



Ethical Mentoring

WHAT IS IT?

Mentoring programs have historically been established to foster career and skills development. Ethical mentoring takes a different approach in that it is aimed squarely at fostering good ethical decision-making and an ethical culture.

Ethical mentoring involves a confidential relationship, usually between peers, aimed at helping the mentee to resolve specific ethical dilemmas and to mutually develop the ability to recognise and work through ethical issues.

WHEN AND WHY SHOULD IT BE USED?

Ethical Mentoring is valuable in situations where unethical behaviour is likely to arise. High-pressure corporate environments where employees are subject to high stress and/or poor work life balance can lead to ill-considered ethical decisions. People in industries with intense competition in a crowded market may be tempted to cut corners. These sorts of environments would benefit from the sort of open discussion of ethical issues that Ethical Mentoring promotes.

Unfortunately most companies will not consider Ethical Mentoring until signs of unethical behaviour start to emerge. Questions may have arisen regarding financial reporting, customers or suppliers may have complained of unfair treatment. In these situations an Ethical Mentoring program is a good way to put ethics on the table: to get all levels of the organisation talking about and considering the ethics of their decisions.

Organisations can make the mistake of believing that a code of conduct is a vaccine against unethical behaviour. Sadly this is not the case. However comprehensive, a code of conduct cannot possibly cover every eventuality. The more detailed the code, the more difficult it is to police and the less likely that employees will use their own initiative. An Ethical Mentoring program is a way of empowering employees to take responsibility for their ethical decisions.

HOW TO MAKE IT SUCCESSFUL?

1. Be very clear about the purpose of the program. Clarity about the broad organisational goals will help participants to take the process seriously.
2. Train both parties for their role. This is a peer relationship so it is important that the right tone and level of trust is established. Mentors need to be trained in a "mentoring conversation style" that enables mentees to explore their own values and find congruent solutions.
3. Establish a framework for the ethical mentoring dialogue and train mentors and mentees to use it. A good framework is for the mentee to articulate the problem, then work with the mentor to explore the context and implications of the problem and the perspectives of others, before reaching a balanced decision. Once a decision is reached the pair should make a final check to ensure the mentee truly believes this is the right thing to do.
4. Review relationships regularly to ensure they are on track.