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## **Turning Mentoring on Its Head: The Implementation of Organizational Advisors**

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Formal mentoring programs have become a staple in many organizations, but they often fall short because they tend to make employees feel awkward on both the mentor and mentee side of the relationship. This is not because mentoring is a bad idea, it's because the existing framework isn't right.

True mentoring happens as a natural role-modeling process that occurs between two people over time. Its virtues can't be forced or formalized. But, since most employers "set up" the pairs participating in internal mentoring programs, the organic underpinnings that normally contribute to the authentic formation of a relationship are lost. As a result, sometimes the relationship sticks, but more often it doesn't.

The problem is that structured mentoring programs overlook individual personalities and sensibilities. And since they match people based on criteria and not chemistry, the odds that a pair will "click" are likely to mirror the success rates seen in online dating where the same approach is applied. Businesses however, can't afford such low success rates because mentors are intended to provide important development opportunities and support for employees, as well as generational fortitude for the long term health of the organization.

So where do we go from here?

First, we must separate the nuances implicit to mentoring relationships from the act of providing advice and guidance to employees for developmental purposes. Then we

must select and train employees who are qualified to act as counselors who coach performance similar to the way universities use the role of advisor to guide students through their academic careers.

The benefits of replacing manufactured mentors with organizational advisors are hard to ignore. First, advisory skills are more tangible, and therefore easier to teach in employee training programs. Secondly, it establishes a framework wherein natural mentoring relationships can bud and form in their own right. But in the meantime, those who it doesn't happen for won't be left out.

Reshaping existing mentoring programs and redefining mentors' roles is the next substantive move in providing employees with development opportunities that strengthen both the individual and the organization while also contributing to the long and short-term success of the company.