

Mentoring

FACTS

Mentoring programs are valued by employees

According to the Engineering Business Institute (EBI), which analyzed the offerings of the firms that participated in the **Structural Engineer Best Structural Engineering Firm To Work For Contest**, 88 percent of firms have a formal mentoring program for new engineers. EBI found that mentoring programs at engineering firms come in all types, with varying degrees of sophistication and purpose.

The goals of some of the mentor programs are to help orient new staff,

while others provide a personal trainer to learn the business-side of engineering, including procedures, business practices, and team skills. The most robust programs provide personal, business, technical, and professional development, with substantial emphasis on career guidance.

EBI data developed from the satisfaction survey of firms who participated in the **CE News Best Civil Engineering Firm to Work For Contest** indicates that offering a formal mentoring program to staff is of mid-level impor-

tance to employees. Data also points out that how employees rate the importance of mentoring programs is not in line with how satisfied they are with their current company's mentoring program. As the chart indicates, the industry has room to improve regarding this benefit. ■



FIRMS

Gilsanz Murray Steficek values mentoring

The New York-based partnership of structural engineers and building envelope consultants Gilsanz Murray Steficek places a high priority on providing a stimulating and fulfilling work environment, with ample opportunity for personal growth for its 67 staff members.

The primary objective of the firm's established mentoring program is to further the protégé's professional development and to address regularly his or her goals and concerns in a relaxed environment. Mentors are not intended to provide feedback regarding performance or to answer questions about office procedures.

Under the firm's plan, the mentoring coordinator organizes the initial meeting with the matched mentor and protégé to explain the goals of the program and encourages the pair to meet for lunch or coffee every three to six months.

In addition, the program includes maintaining a spreadsheet of each engineer's experience with specific material and project types. The file also tracks the staff members and partners who have worked with that individual. This list is then monitored so that all staff are given the opportunity to work on a variety of challenges with as many colleagues as possible, ensuring well-rounded professionals. ■

FEEDBACK

By Saman Chaudry

Effective mentoring benefits both participants

Mentoring programs are an additional resource in a growing arsenal of staff development programs. Mentors not only teach new skills, and add valuable perspective from years of experience; they often increase an employee's confidence. Here are some things to keep in mind as you set up a mentoring program:

Pairing — When pairing up mentors and protégés, consider people who best complement each other in personality, experience, and professional goals. Mentor-protégé relationships should be beneficial for both parties, as mentors also will receive positive reinforcement and recognition from their protégés.

Employee orientation — Mentoring programs are an excellent way to show the ropes to new employees. In this case, mentors can offer valuable social and cultural insight that enhances a new employee's understanding of your organization.

Goals — The mentor should set up a meeting to open lines of communication and establish goals for the relationship. The mentee, whether a new hire or an existing staff member, should clearly outline objectives and expectations so that the mentor can help them work toward those goals. The best employees want opportunities for professional development and will leverage this relationship to improve themselves and their careers.

A mentoring program will help new employees start off on the right foot and help develop new staff. Mentors often engender staff loyalty, protect the investment made during the recruitment process, and build a strong staff base. ■



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The 2005 Best Structural Engineering Firm To Work For Contest application is posted online at www.gostructural.com/bestfirm.html. The entry deadline is May 16, 2005.