

Chapter 8: Mentoring New Leaders

Mentoring

Raise your human capital for success through Mentoring.

Why it is important for your Squadron & Detachment to have a mentoring program in place?

Before discussing in depth the application of mentor relationships at your Squadron or Detachment, look at the definition of a mentor.

Webster's Dictionary defines a mentor as 1) a wise and trusted counselor or teacher, and 2) an influential senior sponsor or supporter. Essentially a mentor is

someone we look to for guidance. Many of us would associate mentorships with formalized programs in the business world or within the boundaries of a professional setting. However these relationships can take many different forms and one individual might have several different mentors at any point. We will focus here on the idea that a mentor is anyone who can help someone else develop their knowledge and skills as an active member in the Squadron, Detachment or National positions.

Why are mentors important to the Sons?

A few hard facts: Non-profit leadership tends to exclude the younger generation. According to the 2014 BoardSource Governance Index, 91% of board chairs in reporting organizations were over 40 and 94% of executive directors were over 40. In addition only 16% of board members were younger than 40. In addition, only 34% of boards reported having executive succession plans in place. Although this report was from a relatively small sample size, it provides a good indication of the need to be developing tomorrow's Squadron, Detachment and National leaders. The ultimate goal is to share the experience and knowledge with new and younger members to add depth to our organization at all levels. Mentoring can be an excellent way to help achieve this goal.

Every Officer should be looking for his replacement and teaching the skills and imparting his experience and knowledge for his successor's success.

Don't lock out the younger talent... that is the future of the organization and it's future sustainability is directly tied to that average age! The support of programs of the Sons of The American Legion and The Four Pillars of The American Legion depend upon investments in our human capital NOW.

Of course, a formal organization-wide program may not be the best option for all environments. For many smaller Squadrons and Detachments, it may be better to develop personal mentorships on an informal basis. If you are an officer or chairman, look for someone to mentor. Make an effort to increase the inclusiveness in your board and try to find someone different from you. It could be someone much younger, someone from a different background, or someone who represents a different perspective. This will increase the opportunities for you to learn from your mentee while you provide guidance in developing leadership skills. It will also assist with your organization's leadership diversity, thereby developing a stronger Sons organization over time. Remember that mentoring doesn't need to involve formal meetings and lectures. Develop opportunities for open conversation, by inviting some of the younger or mid-level leaders to lunch or stopping by for coffee breaks or personal visits periodically, outside of the Squadron, Detachment or National activities.

If you are not already in a senior leadership position, seek out a mentor or several mentors. Ask someone if they could help you develop. Let them know why you see them as a wise counselor. Also, don't

be afraid to seek out someone who is different from you. Remember this can be as formal or informal as the two of you want. Offer to take a potential mentor out to lunch or a coffee break periodically. Thank your mentors for their time and knowledge.

Whether you develop a plan either formally or informally, the act of mentoring will not only help individual growth and development, but also can strengthen your organization's succession plan and future success.

If you are considering developing a mentorship program, there are some important ideas to look at first.

1. Evaluate the reasons for the program.
 - What would it do to help your organization?
 - Are you large enough to implement a formal program?
 - What is the purpose?
 - Does it need to be formal?
2. Be aware of the importance of strong leadership.
 - Locate the leaders in your organization.
 - Get them on board and passionate about sharing those leadership skills.
3. Set up a plan.
 - There should be some guidance for both the mentor and mentee.
 - Specify what you expect from each party.
4. Consider timing.
 - When will it be best to implement this?
 - Plan for at least 6 months or more before it can be fully implemented.
 - Plan for at least 12 months before you can evaluate its success.
 - Don't forget to re-evaluate and revise the program as needed.

Evaluate the direct results based on mentor and mentee satisfaction.

Evaluate the indirect results based on membership retention and morale and any other benefits you may have defined.

Evaluate the talent levels and depth of that talent (*how many talented individuals*); what is the average age? Is it higher or lower than it was five year's ago?

Invest NOW for the highest future returns on our Human Capital Investment.

They're called Volunteers! The lifeblood of any non-profit. As we get older, we acquire experience and lose energy associated with youth. The younger volunteers have the "youthful energy" and could use your knowledge to the organization's overall success. Experience and energy make it work. Pass it forward!