mentoring provides an alternative/supplement to traditional training methods. Mentoring allows for greater tailoring to the requirements of the individual, in terms of pace and content of the training, than group training sessions.

Mentoring is an increasingly popular concept in a wide range of settings from schools to social projects and is undoubtedly a valuable tool for personal development, but is it relevant in the construction industry? Recent initiatives in a number of areas of the industry suggest that it is. Lovell has taken a significant step forward in trying to redress the fact that the number of young people entering construction as graduates or craft tradesmen has fallen dramatically over the last decade. Its Company Mentoring Scheme tackles this growing problem within construction for the benefit of Lovell and the industry as a whole by offering mentoring to students via partnerships with schools.

The government and the construction industry are currently funding a joint project aimed at helping improve day-to-day working conditions to encourage greater diversity in the workforce. Change the Face of Construction will help the industry address the need to change its culture in order to recruit and retain more of the right people and thus combat the growing

skills shortage. Activities will include a mentoring scheme for women and ethnic minorities.

One of the major observations on the UK construction industry that was outlined in the DETR report 'Rethinking Construction' was the need to improve the quality and quantity of the available workforce at all levels. The report suggested three 'R's the employers should focus on: Recruitment, Retention and Respect. The above examples demonstrate the value of mentoring as a tool for encouraging young people into the industry, especially those who may not normally consider a career in construction, it improves retention by making individuals feel more valued and engenders mutual respect. Hopefully these and further mentoring initiatives will increase the appeal of a career in construction and the skill base within the industry and will ultimately address the three 'R's.

Mentoring need not be limited to relationships within companies or between companies and educational establishments. Construction is a team process and most of the parties involved need to understand the roles of the other team members, a degree of cross-fertilisation between the various disciplines involved is therefore desirable and in order to achieve this mentoring or shadowing across organisations may be beneficial. An obvious relationship that would benefit from such cross discipline / organisation mentoring is the client and contractor one, particularly in the area of alliancing where both clients and contractors lack of understanding can cause conflict and would benefit from an increased understanding of the complexities of the duties of the other party.



The Fundamentals of Effective Mentoring

The concept of mentoring as 'training by a knowledgeable friend' is a useful one in understanding mentoring as it highlights the level of commitment involved and the long-term nature of the relationship. There are many theories on effective mentoring but these are the common themes throughout most:

Time

Mentoring is unlikely to be effective when the mentor's workload takes up so much of his time that he has little remaining to devote to developing the knowledge of the protégé.

Patience

Mentors need to be able to explain things in a way that is comprehensible to the protégé, repeating where necessary and taking the time to ensure that the point has been properly understood. Ensuring that the mentor is able and prepared to make the time commitment necessary to achieving this is crucial to the success of the mentoring.

Compatibility

Arguably the most important aspect of a successful mentoring relationship is compatibility. Mentoring differs from traditional methods of education in that it requires the parties to develop an informal relationship; the protégé should feel that the mentor is approachable to the degree where he/she does not feel self-conscious or uncomfortable and is able to ask questions without reproach. The relationship must be nurturing not judgemental with the mentor offering encouragement to the protégé, building growth and confidence in the protégé of his own capabilities. The relationship requires a level of trust to encourage the protégé to actively contribute; he may have much to offer from his experience in similar fields.

Respect

Mutual respect must exist. The protégé must have faith in the superior knowledge and experience of the mentor and the mentor in return must believe that the protégé is capable of progression and worthy of the

time investment. This will facilitate a relationship where honest, constructive feedback can be given and received and there exists an openness/willingness to say what has to be said.

For mentors to be effective in a professional field, especially in peer-to-peer relations, there are additional requirements to those outlined above. Mentors must possess an in depth knowledge of the subject area, understand the requisite skills and be capable of coaching the protégé effectively. They need to be in a position to sponsor the protégé within their own organisation or a suitable alternative and they need to be able to challenge the protégé so that they do not feel that they are being taken advantage of, merely being presented with the menial aspects of the role.

There are now clear signs of recognition of the value of mentoring within the construction industry. It offers a tool to develop the skill base of those within the industry and to attract new talent for the future.

IS Consulting offers an informal mentoring programme providing experienced consultants to work within a client's team delivering commercial management whilst improving the performance of team members who may not currently have the requisite breadth of experience and skills.