

Mentoring with meaning

Bringing the human touch to today's logistics environment

The transportation and logistics industry is under an ever-increasing amount of pressure for meeting greater customer expectations, optimizing operations and revenue, globalizing products and services, and providing all-inclusive supply chain visibility.

Given these growing demands, the unprecedented value that positive mentoring relationships can bring to your employees is a business concept that mustn't be overlooked.

"Without the human touch that the mentoring process brings to our business, imagine the talent that goes unnoticed, ignored or virtually wasted in your work force," says Herb Cohan, senior vice president for AIT Worldwide Logistics. "It's important to consider the detriment this causes not only to your business but to an employee's personal career aspirations and growth potential."

Smart Business sat down with Cohan to discuss why he believes mentoring is the key to grooming logistics success.

How does mentoring contribute to job fulfillment for logistics professionals?

The freight-forwarding business typically requires longer hours, higher stress levels, quick decision-making and immediate reaction time. It's an industry that keeps you on your toes, making it nearly impossible to go home and forget about the demands of your job. Once bitten by the transportation bug, you quickly discover that the supply chain never sleeps.

Unfortunately, it's far too easy in this fast-paced and competitive environment to lose that human touch that is so crucial to our individual growth and career development. Muddled amid the piles of paperwork, countless conference calls and multitude of meetings is a reality that is too often ignored in the so-called 'daily grind': The nucleus of each and every company, logistics or otherwise, consists of the people who run the business.

Facilitating another's professional advancement is an ongoing process — a natural evolution that is highly charged with individual attention, compassionate attachment, mutual trust and a sincere



Herb Cohan
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connection to both the person and his or her job.

Explain how mentoring addresses a specific key issue in the industry.

The stakes have never been higher in ensuring that logistics companies have a tremendously talented, highly specialized work force in place who can keep the business both profitable and operationally sound. While considered one of the fastest-growing employment fields, high turnover rates continue to be an unfortunate trend in our trade.

Mentoring addresses this key challenge in that it attracts and retains a trained and skilled work force who is more apt to experience advancement opportunities instead of dead ends and glass ceilings.

When taking a truly vested interest in mentoring employees, you are establishing a heightened awareness of their overall job satisfaction, personal career goals and specific strengths and weaknesses. In assessing the candidate's best placement within the company, you are also maximizing on the employee's various talents and the compa-

ny's investment in that particular person.

Likewise, when the mentee feels like a valued asset to the company, his or her motivation to excel and succeed is tremendously enhanced.

What factors characterize a healthy and successful mentoring relationship?

A successful mentoring relationship cannot be forced or contrived, nor can it be considered a job obligation or requirement. It's a reciprocal process in that you have to possess a strong desire to be a mentor, just as the mentee has to possess a strong desire to learn from you. You must be genuinely excited to spend time with the person and ultimately guide the individual in elevating his or her career — mentoring mustn't be a self-centered activity or a résumé builder.

Instead, elements of warmth, compassion, altruism and friendship are necessary characteristics of a successful mentor relationship.

A mentor has to be willing to invest the time and commit to the follow-through. Extend an open-door policy to encourage the free-flowing exchange of ideas, concerns and problem-solving strategies. Make yourself available on weekends and evenings to go over growth plans, answer questions or provide feedback. Ensure that he or she has a fulfilling personal life as well as professional life.

There's one simple test that captures the difference between a mentoring team that flourishes and one that flounders: When your mentee ultimately skyrockets to success, are you genuinely happy, even if it surpasses your own success?

If the answer is a quantifiable 'yes,' then you have discovered an invaluable reward: In putting out your hand and returning to the world what the world gave to you, you have given someone else the opportunity to shine. There's no greater, more empowering feeling than that. <<

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