EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW: SPEED MENTORING TOOLKIT

Thank you for downloading the Speed Mentoring Toolkit! This document walks through the benefits of a mentoring program, goes over how a speed mentoring program is different from a traditional mentoring program, and provides some basic logistics so you can implement speed mentoring in your organization, either as a one-time event or a regular program.

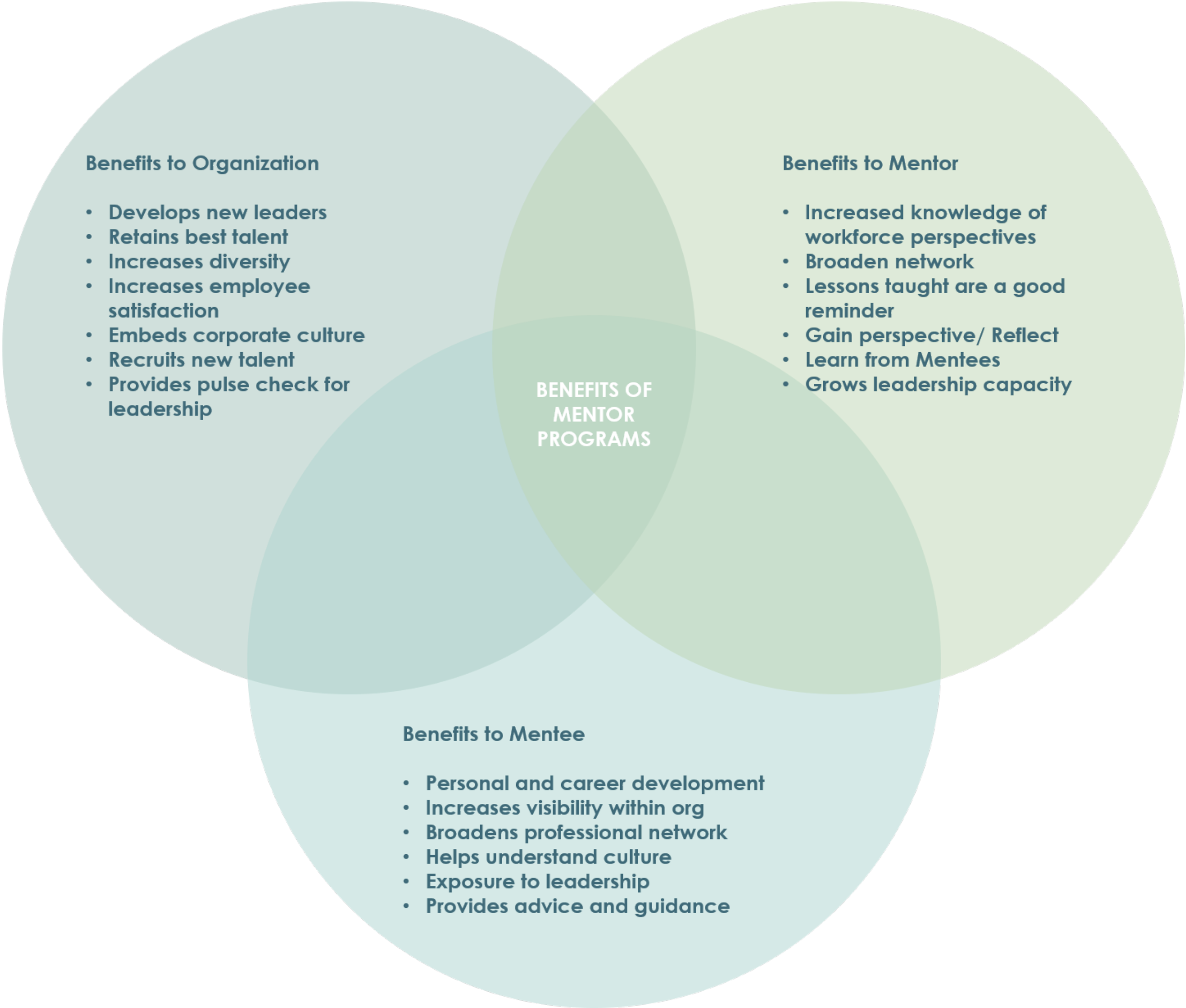
All of the basics are here to help you build your own speed mentoring program. Even so, if you would like to see how EVOLVE could work with you to design and/or implement your speed mentoring program, reach out to me directly and we will set up a time to discuss how EVOLVE can help.

