



# 5 ways to structure your workplace mentoring program

Before starting your mentoring program, get clear on which program design will drive the most impact.



# Introduction

Every mentoring program is unique. Often, when HR and L&D leaders approach our team, they know they want to start a mentoring program, but they haven't settled on the best "kind" of program to launch.

The problem is that when we think of mentoring programs, we think of a senior leader taking a junior employee under their wing. But mentorship today is much, much more than that. Let me explain.

Today, companies are launching mentoring programs to:

- fast-track employee onboarding,
- prepare future leaders,
- make training programs more meaningful, and
- build more equitable workplaces.

To accomplish these goals, companies are employing new models like peer-to-peer, groups, reverse and speed mentoring.

In short, the most successful mentoring program managers today are rethinking what mentorship looks like at work. It's an exciting time to start a mentoring program.

In this E-book, we'll outline **five different types of mentoring programs you can launch**. Each of the five programs is based on the different types of employees (new hires vs high potentials, for example.)

In addition, we'll explore the different ways to pair employees. And lastly, we'll help you decide on which program type to choose based on your goals.

If you're starting a mentoring program, this is your go-to toolkit for how to design it.

Let's dive in!

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# Different types of mentoring programs

In this section, we're going to outline the 'what' and 'why' behind the mentoring programs designed for different groups of employees.

If you've never run a mentoring program before, or you're investigating how you can formalize workplace mentorship, it's important to understand that mentorship is much more than pairing senior leaders with junior employees. That's the traditional aspect of mentoring, but that may not be the best fit for your program, depending on who's participating.

With that, let's look at the different mentoring programs. You can run a mentoring program for:

- New hires,
- High-potential employees,
- Employees from underrepresented or diverse backgrounds,
- New managers, or
- All employees at the company.

Below, we'll look at each in more detail.

## 1. Mentorship programs for employees going through onboarding

Pairing new hires with a mentor can be pivotal in whether or not that employee ramps up successfully. Why do we think this is true? Take, for example, that research by Gallup found that over 70% of new hires feel unprepared for their new role, even after the onboarding process.

With a mentor, new employees have a pillar of support to help them orient to the company culture, understand how they fit in with the team, and answer any questions they may have.

Microsoft instituted an onboarding buddy program which saw increasing benefits the more the new hire met with their buddy:

“

56% of new hires who met with their onboarding buddy at least once in their first 90 days indicated that their buddy helped them to quickly become productive in their role. That percentage increased to 73% for those who met two to three times with their buddy, 86% for those who met four to eight times, and 97% for those who met more than eight times in their first 90 days.” - *Harvard Business Review*



The point is that new hires will feel more confident in their positions with the help of a mentor.

For more on mentoring programs for new employees, see [here](#).

## 2. Mentorship programs for high-potential employees

High-potential (HiPo) development programs are usually designed with two goals in mind:

- Prepare them for future leadership roles and
- Avoid their turnover

Mentorship helps achieve both of these goals. Firstly, pairing employees that show high potential to become leaders in the organization with mentors is a great way to fast-track their development.

Secondly, the existing leaders who mentor these rising stars can pass on the context and experience that will set the HiPo employees up for success. In this way, building leaders internally is much more beneficial than bringing in executives from the outside.

Finally, HiPo employees want the challenge and opportunity to grow. By handpicking them a mentor, they see that the organization is invested in their growth. It's a win-win for both the organization and the employee.

For more on mentoring programs for high-potential employees, see [here](#).

## 3. Mentorship programs for employees from underrepresented or diverse backgrounds

There can be a lot of barriers to growth and development for employees from minority backgrounds in the workplace. Having a workplace mentorship program designed to support their advancement and connect them with opportunities can help them overcome these obstacles.

There's a strong demand for diversity-focused mentoring programs. In a [study by Heidrick & Struggles](#), 74% of minority employees participated in mentoring programs when they were offered.

If that's not enough, for organizations that want to increase representation in their leadership teams, mentoring programs boosted "the representation of black, Hispanic, and Asian-American women, and Hispanic and Asian-American men, by 9% to 24%," according to a [study cited by the Harvard Business Review](#).

For more on mentoring programs for diverse employees, see [here](#).

## 4. Mentorship programs for new managers

Many new leaders struggle with transitioning into their first formal leadership position ([60% say the stress is second to divorce](#)). And many organizations don't have a plan to prepare them for the transition. Too often, it's assumed that a high performer will automatically be a great manager. This problem is summarized in the Peter Principle, which states that employees will be promoted to the point where they're not effective.

