A Guide to Starting a Group Mentoring Program

together
an Absorb company

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Introduction

It can be hard to get a one-to-one ratio of mentors to mentees in a workplace mentoring program. A mentoring group is an effective way for organizations to solve this problem and make sure every employee has access to career-changing guidance and growth. Here's everything you need to know about how group mentoring is different from other types of mentorship, its benefits, and how to start one in your organization.

About Together

Together empowers organizations to accelerate their employee learning and development through mentoring programs. With 1-on-1, peer, and group mentoring, we enable organizations to level up their employee development initiatives.

Organizations leverage mentorship programs to:

- Support diversity, equity, inclusivity, and belonging initiatives
- Prepare high potential employees to take on leadership roles
- Build communities of well-trained and experienced managers
- Set up new hires for success with buddy programs
- Build meaningful connections between your remote employees

HR and L&D teams love Together because our platform offers the best user experience for employees. They don't need to learn or download a new tool because our web-based platform integrates with existing email and calendar systems to make it as easy as possible to build meaningful mentoring relationships.

Each program is fully customizable, allowing administrators to white label their program with a custom URL and branding. Together's platform includes session agendas and resources that provide employees with cues and steps to support mentors and mentees at each stage of their development. In addition, Together's dedicated Support Team provides guidance every step of the way.

Some of our customers include

airbnb

Kellogg's

randstad

Discovery

HEINEKEN

NEW YORK LIFE FOUNDATION

Want to see how we can help you bring your mentorship program to life?

Book Demo

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What is group mentorship?

Group mentoring is a process where peers and leaders come together to discuss common challenges, goals, and ideas. Their combined knowledge and different areas of expertise help each member solve problems and develop new ideas. Instead of two heads being better than one, there are several.

Group mentorship is rooted in Lev Vygotsky's idea of the Zone Of Proximal Development[1]. It suggests that learners rely on one another when tackling tasks they can't complete alone.

Learning as a group in a group mentoring program is more engaging for employees and increases retention of what's learned. Some studies[2] show that group learning directly improves employee performance and ability to learn. According to the Harvard Business Review, they report that 55%[3] of employees will often turn to their peers when they want to learn something new. The fact that employees turn to one another to learn is an important insight for people leaders to recognize.

Essentially, with others, things get better and easier.

Create a Program

Get started by creating your first program

1-on-1 Program

Run a classic mentorship program by pairing users one on one.

Create Program

Group Program

Run a group learning program with facilitators and group participants.

Create Program

Group mentoring vs individual mentoring

One risk to individual mentoring is that the success of the experience can largely depend on how well the participants get along. Unfortunately, this differs from pairing to pairing and is difficult to predict. But, if the match is not right, participants may have a lack of trust in each other, inhibiting their ability to work together.

Another challenge individual mentorships can face is a lack of participation. If an organization has a limited number of mentors, many employees may miss the opportunity to grow through their advice and guidance. With group mentoring, it removes the risk of needing a perfect one-to-one ratio.

Organizations may choose group mentoring when:	Employees may want to join group mentoring because:
There aren't enough mentors for mentees. Group mentoring allows one mentor to guide several mentees.	They want to learn in a group with others that provides the opportunity to gain new perspectives and different ways of approaching work situations.
Admins believe it's a better user experience. The opportunity for growth and learning is expanded in a group setting as additional perspectives will be presented.	They'd rather have a low-pressure environment, particularly introverts, as a traditional mentorship can put a lot of pressure on the mentee when it comes to discussions. One-on-one mentorships can be awkward initially, but in a group setting, the onus is not just on a single participant to break the ice.

What are the benefits of group mentoring?

In a study by Olivet Nazarene University, 44%[4] of the 3000 people surveyed claimed they do not have mentors, while 15% claimed it is tough to get one. The reason is simple. It is practically impossible for everyone to have one-to-one mentorship with a senior leader or executive. This is where group mentorship comes in handy for organizations trying to make mentorship available to everyone.

> " 77%[9] of companies reported mentoring programs increased employee retention."

Let's look at 10 benefits of group mentorship:

1. **Find support from peers.** Only 53%[5] of employees believe that their manager supports their career. Although it's important for managers to support the individuals on their teams, they're pulled in a lot of different directions. For that reason, they may not be able to dedicate the amount of time each team member needs. Group mentoring can fill this gap. Likewise, group mentoring boosts employees' self-confidence to take risks that lead to growth.

2. **Develop their voice and perspectives in relation to peers:** Different people have different perspectives. In group mentoring sessions, you listen to other people, compare their ideas with yours, add new information to what you already know about a subject, and form your own opinion about your peers and others. The goal here isn't just changing your point of view in relation to that of your peers; it's also about sharpening your voice and understanding of the subject.