Benefits of a Mentoring Program

A mentoring program, in any form has several benefits. And, those benefits are not just for the one being mentored! There are benefits to the organization and the mentor as well. In fact, I implemented speed mentoring in an organization, in conjunction with their quarterly senior leadership meetings and it was the highlight of the meetings. Every leader from the top on down, enthusiastically signed up to be a mentor in this "speed" format and always enjoyed themselves. But there is more to the benefits of participating than just being fun.

For the organization, a mentoring program provides the opportunity to showcase leadership and expose employees to those leaders, developing leadership qualities in those employees as well. The event, especially if done regularly, is a great retention tool; top employees are looking for an opportunity to grow and develop and mentoring programs provide that opportunity and send the message that leadership is invested in the employee's growth. Leadership teams are typically less diverse than the workforce as a whole. Mentor programs allow access to leadership in a more equitable way that increases opportunity for a diverse group of people to learn from, and have access to, senior leaders. Investing in employees through a mentoring program increases employee satisfaction and engagement. The more an employee is engaged, the more discretionary effort they are willing to devote to the organization, increasing productivity. Being able to tout a successful mentor program when recruiting for new talent is a great way to separate your company from everyone else in the market for the same new talent. Finally, leadership gets to hear first hand what the workforce is worried about and struggling with on a regular basis, helping deepen their context around organizational issues that should be addressed during strategy discussions.

For the mentor, each leader, in my experience, finds the process very rewarding. It provides an increased, first-hand knowledge of various workforce perspectives and it helps them broaden their networks outside of their own departments. Additionally, the stories and words of wisdom they share during a mentoring session are a good reminder for their own professional lives. The questions asked by the mentees force the leader to take time to reflect, gain perspective, and make meaning out of their career journeys, which is something they typically do not take time to do otherwise. Taking a step back from reaching organizational metrics and accomplishing their mission to support others allows them to grow, learn from the mentees, and improve their own leadership capacity.



For the mentee, the benefits are numerous. Participating in a mentor program instantly means that the mentee has a cadre of senior leadership supporting them in their personal and career development. They get to broaden their network and having conversations with the mentors increases their visibility within the organization. Asking questions and engaging in discussions with senior leaders gives the mentees insight into the organizational and leadership culture they might not have otherwise had for some time. Finally, the mentoring program gives a mentee the opportunities to get advice and guidance from leadership, who has been there. Even when conducting speed mentoring events in a region or area with traditionally lower employee engagement, the number of employees signing up to be a mentee exceed the space we had and they came with powerful questions and topics to be addressed. It was a powerful way for the workforce to feel seen and heard.

What is Speed Mentoring?

Let us assume you are convinced that a mentoring program has all of the benefits listed above, and maybe more. Great. So… what exactly is speed mentoring? How is it different? Well, regular mentoring is to serial monogamy dating as speed mentoring is to speed dating.

Traditional mentoring programs involve pairing up a mentor and a mentee for an extended mentoring relationship, perhaps with a formal program of training for both the mentor and mentee. The time commitment for both the mentor and mentee are large and the cost to run a program like that can cost tens of thousands of dollars, or more, depending on how much training and facilitation is needed.

Speed mentoring is a one-time commitment (even if the speed mentoring is a reoccurring program that happens regularly). The commitment for the mentor and mentee is capped at the length of the event, typically two or so hours. Those managing the logistics have a little work they do behind the scenes, but the commitment for the participants in minimal. This is key because it means senior level leadership, who may not have capacity to volunteer to be a mentor in a formal mentoring program, can participate in these shorter speed mentoring sessions, especially if they are added to the agenda for the senior leadership quarterly meetings.

The process for a speed mentoring session is the same as what you might have seen on tv or in movies about speed dating (or experienced in person). The room is set up with several tables. Each table has space for 1-4 leaders (mentors) and 4-6 employees (mentees). The sessions are mapped out ahead of time with a certain number of sessions for the time allotted. Once the timer starts, the employees have the opportunity to ask questions to the leaders at the table. When the timer goes off (typically 15 - 20 minutes), the leaders stay where they are and the employees move one table to the right and the process begins again. The constant movement and time keeping keeps a level of urgency and energy in the room and there are always good takeaways from both the employees and leaders.

Why Speed Mentoring?

The biggest why was stated in the previous section – speed mentoring offers a low commitment, low cost alternative to traditional mentoring programs while providing many of the same benefits.

Speed mentoring also mitigates some of the pitfalls of a traditional mentoring program. For instance, in a traditional mentoring program, there are inevitably mentor/mentee pairs who do not work well together. Sometimes good intent is overcome by events and either the mentor or mentee cannot keep up with the schedule. Sometimes mentorship programs fizzle out because they tend to be treated as a nice to have – first thing to get cut when time and resources get tight. Speed mentoring takes all of this off the table.