To avoid this fatalistic principle, mentoring programs can work in the same way that a new hire program works: pairing new managers with more experienced leaders can help them learn the ropes more quickly because they have someone to lean on.

For more on mentoring programs for managers, see [here](#).

## 5. Company-wide mentorship programs

Often, when companies start mentoring programs, the intent is to offer mentors to all employees. These are more general programs that loosely focus on career development or knowledge sharing.

The most successful programs that are company-wide make mentorship a core part of their culture. They encourage senior employees to make themselves available to mentor others throughout the year.

Likewise, it's encouraged that employees sign up at any time. The programs are less likely to have pre-determined start and end dates. They're always open for employees to join.

Finally, these programs have robust support systems like meeting agendas, discussion questions, and learning resources. In this way, each employee has the support they need from their organization to have a self-guide mentoring experience.

**For more guidance on scaling up a mentoring program for the whole company, see [here](#).**







# Group vs 1-on-1 pairing arrangements

Above, we walked you through the five different audiences that mentoring programs can serve. Within each of those types of programs, you can pair employees in a few different ways.

Broadly, pairing within a mentoring program is either:

- 1-on-1 mentoring, or
- Group mentoring

In this section, we'll explain why you would choose one over the other and the different approaches within both 1-on-1 and group pairing formats. To start, let's look at 1-on-1 pairing.

## Traditional 1-on-1 mentoring

For 1-on-1 mentoring, the most typical arrangement here is that the mentor is more experienced and senior in their field than the mentee, though this certainly doesn't always have to be the case.

1-on-1 mentoring is most effective when the main goal is to help the mentee develop their skills, knowledge and experience to progress in their career. The mentoring sessions need to be focused on the mentee's individual development.

That being said, 1-on-1 mentoring relationships can take a few different forms. Let's list them and then provide details on each:

- Senior-junior mentoring
- Peer-to-peer mentoring
- Reverse mentoring

### Senior-junior mentoring

This is the most typical kind of pairing arrangement, so it doesn't require much of an explanation. What we will say, however, is that when we think of a mentoring relationship, it's usually between a leader, who shares their experience and advice with someone more junior to themselves. This is traditionally what's thought of when we talk about mentorship.

## Peer-to-peer mentoring

Peer-to-peer mentoring is when two colleagues of similar career levels are paired together. Usually, employees from different parts of the organization come together to exchange knowledge, advice and hold each other accountable.

## Reverse mentoring

Reverse mentoring is the traditional senior-junior relationship flipped. In these pairing arrangements, the leader takes on the role of learner to listen to the unique perspectives of someone else. The more junior employee may be someone early on in their career. If this is the case, reverse mentoring is great for connecting different generations to learn new perspectives.

Additionally, companies can leverage reverse mentoring to connect diverse employees with leaders in order to shed light on a lived experience the leader may not be exposed to in their day-to-day.

## Group mentoring

In a group mentoring arrangement, there can be either one mentor with multiple mentees, or multiple mentors with multiple mentees. The ratio is never 1:1, however.

Group mentorship is often used for team development or training. The focus here is on teamwork, collaboration, and transferring skills to a group of mentees with shared learning needs.

### One mentor; several mentees

When there's one mentor, mentoring several mentees, they can go about it in one of two ways.

1. 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.
2. 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.

### Multiple mentors; multiple mentees

In a group mentoring format with several mentors and mentees, the sessions can look similar to a networking event. The groups are typically larger 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.





# The different goals to have in your mentoring program

So far, we've discussed the different audiences you can design your mentoring program for and the different ways to pair them. In this section, we'll bring it together to look at how to decide on your audience and pairing format. In short, it comes down to your goals.

We've seen hundreds of mentoring programs launch on our platform, and among them, we've narrowed down four of the most common goals. They are:

1. Leadership development,
2. Supporting diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging,
3. Employee engagement, and
4. Employee learning and development.

Your program may have specific goals, but broadly, we see the above as the most common goals for launching a mentoring program.

Because there are so many ways to design your mentoring program, we've provided our recommendations for program design based on the broad goals above.

We hope that the chart on the next page will provide guidance on how you should structure your mentoring program.



