



HOUSE NEWS



Mentor-Mentee Relationships: A Platform for Personal Growth and Professional Development

----- HONG KONG INSTITUTE OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Recognised as one of the most effective platforms for advancing career and professional development opportunities, investing time and effort in a mentoring relationship— whether as a mentor or mentee— can provide win-win benefits.

Launched in 2012, the HKIHRM Mentorship Programme provides a platform for Associate Members (mentees) to learn on a one-to-one basis from seasoned Fellow and Professional Members (mentors). To date, the programme has brought together more than 130 mentor/mentee partnerships. Importantly, mentorship is never a one-way street; the programme creates a reciprocal learning experience for both mentees and mentors. While mentees receive guidance and advice from experienced HR practitioners, mentors are able to keep abreast of the career aspirations of the young generation of HR practitioners as well as reinforcing the importance of being agile and purpose-oriented. What's more, the programme helps to create a pipeline of sustainable talent for the HR profession.

According to the findings from the HKIHRM Mentorship Programme Survey conducted in 2023 with mentees who participated in the programme, 51% of respondents appreciated how their interpersonal communication skills had been enhanced. In addition to broadening their HR industry knowledge and expanding their networking relationships, respondents also cited that they had enhanced their career development strategies and developed a clearer focus on setting goals.

Lurlee Leung and Evelyn Chun, both active mentors in the HKIHRM Mentorship Programme, point out that, like most things in life that offer potential benefits, successful mentoring partnerships do not simply happen. To ensure a successful mentorship experience, Lurlee and Evelyn agree it is important that both parties are proactive and invest time in communicating with each other. Lurlee and Evelyn also agree the more that is put into the relationship, the more that both participants can expect to get out of it.

Listening is key

For Evelyn, who mentored Wendy Man, qualities required for being a good mentor include being able to provide constructive, but non-judgmental feedback. While listening skills are important, Evelyn says it is equally important for mentors to pay close attention to the mentee's unspoken thoughts. After listening to the mentee, if circumstances allow, mentors could take the conversation slightly deeper to address the concerns that may have only been briefly touched upon. Additionally, Evelyn believes that it is more appropriate to adopt a coaching approach instead of providing a "quick-fix" to allow the mentee room for self-deliberation in arriving at the solution.

Key Takeaways

- In its simplest form, mentoring can encourage the personal and professional development of a mentee through the sharing of knowledge, expertise and experience.
- Numerous study findings highlight positive outcomes for mentees, which can include fast-tracking career progress, which can identify and correct gaps in generic skills and knowledge, which can cut months – or even years – off the learning curve.
- Mentoring relationships are typically mutually beneficial, and mentors often find that they learn as much from mentees as the other way around.
- For mentors, interactions with a mentee offer numerous opportunities to practice and build interpersonal skills, such as communication, active listening and empathy.
- By establishing trust and understanding, the mentee recognises that constructive criticism is intended to build their professional growth rather than make them feel uncomfortable.

About the HKIHRM Mentorship Programme

Launched in 2012, the HKIHRM Mentorship Programme with over 130 pairs has provided a platform for Associate Members (mentees) to learn individually from our seasoned Fellow and Professional Members (mentors).

The Programme not only serves as a reciprocal learning experience for mentors to understand career aspirations of the young generation of HR practitioners, but also helps sustainability of the HR profession.

Click [here](#) to know more.

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“As mentors, because we have more experience, there is a tendency to believe we are the ones that should be providing the teaching or sharing our experiences with the mentee. The mentorship process allows for mutual learning and adding values to each other, the mutual learning approach can contribute to the development of the entire HR industry and even help the companies that mentors and mentees work for to grow.”

- Lurlee Leung, Mentor
2023/2024 Mentorship Programme

While mentors do not require specific qualifications or coaching credentials, it is important to be open-minded and willing to share experiences with the mentee, Lurlee says. Mentoring should never be considered as “just another task”. “Through interacting with their mentees, mentors can have an impact on their lives in addition to their careers,” he adds. Through the HKIHRM Mentorship Programme, Lurlee says he strives to enhance his ability to discover the potential of mentees and provide them with a platform to showcase their strengths. “The biggest takeaway for me is the constant reminder that people from different generations have their own unique values,” Lurlee notes. “I constantly remind myself of this.”

