



The Customer Communicator Web Extra



Mentoring a new team member can provide benefits for all

Even if your company doesn't have an official program, mentoring other reps to help improve their skills helps increase your own sense of accomplishment, helps build relationships with others on your team, and helps to develop your own coaching and leadership skills.

Are you ready to take on a coaching role? Quint Studer, author of *The Great Employee Handbook*, suggests that you should answer that question with a question. "If somebody came to me and said, 'Quint, I would really like you to mentor me,' I would probably say, 'I am very interested in helping, but tell me exactly what you would like to learn? What do you want to accomplish when we're through with the process?'"

Once you have clarified for yourself what the process is meant to achieve and you have taken on the task of coaching or mentoring another rep, you should begin by having what Studer calls an "expectations meeting" with the rep you are helping.

"In the expectations meeting you want to lay out a plan," he says. "You say, 'Here's what I will be doing as the mentor, and here is what I need you to do as the mentee.'"

And because a lot of mentees are hesitant to bother their mentor when they need help, you have to make it clear that you are going to be available and that you want them to ask when they have questions. Make it clear that the mentee has to be willing to be a little vulnerable, as well. He or she has to be willing to say what they don't know, and to ask questions.

Once the process gets started, you'll be sharing lots of ideas and advice. How you go about doing this can impact the success or failure of your

trainee. "Don't preach, but share," Studer says. Mentors should be careful not to use language like, "Here's what you need to do." He adds: "Using the word 'you' is like pointing a finger at someone. Instead, share what's worked for you, in your own experience."

Studer also warns that it is important not to overwhelm the trainee with a large number of things to learn all at once. "Give your mentee one or two clear tactics to try, and let him or her work on those before moving on to something else," he says.

Frequency is another important factor in successful mentoring, says Studer. "Some of the tactics that you suggest might be uncomfortable for the trainee at first," he says, "so the more often you connect to talk about how they are doing, the better the results you are going to get."

It's also important for mentors to find ways to exhibit or exemplify the tactics or behaviors that they are suggesting. "Simply explaining how a thing is done might not be enough," Studer says. "So any time a mentor can model a behavior or do it with the mentee it is going to be more effective."

In customer service, of course, that could mean sitting side by side with the trainee in the call center, listening in on calls and offering advice, or having the trainee listen in on your calls to provide an example of how certain types of situations should be handled.