Goal	Audience	Pairing format	Description
Leadership development	High-potentials	(1-on-1) Senior-junior	Pair experienced leaders with your rising stars, paving the way for their succession.
Leadership development	Employees from diverse backgrounds	(1-on-1) Reverse	Connect leaders with employees from diverse backgrounds, encouraging leaders to take on the role of learner and gain a new perspective
Support diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging	Employees from diverse backgrounds	(Group) One mentor to many mentees	Organize group mentoring sessions between a leader who is part of an ERG and the members of that ERG.
Support diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging	Employees from diverse backgrounds	(1-on-1) Senior-junior	Connect diverse employees with leaders to pave the way for more representation in leadership roles through coaching and sponsorship.
Employee engagement	Company-wide; all employees	(1-on-1) Senior-junior	Open an Evergreen (always-on) mentoring program where employees can join at any time and find recommendations for mentors at the company.
Employee engagement	New hires	(1-on-1) Peer	Launch an onboarding buddy program that pairs new employees with a more seasoned employee who can help them ramp up.
L&D	New managers	(Group) Multiple mentors to many mentees	Organize groups of newly promoted managers to learn from more experienced managers in coaching-style lectures.
L&D	New managers	(1-on-1) Peer	Pair new managers with other new managers to help each other adjust to the roles and share what they're learning.



# Brainstorm activity:

## Explore unique ways to design your mentoring program

The above are our recommendations. But, if you want to explore new ways to structure your program, grab a piece of paper and reconfigure the below table:

- 1. Read over the different goals, audiences, and pairing formats below.
- 2. Mix and match the cells from the columns in the table below in the blank boxes.
- 3. Imagine how the program would look if you designed it in that way.
- 4. Fill in the last column to *imagine what this program would look like*.

By completing this exercise, you may find a creative way to launch your program.

Goal	Audience	Pairing format	Description
Leadership development	New hires	(1-on-1) Senior-junior	<i>Imagine what this program would look like.</i>
DEIB	High potentials	(1-on-1) Peer-to-peer	<i>Imagine what this program would look like.</i>
Employee engagement	Employees from diverse backgrounds	(1-on-1) Reverse	<i>Imagine what this program would look like.</i>
L&D	New managers	(Group) One mentor to many mentees	<i>Imagine what this program would look like.</i>
	Company-wide; all employees	(Group) Multiple mentors to many mentees	<i>Imagine what this program would look like.</i>

# About Together

Together is a mentorship platform that empowers organizations to accelerate their employee development. We make it easy to manage large-scale mentoring programs, handling registration, pairing, mentoring relationship development, and reporting.

Together's platform includes session agendas, templates, and resources that make it easy to get your mentoring program up and running quickly. Likewise, our web-based platform integrates with existing email and calendar systems.

Whether 1-on-1, group, or peer mentoring, we enable organizations to find every employee a relevant person to learn from.

## Some of our customers include

**Teladoc**  
HEALTH

*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](#)



# Expert advice for starting your mentoring program

Our hope is that this E-book provided you with more insights and understanding of how you can structure your mentoring program. Our goal is to provide the most relevant and helpful information on running mentoring programs.

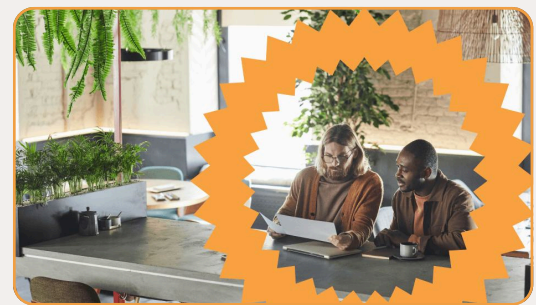
Get inspiration our webinars, customer panels, and content below



[Best practices for running a mentorship program](#)



[How to measure, track and evaluate your mentoring program \[with examples\]](#)



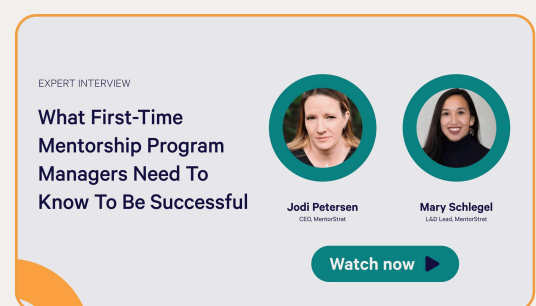
[Mentoring topics: Agendas that encourage meaningful discussion](#)



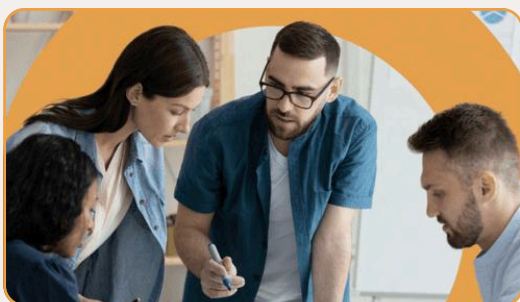
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[State of coaching and mentoring at work](#)