

ABSTRACT for OTUG April 20, 2010 Meeting

Title of the Presentation and Discussion by Gary Jedynak and Arun Batchu

"How might we make IT mentoring more accessible and available for both short term and long term mentoring? Shortage of mentors is thought to be a major constraint to expanding mentoring...yet there is high demand for mentoring. After a short presentation we will invite your views in open discussion."

Definitions and context:

Short term mentoring is offered by many IT educational institutions.

Usually this type of mentor-advisor uses a standard format; e.g. once a month phone contact and once a quarter lunch meeting. In such approaches mentors may change each year. Available mentors often limit the capacity of such programs.

Long term mentoring requires personal compatibility and some sort of shared history.

It is believed that churning workplace dynamics has caused declines in mentoring opportunities. Many, if not most, people having difficulty in finding and sustaining a long term mentoring relationship.

Technological remedies are very helpful but are insufficient to solve the problem:

Various technologies such as video can increase scheduling convenience and thus improve sustainability. Still persistent workplace demands on mentor availability can reduce confidence in the mentoring process. Already thin threads of discussion tend to falter.

Increasing the number of mentors, their availability and accessibility:

Mentoring is seen to be essential for all aspects of improving work life and ultimate impact on the customer value proposition. Simply working harder is not enough. It seems reframing the problem might provide the most plausible mentoring strategy.

General strategy: IT Mentoring Team

Create a team with the mentor and mentee/student being at the center of a well configured support group. Use an intensively relationship based approach to assist with all aspects of the mentoring and learning process.

Features of an IT Mentoring Team:

Instead of a stand alone mentor-mentee (student) pair create a team with them at the center but supported by secondary mentors who will help with technical support. The second tier of mentors-in-training help the mentee/student learn and stay on course in their learning by answering questions or advising sources of solutions. The student is also surrounded by a peer team of similarly situated relationship based mentees and or students. In this way the burden is reduced on the mentors and the peers learn to support each other via building long term relationships. The student peers do the administrative work of the IT Mentoring Team. The IT Mentoring Team then, would have three parts: primary mentor, secondary technical mentors, and peer team.

This IT Mentoring Team would be unique to each student but would also overlap and network with other such teams to achieve optimal use of support in particular learning paths, languages, career levels. The core team for this project suggests that the evolution of the mentoring team would have a strong collaborative component. And a few of these ideas will be presented as well, especially as the Collaborative IT Mentoring Team might easily and preferably evolve into a commercial, intern supported entity.

An example scenario of how this would work will be provided prior to the April 20 meeting. Distinctions between short and long term mentoring would be made clear. The short presentation will clarify the general idea of the IT Mentoring Team and your input will be used to improve the idea.

Plausibility of this mentoring scenario has been emerging in recent books such as The Talent Code, by Coyle, and Drive, by Pink. Concepts such as habits of mind, deep practice, talent hot beds, 'autonomy, mastery, purpose' will seed the discussion. Plausibility of the collaborative group has been emerging in numerous places as communities start to place high value on relationship based, locally-grown and financed new businesses.

This project would start with OTUG and hopefully with local universities' support and participation given their need for mentoring of their students. OTUG and or individuals might reach out via personal contacts with other trade groups for support of this emergent solution to the unsolved problem of IT mentoring. There just may be a win-win, community building solution.