Expectations are managed because you can only get so much value from a half-day (or less) event. It is clear that any follow up or future connection is on the employee to initiate, with permission. Because the cost is negligible, the program does not get cut during lean times, and might even become one of the programs people hold onto because it adds so much value with no cost other than employee time.

The How

The logistics of a speed mentoring program is fairly simple. There are just a few steps that, once done once, are easily repeated based on the calendar of the intended speed mentoring sessions. If your organization has multi-day strategic meetings with senior leadership each quarter, I highly recommend incorporating the speed mentoring into an afternoon after the tensest day in the meeting. It is a great way to energize and reengage the leadership so they come back ready the next day for more meaningful strategizing.

The first pre-step is to get the buy in to do this program. You want to make sure leadership fully supports this initiative and is willing to devote some of their precious meeting time (or other time) into participating fully. If the speed mentoring is not going to be attached to regular leadership meetings, I highly suggest finding another way to make sure it is easy for leadership to say yes and fulfill their commitments. If it is an open-ended invitation to participate with no "carrot" or "stick" to encourage following through, my experience shows that you will be disappointed with the turnout.

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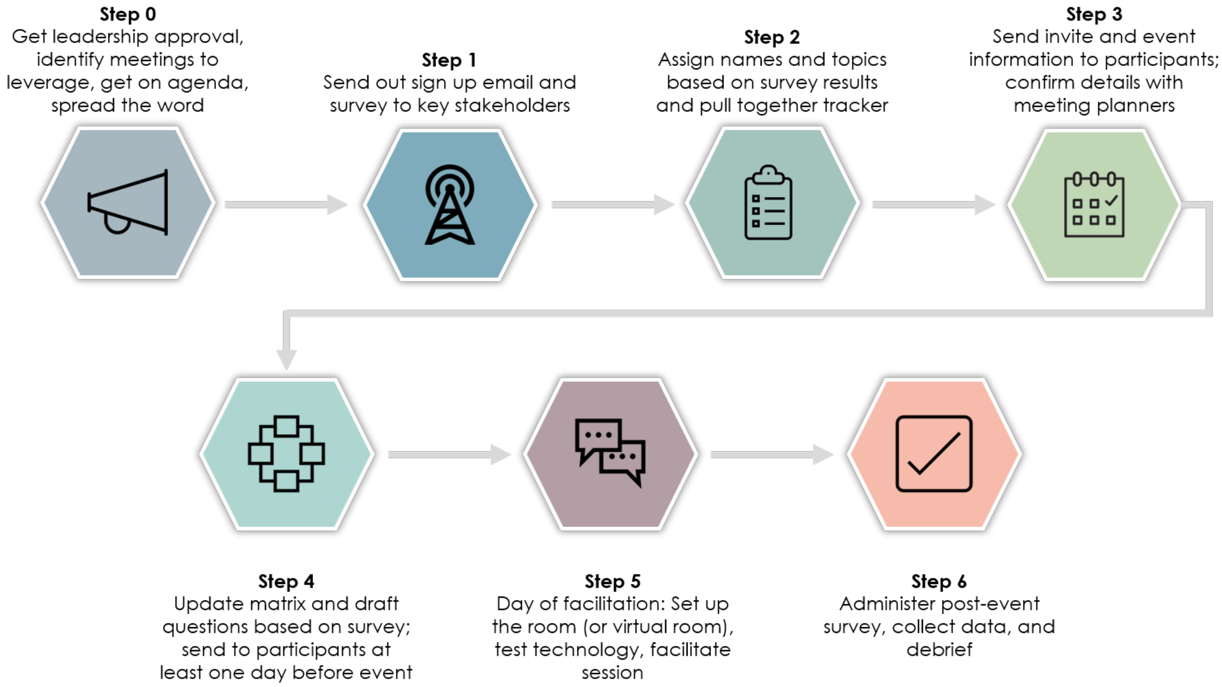

The Logistical Details

Step One

The first step is to go out to the stakeholder groups to gauge interest in participating in the event. The first decision point is to determine whether the organizers of the event will be determining the list of topics that will be the conversation starters or if you want to solicit topics from the workforce. If you choose, you can also do both by listing all of the topics you identified (based on strategic focus, business goals, culture, etc.) and allowing the participants to add ideas of their own. If you do this, there will be a little extra work in synthesizing the data and determining if any topics got enough of a mention to be added.