3. **Give and receive feedback on performance:** Employees get to give and receive feedback and constructive criticism on one another's performance. They also get to belong to a unified community where they have support. Sharing information also becomes less stressful since it's no longer a one-person job.

4. **Develop stronger communication skills:** Studies[6] have shown that participants have enhanced communication skills after any group learning exercise.

5. **Tackle more complex problems than they could on their own:** Learning with peers is the most effective way to understand complex concepts and help employees feel more motivated to solve problems.

> Researchers at Millennium Group International found that 95%[10] of mentees said their experience motivated them to perform at an even higher rate."

6. **Share diverse perspectives:** Group mentoring is an excellent way to help employees become more aware of their own biases. As they get to work together, their interactions will open them up to diverse initiatives beneficial to your organization.

7. **Pool knowledge and skills:** World Economic Forum reported that 50%[7] of current employees will need to be reskilled by 2025. This means that if employees aren't properly trained, their skills will soon become obsolete.

8. **Hold one another (and be held) accountable:** Accountability improves performance at work. In a group mentoring program, where employees are talking about and setting goals, their colleagues and mentors can hold them accountable to achieve them.

9. **Connect different generations in the workforce:** Today's workplace has people from different generations. Group mentoring can bridge the generational gaps between Baby boomers, Millennials, and Gen-Z's. Connecting them and allowing them to learn together and understand one another more.

10. **Build inclusive cultures:** Group Learning helps employees establish a shared identity with other group members. Employees with shared identities work together towards common goals, which positively impacts the company's culture.

Group Mentorship

One Mentor With Multiple Mentees

One mentor who is usually a senior employee or executive leads mentoring sessions with multiple mentees.

Multiple Mentors and Mentees

Typically larger groups of people to discuss goals for the organization or run ideas past executives.

Peer Mentoring

Different teams at similar seniority levels come together and help each other grow by coaching and mentoring one another.

The different ways to run a group mentoring program

There are three ways to organize a group mentoring program:

- One mentor; multiple mentees

- Multiple mentors and mentees

- Peer mentoring

Let's explore each of these individually to get a well-rounded idea of the nuances of group mentoring.

One mentor with multiple mentees

In this form of group mentorship, one mentor (who is a senior employee or executive with a wealth of experience) leads mentoring sessions with multiple mentees.

> " In this form of group mentorship, one mentor (who is a senior employee or executive with a wealth of experience) leads mentoring sessions with multiple mentees."

The mentor can organize the discussions in a couple of ways.

The first way is to discuss particular topics in a lecture-style format. The mentor can share their expertise on a particular topic and then answer questions from the mentees.

The second way one mentor can lead multiple mentees is by organizing the session to be a Q/A format where mentees bring their ideas, goals, or challenges to the group and the mentor guides a group discussion around finding a solution. In this sense, they don't lead the discussion but act as an MC who supports and encourages the group to help each other.

Multiple mentors and mentees

The sessions can look similar to a networking event in a group mentoring format with several mentors and mentees. The groups are typically larger with looser guardrails on the discussion.

> " A group mentoring session with multiple mentors and mentees can look similar to a networking event with looser guardrails on the discussion."

It may be an opportunity to get several leaders and employees in the same space (virtually or in-person) to discuss goals for the organization or run ideas past executives. Both leaders and employees can gain a fresh perspective on how they view certain things in the organization.
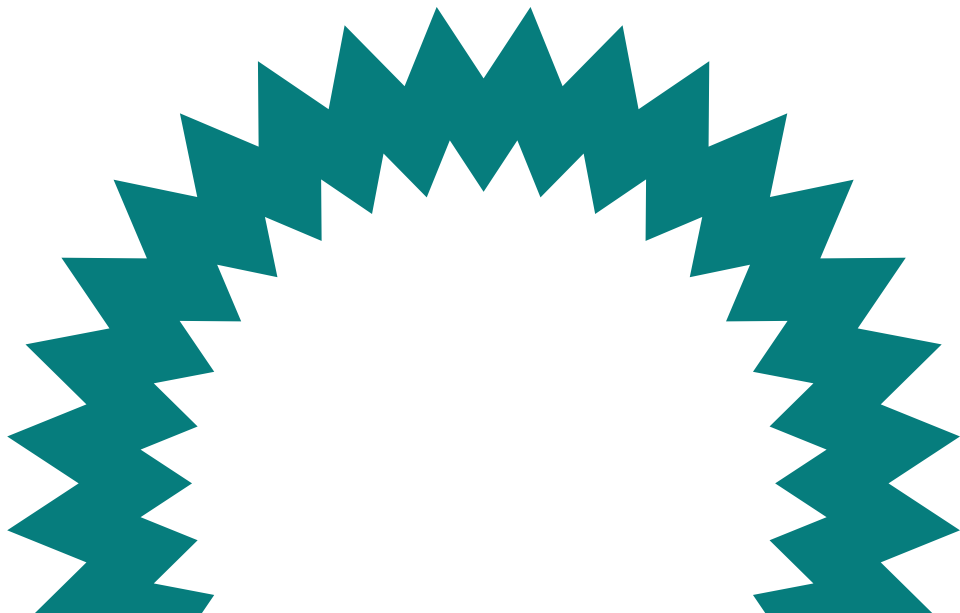
Peer mentoring

