

Gender-Based Reverse Mentoring



Reverse Mentorship: An Intersectional Approach to Building Inclusive Organizations

Reverse Mentorship occurs between an early-in-career employee and an employee in mid- to high-level management, where the younger employee serves as a mentor.

BENEFITS

- Convenes participants to promote understanding and close knowledge gaps in gender, diversity, and generational differences.
- Provides a private and personal education for both the mentor and mentee.
- Empowers emerging and established leaders.
- Creates a more inclusive work environment and culture.

For managers, an “ah-ha” moment occurs when they realize the nature of gender and identity diversity challenges. Mentorships between management-level employees and early-in-career employees accelerates that learning by exposing adverse behaviors.

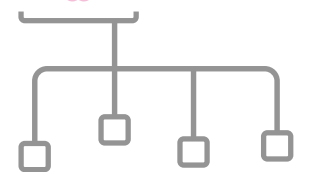
IMPLEMENTATION

Sarah Hubbard, Program Manager; Puja Gubbi, Software Engineer; and Ross Smith, Director, Engineering; began the Reverse Mentorship program at Microsoft in 2016.

The program grew from a grassroots effort with a supportive senior manager and a few willing early-in-career volunteers. The process proved that it’s possible to create organizational change through a group of willing and open-minded individuals. It doesn’t necessarily require an executive-sponsored or human resources initiative. With traditional programs, senior managers try to address retention by introducing early-in-career women to higher-level strategic and managerial opportunities and challenges.

As these programs scale quickly, it becomes harder to maintain a personal touch and there are concerns that participants don’t work through issues or share outcomes. Other well-intended programs across the industry make participation mandatory for senior leaders. This group has found that allowing for opting-in has been a key factor for successful mentorship. An opt-in structure is preferable, as participants are passionate and excited about Reverse Mentorship. In fact, [Top Companies 2018 research](#) shows non-mandatory programs yield the best results.

IMPACT



SPANNING OVER
**15 DIFFERENT
ORGANIZATIONS**
WITHIN MICROSOFT

A mentee sent their mentor an engineering job listing before publishing. She reviewed the listing and made many suggestions about the language and descriptions used. When the mentee posted the job listing, he ended up getting more diverse applicants on that listing than on previous job listings.

NOTE









The effectiveness of the program is mainly surveyed through qualitative data, including asking for feedback via email, word of mouth, and gathering mentors and mentees for meetup discussions. Practical examples to illustrate the impact is important to proving effectiveness. Future plans include integration of surveys as a means of measuring year-over-year growth and impact.



ACTIONABLE RECOMMENDATIONS

As with any mentorship, this program requires dedication from the mentors and mentees, as well as a willingness to learn. Keeping this as a grassroots effort is essential to successful adoption.

Recommendations and insights for gender-based reverse mentoring:

-  Find one manager, preferably at the senior level, who will volunteer to be a mentee. Find a new hire who is not in the same chain of command as the mentor and start a pilot. **Set up reoccurring meetings** in the mentor’s office or a shared location.
-  **Conversation topics will vary** between mentor and mentee pairs, but some beginning topics include perspectives on current industry and trends, personal experiences through university and entering the workforce, and day-to-day workplace challenges.
-  Iterate conversation topics based on what is working well in your Reverse Mentorship relationship to **establish greater trust and communication**. Take notes of your learnings along the way.
-  **Share your results** with peers and other senior managers.
-  **Survey** the early-in-career mentors and get feedback.
-  **Learn how managers are incorporating their conversations and insights** into their own teams and organizations.
-  **Scale up** the program based on feedback and results.
-  **Continue to track retention**, as well as keep a list of “lessons learned” to share with others.

“I am new to the manager role and the Reverse Mentoring program has been an invaluable tool in helping me to become a successful manager.

This program has provided me with a safe, judgment-free venue in which I can ask difficult questions and discuss workplace situations.

Overall, in just a few meetings, I feel my mentor has really given me insight into, and helped grow my understanding of the perspective of a female employee. The constructive feedback and reassurance she has provided, so far, have given me the confidence that I can be successful in building an effective and gender-diverse team!”

- ENGINEERING
MANAGER, MICROSOFT

COLLABORATE WITH THE TEAM >

REACH OUT:
witreversementor@microsoft.com

LEARN MORE:
How to Create a Successful Reverse Mentoring Program to Promote Gender Diversity
<http://blog.shrm.org/node/7563>

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