As a mentor, Lurlee believes it is vital to have a genuine commitment to help others achieve their goals. At the same time, it is important to adopt a mindset of continuous learning. “As mentors, because we have more experience, there is a tendency to believe we are the ones that should be providing the teaching or sharing our experiences with the mentee. However, in reality the mentorship process allows for mutual learning and adding values to each other,” Lurlee says. The mutual learning approach can contribute to the development of the entire HR industry and even help the companies that mentors and mentees work for to grow.

In reference to mentoring mentees from the younger generation of HR practitioners, such as Gen Z, Lurlee believes it is not a case of one generation adapting to the ways of another generation, but more about exploring or creating the “chemistry” that reinforces bonding and stimulates two-way communication. Lurlee notes, while it is common to categorise or classify people with generation terminology for the convenience of workplace demographic studies and the ease of communication, this feels like labelling. “This is something I aim to avoid. I believe it is crucial for everyone to let go of these labels and see each other as unique individuals, which ultimately can result in deeper understanding and better communication,” Lurlee notes.

Having worked in the HR industry for some time, Lurlee aims to draw on his experiences to broaden the thinking and decision making processes of newcomers and those that are less experienced. “I want to help them to gain a clear understanding of current industry needs and guide their future career development,” he says. In the HR industry, some practitioners hold the view that changes are not a priority, considering the significant challenges currently faced. In addition, some HR professionals may prioritize adherence to established rules and regulations without always fully considering the purposes and dynamics of the evolving business environment. With this being the case, Lurlee says he tries to share insights with young HR practitioners on ways to handle challenging situations

and reinforce the importance of being purpose-oriented and agile.

New perspectives

As a result of being mentored by Lurlee, Daisy Wu says she has re-evaluated some aspects of her career outlook. “Mentors can help mentees to reach their destination by avoiding making unnecessary detour,” notes Daisy who discovered she could approach challenges from a different perspective, which also boosted her confidence. “Without Lurlee’s guidance I would have been hesitant about advancing to a more senior position or taking on a role with more responsibilities,” she explains. Even though she has worked in the HR profession for a relatively short time, she has learned that having the necessary skill sets is just as important as having years of experience.

Initially, Daisy explains, she hoped that through the mentoring process Lurlee could help her identify any “blockers” and uncover her potential, which would enable her to step out of her comfort zone and explore different areas. However, she found the experience was far more expansive than she first envisaged. Having joined the HKIHRM Mentoring Programme in August 2023, at a time when she was facing a challenging period in her career, Daisy explains that due to company policies and strategic constraints she found it difficult to achieve both her career and work goals. Daisy says she even considered changing jobs. Instead, following Lurlee’s advice, together they formulated a strategy that enabled her to communicate with her manager to better explain the challenges she faced as an operational-level employee. “I found Lurlee’s suggestions to be excellent advice,” says Daisy.

When seeking a mentor, Daisy believes it is important to have clear and specific goals in mind. Furthermore, the aim should not necessarily be to achieve a single goal, but instead, a series of smaller targets broken down to reach an overarching goal. It is also helpful to set a timeline to achieve objectives, identify any obstacles and identify a goal that is currently out of reach, but achievable in the future. Importantly, Daisy stresses, it is essential to find a comfortable method of communicating between mentee and mentor so that conversations are meaningful and productive. Because HKIHRM mentors have a wide range of knowledge and a wealth of experience, Daisy says mentees need to be prepared to receive constructive comments, which can include observations on areas for improvement. “It may take time to fully

understand the guidance provided by the mentor and the advice given may even require time for further self-reflection,” Daisy notes.

Time and humility

For Evelyn who joined the HKIHRM Mentorship Programme as a mentor when it was launched in 2012, with over twenty years of experience in the HR profession at the time, she felt a strong inclination to give back to the industry. At the same time, Evelyn says, mentoring has given her a golden opportunity to hone her coaching skills, which has also contributed to her personal growth.

For those considering becoming a mentor, Evelyn stresses it is important to ensure that there is sufficient time to dedicate to the role. Without adequate time to devote to mentoring, Evelyn cautions, both the mentor and mentee cannot expect to benefit. Evelyn also believes it is important to approach the role as a mentor with humility. “As mentors, although we may have more extensive work and life experiences compared to mentees, we should never adopt a patronising attitude,” Evelyn notes. As a mentor, it is also vitally important not to overstep boundaries and encroach on the mentee’s personal matters. Mentors should also be prepared to accept that mentees will not always follow guidance or advice; regardless of how well-intended the advice was given. “We should respect mentees’ decisions and choices,” says Evelyn.