Peer mentoring is an opportunity for colleagues from different teams to come together and help each other grow. This is in contrast to a group of colleagues led by a senior executive—instead, they coach and mentor members from different teams.

> " Peer mentoring is when colleagues from different teams, but on similar levels, mentor each other."

Different departments can also come together and explore different perspectives or challenges. In this way, employees step out of their immediate context and get a sense of how other teams think about things. It's an effective way to enable knowledge sharing. Many of these discussions will splinter off into mini one-on-one's which can be considered flash mentoring.

Who would benefit from a group mentoring program?

If you're starting a mentoring program, you may wonder which format is best. Group mentoring in particular is well suited to new hires, new managers, high potential employees, diverse employees, or remote workplaces. We'll explore each below.

New hires

The onboarding process is the foundation of the employee experience at your organization. Yet, according to Gallup, only 29%[8] of new hires feel prepared for their new role after onboarding. Many companies have found mentoring new employees to be useful at reducing turnover rates and adequately preparing them for their new roles.

- One study found that 77%[9] of companies reported mentoring programs increased employee retention.

- Mentoring programs also inspire employees. Researchers at Millennium Group International found that 95%[10] of mentees said their experience motivated them to perform at an even higher rate.

You can give employees all the information and manuals they need to maneuver the processes and procedures at your company, but that won't create trust, respect, or a feeling of belonging.

Mentoring during the onboarding process is key. A mentor knows the ropes and can provide support, encouragement, and advice. They can also help a new hire integrate socially into the company.

New managers

Getting a quality manager is an arduous task. A Gallup[11] report showed that only about one in ten people possesses the unique combination of talent to effectively manage. That can make finding the right person for the job quite difficult. Gallup discovered that "82%[12] of the time, organizations have not been successful in selecting the candidate with the appropriate skill set for a managerial position."

What's the solution? You don't have to choose the right manager (something the research shows is unlikely to happen), but you can train the right manager.

How? By connecting them with other new managers.

New managers need to learn from each other, sharing their successes and failures. Additionally, provide these groups of new managers with a senior manager to act as the group's mentor. In doing so, they'll have both peers and mentors to glean advice and support from.

High potential employees

Mentorship can be a life-changing experience. When successful, mentors can help your employees learn, grow, and unlock their potential. Consequently, group mentoring offers an experience for high potential employees that can enhance their leadership skills and make them ready to take on the next challenge in your organization.

Some of the advantages that Group Mentoring holds for your HiPo leaders include:

- **Similar goals.** In a Group Mentoring setting, HiPo employees can share with other leaders what they want to achieve. They'll also hear the goals of their peers. This creates an atmosphere of accountability and commitment. They've said what they want; now they need to follow through. This motivates them in a way that 1-on-1 mentorship might not.

- **Professional networking opportunities.** As employees share their goals for their careers and talk through various challenges they face, they'll build relationships. These professional connections will undoubtedly be beneficial as they progress in their career.

- **Groups fast track leadership skill development.** Employees need to develop soft skills to be good leaders. A group mentoring setting is a low-risk environment that allows HiPo employees to practice their leadership skills, such as effective communication and active listening.

Dispersed teams in remote and hybrid workplaces

It can be challenging to have the water cooler conversations that lead to informal mentorship or learning opportunities in a remote-first workforce. As organizations move towards more remote workplaces, many do not want to lose the benefits of workplace mentoring programs.

Whether your company is transitioning to a virtual workplace due to COVID-19 or if there is a long history as a remote organization, workplace mentoring can offer support and comfort to employees in addition to professional growth.

When it comes to virtual mentoring, there are a number of advantages, such as

- Lower costs are associated with the organization running the program.

- Improved access to qualified mentors across the globe.

- Fewer limitations in time, space, and location.

A virtual mentoring program can be just as valuable as a traditional, in-person mentoring program.