Some topics that have been successful for us in the past include topics like:

- Leadership philosophy (Describe your leadership philosophy)
- Giving and receiving difficult feedback (What communication techniques do you use when dealing with problems?)
- Time management (How do you prepare for the week ahead?)
- Managing your career (How did you get where you are?)

- Building an engaged workforce (How do you make sure your teams are engaged and fulfilled?)
- Handling difficult clients (How do you handle difficult clients when you have to say no?)

Once you've made the decision on how to define topics and trigger questions, you want to send out two surveys, one to the workforce and one to the senior leadership team. In these surveys, you want to include all of the basic information about the event, especially the first one. Give them an idea of what to expect, share the date, and the disclaimer that it is first come, first served. Make sure you explain any approval process needed (e.g. do employees need to get explicit approval from their supervisor to attend?). The survey should collect names and emails if they are interested, topics they are interested in discussing, and any other information you think would be helpful (like the organization they work for, etc.).

You will want to start this data collection process at least one month prior to the event, possibly longer for the first event.

Step Two

Once the survey responses are back, you will want to open the results in spreadsheet form and select the first batch of responses, based on the time they completed their forms. For instance, if your maximum number of employees is 25, pick the first 25 on the list when sorted by response date and time. If you have more than 25, send them an email letting them know they are on a waiting list and will be notified if a spot opens up.

Once you have your list of invitees, for both mentors and mentees, start the sorting process based on their interests. If you have 90 minutes slotted, you can have 15 minutes sessions with 5 minutes in between to shuffle around and get resettled, then have 20 minutes or so to discuss key takeaways as a group. That means each individual will need to have three topics.

Once you have each participant assigned to three topics, move on to step three.

Step Three

At least two weeks prior to the event, you want to send out calendar invites. The invite should include date, time, room numbers, what to bring, the topics they are assigned to, some trigger questions to get them thinking about each topic, and an encouragement to think of other questions they would like to discuss with senior leadership. Monitor the invitations and if anyone declines, invite the next person on the waitlist to ensure participation is maximized.

Step 4

At least one week prior to the event, you want to create some documents that will be used on the day of the event. The first document will be the agenda by table. This document should include the leadership mentors at that table and their titles/ organizations. It should include the times and topics for each of the rotations with directions for kick-off and some discussion questions they can use.

This document may look something like this:

Table #1	
Mentors:	Leader One (Title, Department) Leader Two (Title, Department) Leader Three (Title, Department) Leader Four (Title, Department)
Rotation #1: 1:20 – 1:35 PM	
Topic	Leadership Philosophy
Directions to kick-off conversation	1. Go around the table and introduce yourself 2. Mention the selected topic for rotation and ask if anyone would like to start 3. Use topic prompts to begin conversation, if needed 4. Do not hesitate to stray from assigned topic if group organically moves to another topic
Topic Prompts	• Describe your leadership philosophy in 3 words – why did you choose those words? • Who has shaped or inspired your leadership philosophy? • What is your favorite book on leadership? Why? • How has your leadership philosophy evolved over time?
Rotation #2: 1:40 – 1:55 PM	
Topic	Giving and Receiving Difficult Feedback
Directions to kick-off conversation	1. Go around the table and introduce yourself 2. Mention the selected topic for rotation and ask if anyone would like to start 3. Use topic prompts to begin conversation, if needed 4. Do not hesitate to stray from assigned topic if group organically moves to another topic
Topic Prompts	• What constructive communication techniques do you use when dealing with problems? • What does feedback look like in person versus virtually? • Why is giving and receiving feedback important? • What is the most important part of giving/receiving feedback?

Rotation #3: 2:00 – 2:15 PM	
Topic	Time Management
Directions to kick-off conversation	1. Go around the table and introduce yourself 2. Mention the selected topic for rotation and ask if anyone would like to start 3. Use topic prompts to begin conversation, if needed 4. Do not hesitate to stray from assigned topic if group organically moves to another topic
Topic Prompts	• How do you prepare for the week ahead? • What are some of the most effective things you do to prepare for a busy week? • What is the biggest distraction you face when accomplishing big tasks? • How do you resolve workplace distractions? • How do you manage multiple priorities and meet tight deadlines?
Group De-brief and Key Takeaways: 2:25 – 2:50 PM • What was the most surprising realization or takeaway from today? • What will be something you take back and implement in your work? • What could we do to make this event more meaningful? • What was your favorite thing about today?	

