Reverse Mentoring – How to Unleash Innovation By Learning From Junior Team Members

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

Have you ever thought that the newest pair of eyes in your team could be that from which the most innovative idea will come? Indeed, I mean the young employees that you are working with. Leveraging the fresh perspectives and up-to-date knowledge of younger team members, through reverse mentoring, can be a game-changer for your business.

Reverse mentoring programs, where senior leaders learn from junior employees, not only empower the younger generation but also help foster a culture of innovation and continuous learning within the organization.

Related: **4 Reasons You Need a Mentor Who Is Younger Than You**

The essence of reverse mentoring

Reverse mentoring is not only about giving the upcoming generation a voice but also about being a driving force behind the change they want to see in an organization. It’s about the idea of revealing that the new kids on the block are usually aware of what’s going on when it comes to the latest trends, technologies and cultural tendencies. It is a critical move, not just a program that will make juniors feel special.

Here are ten ways in which reverse mentoring can be a game-

changer for your organization:

1. Technology views and approaches by newcomers

Younger team members usually use various technologies and social media platforms fluently. You can learn about new tools and technological platforms to help your company achieve better results or improve customer experience by listening to them. It’s not only about the latest social media craze; it’s about using these tools to achieve real business outcomes.

2. Adaptive cognitive abilities and flexibility

Juniors tend to be more pliable and ready for change, for they are neither shaped by nor operated by the unquestioning “this is how we’ve always done it” mindset. A flexible and responsive problem and project management model can emerge in such a culture, which will cultivate an environment ready to deal with change.

3. Diverse perspectives

Moreover, many young workers have a unique mindset and come from different educational and cultural backgrounds. A creative and innovation-generating team is most likely to arise from the diversity in thinking that a more homogenous senior team can miss.

4. Reverse mentoring as a retention and recruitment tool

Nowadays, Gen Y and Gen Z workers feel that being heard and appreciated is important in the workplace. Implementing a reverse mentoring program shows that you respect and value your employees’ input. This can be effective for the retention of top talent and the hiring of the best people.

5. Dispelling of hierarchical structures

Reverse mentoring can help make the most of the knowledge and skills in the workplace by democratizing how people work

together. It creates an atmosphere where everyone's thoughts are respected regardless of his/her position on the team. And still, every idea will be assessed based on its effectiveness.

6. Implementing digital literacy skills in all strata

During the mentorship, where the older ones learn from the younger ones, the senior staff upgrade their digital skills and become more knowledgeable in using new technologies. Thus, upskilling is basic and vital for having an edge in the present technology-based market.

7. Fostering a culture of continuous learning

It is an especially powerful example of leadership engagement when senior top management involves itself in the process of critical learning from juniors. It is demonstrated by this fact that the learning process never finishes, and it is not just a stage achieved after you climb up a career ladder.

8. Boosting morale and job satisfaction

Employee morale and job satisfaction are key factors in any business, and ensuring their well-being is crucial. Through reverse mentoring, junior employees feel they are important to the company and appreciated; therefore, they may have higher morale and job satisfaction. When all their ideas are being listened to and even implemented, they will be more motivated.

9. Encouraging innovation and risk-taking

Juniors may be more aware of the hottest trends or even tend to break the code of yesterday's conventions. Use different people's ideas and give them the space to speak. By doing so, you create an environment that encourages innovation and calculated risk-taking.

10. Building stronger inter-generational relationships

Reverse mentoring helps develop a cross-generational bond

among the organization’s employees. The resultant effect is to advance mutual understanding and respect, which, in turn, breaks down the existing stereotypes and encourages more unification and organization.

Related: How Reverse Mentoring Can Disrupt C-Suite Thinking (And Deliver Confidence In The Future)

Making it work

Here’s how you can make it actionable and effective – below, you will find some practical and useful steps:

1. Set clear objectives: Both sides should clearly understand and jointly agree on the specific objectives that will be the basis of the program. The program outlook should be goal-centered to enhance their productivity.

2. Encourage openness: Provide an atmosphere where junior employees feel free and safe to share their ideas. This alteration requires us to abandon top-down leadership in favor of a teamwork-focused leadership model humble to submissions from below to the top.

3. Monitor and adjust: While any program is being implemented, its effectiveness should be assessed and adjusted periodically. Acquire feedback from the people doing the job. Then you can adjust the program as needed to match the workers’ needs.

To see the usefulness of the “reverse mentoring” procedure, you first need to hear it from its practitioners. Then, you must observe its influence on some individuals for some time. The ability of this strategic approach to spill some new blood and sprinkle fresh ideas is the very power it has to take down any information interval and throw the culture of constant innovation into the organization.

Engaging juniors and soliciting their input constitutes an

empowerment factor; not only are junior team members empowered, but the overall enterprise can withstand all adversities from both internal and external forces. Therefore, instead of using well-established mentor-mentee models, you should let your team be innovative and think outside the box.

Related: Encouraging Your Company's Young Employees Is Crucial for Long-Term Success. Here's Why (and How to Do It).

https://www.entrepreneur.com/leadership/how-reverse-mentoring-can-transform-your-business/474384