Diverse employees

A lack of diversity in the workplace can hurt a company's bottom line, turnover rate and employee morale and productivity. Yet, research has shown that a good mentoring program can lead to positive changes.

> " 74% of minorities participate in workplace mentoring programs when they are offered."

Mentoring has been found[13] to significantly impact the psychology and confidence level of those from minority groups. Based on a study, many women and minorities in a mentoring relationship reported higher levels of job satisfaction.

Another recent study[14] found that 74% of minorities participate in workplace mentoring programs when they are offered. The results also noted that women were more likely to say the mentorship experience was important to them (30%) when compared to just 23% of men.

In addition, 32% of minorities indicated a mentoring relationship was "extremely important," while just 27% of the overall respondents said so.

These studies support that mentoring plays an essential role in supporting diversity in organizations.
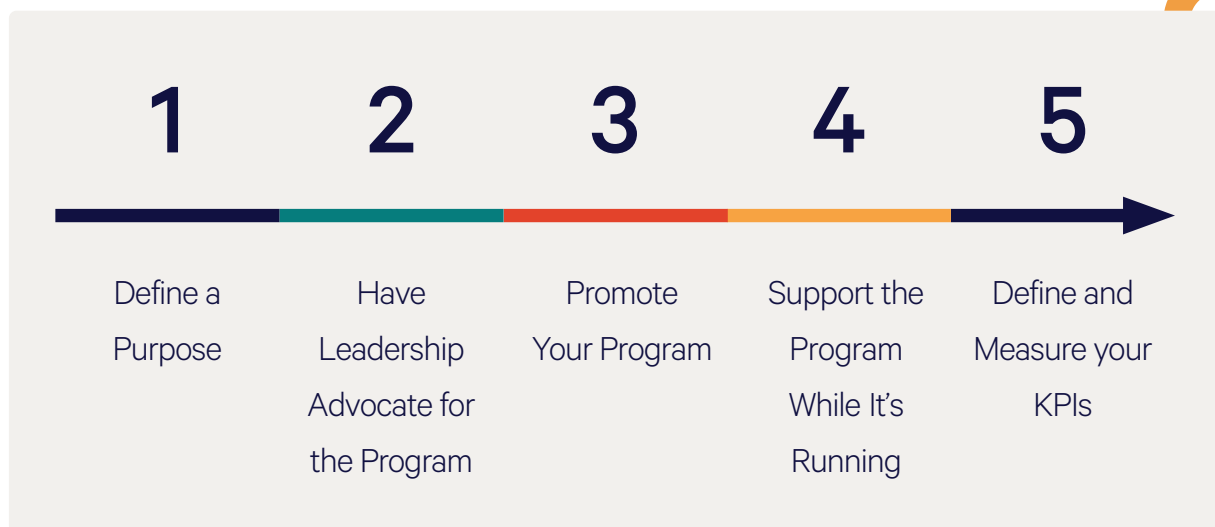
> " 32% of minorities indicated a mentoring relationship was "extremely important."

An industry that struggles with diversity is the video game industry. King Games, a division of Activision and creators of Candy Crush, wanted to be different. They made the decision to leverage Together's mentorship software to match up members of their Women@King employee resource group seamlessly. Our pairing algorithm suggested the most relevant mentors to each ERG member based on their skills and goals and gave them the ability to choose which one they wanted. King successfully matched over 250 employees, providing them with career-changing mentorship that led to more confidence and em-powerment among their employees.

How to start a group mentoring program

To build a group mentoring program at your organization, there are five key steps to follow:

1	2	3	4	5
Define a Purpose	Have Leadership Advocate for the Program	Promote Your Program	Support the Program While It's Running	Define and Measure your KPIs

1. Define a purpose

Begin by considering what you want to achieve with the program. How will your employees benefit from participating? Refine your objectives and determine KPIs to measure. Tracking the success of your program by monitoring the KPIs is vital to proving its effectiveness to your organization.

Once you have your objectives defined, think about the details, such as how many mentees will be in each group.

How will you manage the pairing process? Registration and mentor matching is key to building a successful group mentoring program. Together has been designed to make the pairing process simple and scalable. Our algorithm can be customized to fit the objectives of your organization's program.

Additionally, having mentoring software can alleviate the burden on the program administrator. With Together, employees can register online, and you can even track the success of each group by monitoring feedback after each session. Admins will be able to compile analytics and reports faster and with more reliable data.

2. Have leadership advocate for the program

Company leadership will need to help promote and advocate for your group mentoring program. Having some senior employees on board makes finding qualified mentors easier. It can also be beneficial in unlocking company resources that may be required for your group mentoring program. If you're not sure how to get leadership involved, Together has a white paper to help you build a business case for your program.