The second document will be a final matrix for the day. It should include a snapshot of all of the "tables" (virtual or in person), with the leaders assigned to each table, the topics they are assigned for each rotation, and the employees who will be at their table for each rotation. The document might look something like the matrix below. It's kind of like a big sudoku puzzle. You want to make sure there are no repeats of the topic or the table. The more leaders/ tables you have, the more employees you can invite. And note that I am using the word employees and workforce interchangeably – this includes both supervisors and front-line workers. If you want to occasionally (or always) limit participation to employees at, above, or between certain levels in the organization, that is certainly an option as well.

If you want to open this up to as many as possible, but only have a limited number of leaders, you can reduce the number of leaders sitting at a table. It seems to work better with at least two leaders, so they can play off of each other and don't feel like they are in the hot seat as much, but it has also worked with a single leader and several employees.

The matrix document should look something like below, with as many rows as needed.

Table	Leadership	Rotation 1		Rotation 2		Rotation 3	
		Topic	Employees	Topic	Employees	Topic	Employees
1	Leader 1 Leader 2 Leader 3 Leader 4	Leadership Philosophy	Employee 1 Employee 2 Employee 3 Employee 4	Difficult Feedback	Employee 5 Employee 6 Employee 7 Employee 8	Time Management	Employee 9 Employee 10 Employee 11 Employee 12
2	Leader 5 Leader 6 Leader 7 Leader 8	Building an Engaged Workforce	Employee 5 Employee 6 Employee 7 Employee 8	Handling Difficult Clients	Employee 9 Employee 10 Employee 11 Employee 12	Managing your Career	Employee 1 Employee 2 Employee 3 Employee 4
3	Leader 9 Leader 10 Leader 11 Leader 12	Managing your Career	Employee 9 Employee 10 Employee 11 Employee 12	Time Management	Employee 1 Employee 2 Employee 3 Employee 4	Leadership Philosophy	Employee 5 Employee 6 Employee 7 Employee 8

Step 5

Once you have all of the information finalized, you need to start prepping for the day of the event. If the event is going to be in person, you want to print out name tags with each employee's Name, Title, and Department, along with the room numbers and table numbers for each of the three rotations.

If the event is going to be virtual, you want to make sure the technology is tested. If you will be using break out rooms for the various "tables", you will want to make sure everyone knows to enable audio in such a way that their name and phone number are linked so that they get transferred to the right rooms for each session. Using the breakout rooms function is the best way to do this so people don't have to log off and log back in to a different room every 15 minutes. It is also nice because everyone comes out of the rooms for the final recap with no effort and the facilitators can pop in and out of each room to make sure things are going well and to give them timing alerts.

On the day of the event, whether virtually or in person, make sure you have enough support staff to work the event. Especially when doing this virtually, it is important to have enough people in different locations with different internet connections to provide backup if needed as well as people to provide tech support to participants as needed. If the event is in person, you'll want to have people posted at the various break out rooms to direct traffic and get people settled.

The actual facilitation work is minimal – you want to welcome everyone, make sure they know where the first table is, and manage the clock. Once all rotations are complete, everyone should come back to the main room (in person or virtual) for a recap where you can facilitate a reflection session, making sure to get input from leadership and employees. If you are managing this virtually, you can have a poll ready to post and get immediate feedback from the participants. If you are in person, you can let them know to look for a survey via email the following day to provide feedback.

Step 6

The survey or poll questions should be simple and straightforward based on the success metrics you want to track for leadership. I would stick to just a few quantitative questions and a few open-ended questions:

- On a scale of 1-5, how useful/meaningful/enjoyable (pick your word) was the speed mentoring session for you?
- On a scale of 1-5, how likely are you to recommend this to a colleague or sign up for another session?
- Here are the topics we covered today (list them). What other topics would you be interested in discussing with senior leadership in this format?
- What could we do differently to improve the experience for next time?
- What was you biggest takeaway from the session?

Once you have received feedback from the participants, compile the feedback into a report for leadership and send it to them with a thank you for participating. It is rare that leadership gets to see the impact of what they do almost in real time. This thank you email with a brief one pager summarizing the feedback and impact from the session will go a long way to encourage continued participation.

If any feedback was received that could improve the process, incorporate the feedback into the procedures for the next quarter.

That's it! The process for hosting a speed mentoring event. Once you do it once, you will just be tweaking the documents, emails, invites, and other documents so the level of effort is reduced after your first event. I hope everyone will give it a go – it truly is one of those events that has such a big return on such little effort.

If you want to see how EVOLVE can help you identify and plan a whole portfolio of these types of low cost, high impact programs, reach out to Mary directly at mary@evolveYourPerformance.com so we can discuss how we might be able to help.