

## MENTORING PROGRAMS CAN BENEFIT BOTH THE STUDENT AND THE MENTOR.

By PAIGE RUBINO, CPA

Most business leaders want to know that there will be a strong talent pool from which to recruit future employees, but not all of them realize how a little effort on their part can help make that pool a little larger.

Growing numbers of colleges and universities, including the University of Delaware and Delaware State University, are intensifying their efforts to find mentors who can help their students learn more about the ins and outs of working in specific career fields. At Delaware State University, for example, the goal within its business school is to provide every student with a faculty advisor on campus and an off-campus mentor who works in the student's chosen career field.

Participation in a mentoring program does not require a major commitment. Guidelines differ from school to school, but it typically involves meeting with a student over lunch or coffee and communicating periodically via phone or email.

Mentoring programs offer benefits to both students and their mentors.

For students, the primary benefit is obvious. It offers the opportunity for a candid give and take about life in the real world, not only about the requirements of a particular type of job but, more importantly, the ups and downs encountered in getting the work done.

Accountant mentors, for example, might not give students advice on the proper construction of a balance sheet, but they're likely to talk about the strains of 14-hour workdays during tax season and the exhilaration they feel when they have helped a client discover tax savings.

Getting a better feel for a profession is important to students – young men and women who likely have an idealized view of what they would like to do with their lives but very little idea of what it takes to get the job done day after day.

While colleges are also emphasizing the importance of internships – and some schools make them mandatory for certain majors – mentors offer something that internships cannot provide. Interns learn the day-to-day work flow but they go home at the end of the day. Mentors can inform about what goes on behind the scenes, the stresses and strains of working on a project and the satisfaction of seeing it to completion. The more students know about what is not always obvious about an occupation, the more likely it is that they will make a proper judgment about whether the career is right for them.

Maintaining a relationship with a mentor after graduation offers additional benefits to the student, including having a starting place for building a professional network and a trusted confidant when career guidance is needed.

For the professional, mentoring offers many benefits, some personal and some related to your workplace.

Most obviously, it provides an opportunity to share your passion about your work. Also, by opening up a conversation with someone who is not very familiar with what you do, it requires you to continue developing essential communications skills – expressing yourself clearly and engaging in meaningful dialogue.

Interacting with students interested in your profession can also help you stay ahead of your peers because strong university programs must keep abreast of the latest trends in all fields of instruction.

Staying in touch with students you mentor can also benefit your business. As they progress in their careers, they may develop skills that are valued by your company.

If you believe that participating in a mentoring program would help your business and benefit future leaders in your profession, contact a nearby college or university to learn what options are available. The career services office and the academic department most closely related to your profession are the best places to start.

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