3. Promote your program

The next step to developing a successful group mentoring experience is by attracting participants. Let employees know about the program and share the benefits they'll get by being involved.

Consider the various channels your company has that you can use to promote your program, including email, intranet, posters, launch events, etc. The aim is to generate interest and excitement for your program.

4. Support the program while it's running

Assist the mentoring relationship by giving mentors and mentees resources. You can provide articles, TED talks, sample questions, or even ideas for discussion topics to guide their sessions. This can help break the ice as well as make sure each session has lots to talk about. For example, mentoring programs on Together have template agendas on various topics like problem-solving, goal setting, and career development.

Encourage your mentors to create development plans with new hires to help guide the relationship. Together's mentoring programs encourage participants to draw up a mentoring agreement. This document allows the mentor and mentee to agree on logistics like when they'll meet and how they can prepare for each session. It also outlines expectations for the mentorship, such as who will ask questions and what they expect to learn.

5. Measure your KPIs

Having a defined process for reporting is vital to building a solid onboarding mentorship program. There are some key metrics you'll need to track, including

- **Signups.** How many registrations you're receiving signals the demand for your organization's mentoring program. It can also indicate the balance you have between mentors and mentees.

- **Mentee and mentor goals.** Mentorships are built around mentee goals. Encourage groups to develop a mentorship agreement that outlines their goals.

- **Anecdotal feedback.** Program managers need to reach out to mentees at different stages of the program and seek some feedback. This feedback is key. It lets you know how participants feel about the program and whether it is living up to expectations.

- **Session feedback.** Together's software encourages mentors and mentees to offer feedback following each session. Information like this can lead to insights about the program. It's also something that can be used to demonstrate the effectiveness of the program to executives.

- **Business outcomes.** It's essential to demonstrate how the mentoring program is contributing to business objectives. You may need to show company leadership the connection between a healthy mentoring program and the growth or strength of the business. To calculate the ROI of mentorship programs, check out our guide on the topic.
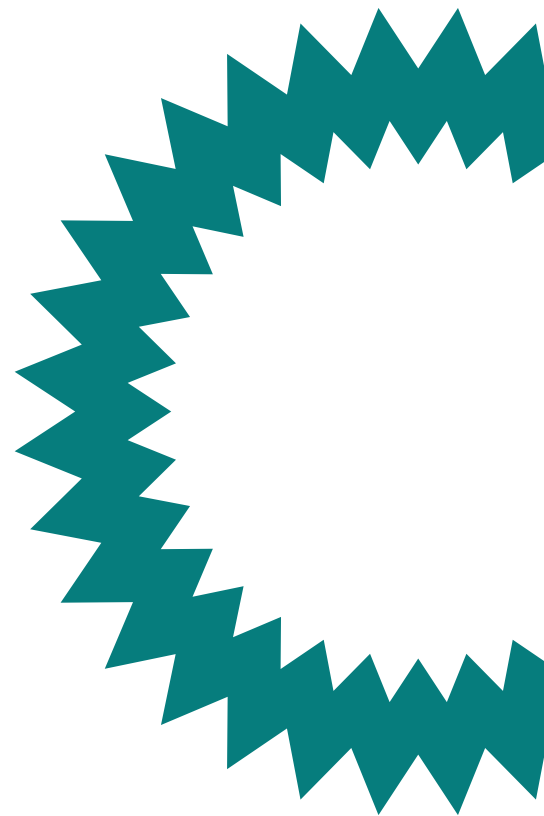
Next Steps

To build a successful mentoring program, check out our guide on how to start a mentoring program. It breaks down everything you need to know as an organization when starting a mentoring program.

Likewise, when beginning your mentoring program, you'll need our best practices guide. We've compiled the best practices from the first-hand experience of program administrators and the expertise of the Together team.

If you're ready to get started building a group mentorship program for your organization, we can help. Find out how Together' mentoring software can work with you to create a successful group mentoring program.

Chat with us today

To continue learning

To continue learning about mentorship, check out our other white papers, blogs, and webinars, where we explore the benefits and applications of mentorship.

Resources

- Measuring Return on Investment of Mentoring [white paper]
- Examples of Successful Mentoring Programs [blog]
- Best Practices for Running A Mentorship Program [white paper]
- Round-Table: Mentorship Program Admins Share Best Practices [Webinar]
- How Do I Promote My Mentoring Program? [blog]
- The Definitive Guide to High Potential Talent Programs [white paper]

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[14] Study: Women and Minorities Value Mentoring Programs, But Findings Reveal Opportunities for Improved Effectiveness - Cision