Commentating on her mentor/mentee partnership with Wendy Man, Evelyn is amazed by Wendy’s professional achievements as well as her commitment to give back to her alma mater and the HR community by becoming a mentor. “It is truly remarkable to see Wendy’s transformation from being a mentee to becoming a mentor, which keeps succession process in place,” says Evelyn.

From mentee to mentor

For Wendy, who has experience of being both a mentee and a mentor, the benefits are twofold. As a mentee she gained insights, received support and made connections that no textbook tutorial could offer. Meanwhile, as a mentor, while passing on her knowledge and experience to others she has been able to enhance her interpersonal and soft skills. “Mentoring is about building personal relationships,” Wendy says, it is about connecting the human touch. As such, Wendy believes the key to success requires the mentor and mentee to co-create the mentoring experience. While a ridged framework for achieving objectives may not be necessary, Wendy recommends there are benefits if both mentee and mentor prepare ideas or topics to talk about prior to a meeting. “There is rarely one absolute answer or solution, so it can be helpful if conversations ‘go with



“Mentors play a crucial role in guiding mentees towards their goals and preventing unnecessary detours. Through my mentorship experience, I realised the power of approaching challenges from a different perspective, which not only boosted my confidence but also propelled me towards my desired destination.”

- Daisy Wu, Mentee
2023/2024 Mentorship Programme



“Mentoring has provided me with a valuable opportunity to sharpen my coaching skills, resulting in personal growth. As mentors, it is vital for us to pay close attention to the unspoken thoughts of our mentees. Instead of providing quick-fix solutions, adopting a coaching approach allows mentees the necessary space for self-deliberation, empowering them to arrive at their own solutions.”

- Evelyn Chun, Mentor
 2012 Mentorship Programme

the flow’, which involves an open exchange of thoughts and ideas,” Wendy notes. While in-person interactions are the preferable way to conduct a mentorship partnership, video and digital platforms have a role to play, especially when time it is at a premium. Also, younger members of the HR profession are especially comfortable when it comes to using digital technologies.

For those considering becoming a mentor, Wendy suggests they should set aside any negative perceptions they hold relating to level of seniority or years of work experience. “Everyone has knowledge and lessons they have learned that are worth sharing with others,” she says. To enhance the mutual learning experience, the focus should be on peer-to-peer relationships instead of senior and junior relationships. It is also important for the mentor to be conscious of listening instead of doing all the talking.

For those seeking to be mentored, Wendy recommends it is important to enter the relationship with an open mind and be prepared to learn and absorb new perspectives. For example, be willing to embrace the fact that mentors come from different backgrounds and have different personalities, which enables them to provide a new window on work, career and life experiences.

Considering herself fortunate to have been partnered with her mentor through the HKIHRM mentoring programme early in her career, Wendy says the first time she met Evelyn — her mentor — she made her feel relaxed. “Evelyn was very open and

approachable and willing to share her rich experiences in the HR profession,” Wendy says. Instead of giving her direct answers to questions, Evelyn encouraged her to think about the topics they discussed and formulate her own solutions and answers. “This has built up my ability to look at situations from different angles, particularly when I face work and career-related challenges,” Wendy explains. Learning from her mentor has helped her to gain experience in a way she might otherwise not have had. “I like learning from others through their stories and their thinking processes,” she says.

Spreading the message

Mentors and mentees who have benefited from the HKIHRM Mentorship Programme, collectively believe the experience is worth sharing with HKIHRM members, either through videos, articles and even live sharing events. For those with reservations about the benefits of mentoring, some of today’s most successful business people credit many of their achievements to mentoring. Sheryl Sandberg, who recently announced she is stepping down as chief operating officer of Facebook parent Meta, frequently acknowledges Larry Summers, her former university professor who also served as chief economist at the World Bank and US Treasury secretary, as being her “first and most important’ mentor”. As Oscar-winning filmmaker Steven Spielberg once remarked, “The delicate balance of mentoring someone is not creating them in your own image, but giving them the opportunity to create themselves by listening to them and giving them the support and guidance they need to reach their highest potential.”



“I believe that for those who are considering becoming a mentor, it is essential to foster peer-to-peer relationships rather than falling into traditional senior and junior roles. It is equally important for mentors to be mindful of actively listening to their mentees instead of dominating the conversation. ”

- Wendy Man, Mentor
 2023/2024 Mentorship Programme

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