

REVERSE SPEED MENTORING – GUIDANCE FOR SENIOR MENTEES

Reverse mentoring, accompanied by a robust D&I Strategy, is a key tool towards developing a more inclusive environment.

Reverse mentoring differs from traditional mentoring in that, rather than the mentor providing support and guidance for an individual's career aspirations, reverse mentoring strives to promote intergenerational collaboration and understanding and to provide underrepresented groups with the opportunity for face-to-face time with senior leaders, sharing their lived experience and feedback to assist the seniors in becoming more inclusive leaders.

In a role reversal, reverse mentoring has evolved to comprise senior (usually older) leaders being mentored by a more junior (usually younger and often from an underrepresented group) colleague who, from a diversity and inclusion perspective, is different from them in some way, and therefore experiences their career differently.

Benefits for senior mentees:

- Enables mentees, through the open and honest feedback shared by their mentor, to become agents for effective change within their organisation, challenging outdated practices;
- Provides a practical opportunity for leadership to lead by example to direct culture change;
- Improves confidence in understanding and discussing the issues by building awareness of the experiences of, and barriers faced by, underrepresented groups;
- Develops the ability to lead diverse teams and builds inclusive leadership competencies.

Benefits for junior mentors:

- Increases visibility as role models to other underrepresented groups in the industry;
- Broadens their network by building mutually beneficial relationships with senior leaders;
- Provides mentors with a unique insight into leadership roles.

Real Estate Balance reverse speed mentoring

Reverse mentoring programmes typically operate internally within an organisation and are run over an extended period of time allowing participants to build effective relationships. Real Estate Balance reverse speed mentoring differs in that mentors and mentees will not be paired with someone from their own organisation and they will have just 30 minutes in their pairing before they swap with the other pair in their group for the second 30 minute session.

This provides an excellent knowledge-sharing experience without the time commitment of formal mentorship. One of the pluses of knowledge sharing in this way is that the focus of the interaction is on sharing information, not so much on building a relationship, and can provide mentees with a variety of perspectives in a short amount of time.

Intended outcome

Whilst an organisational reverse mentoring programme should be a long-term initiative with relationships between the mentor and mentee built over time, the intended outcome of the Real Estate Balance reverse speed mentoring event is to provide mentees with a variety of perspectives in a short amount of time and for them to be part of a knowledge sharing experience without the time commitment of formal mentoring. In this way, we hope that all participants will get a flavour of the value of reverse mentoring as an important tool in creating a more inclusive environment and will return with the intention of instigating a reverse mentoring programme in their own organisation.

Show interest

For the reverse mentoring sessions to work, the mentee, or the senior leader, needs to be genuinely interested in what their mentor, the junior, has to teach them. Remember that their insights as a mentor are more valuable in these sessions. This is essential for any successful interaction. If the mentee is not interested in gaining anything from the experience, it just won't work.

Agree on ground rules

Begin by setting some ground rules and agree an agenda for the session (you will be provided with some discussion ideas and prompts to help you set an agenda). Agree upfront that the conversations will be confidential. You will have been made aware of any subjects that are 'off limits' for your mentor such as aspects of their personal and private lives but it is good to revisit this at the beginning of the session for clarity. You may also have subjects that are 'off limits' for the discussion and you should be proactive in boundary setting at the outset.

Break the ice

You will start each session with an ice breaker. Search for differences, not similarities. That's where reverse mentoring can be most potent.

Don't switch roles

Beware of role reversion. Sometimes you may be tempted to slip into a leadership role, but don't try to give career advice. You are there to learn. Not teach. If you do find yourself going down that route, don't worry, just acknowledge it, and get back on track. Your mentor will be provided with a flag they can raise if they think you are in danger of this! If they do this, take it in good humour. You will also be provided with a flag should it be the other way around.

A safe and brave space

A safe and brave space needs to exist in reverse mentoring. Mentees need to ensure the sessions aren't too taxing on the mentor and that sensitive subjects are handled with care. Although your mentors have taken part willingly, mentees should be aware people who experience discrimination often feel obliged to take part in diversity and inclusion programmes to force change needed for themselves and their peers. Some of the experiences shared by your mentors could be unsettling or upsetting and mentees should 'check-in' with the mentor periodically during the discussion to confirm they are happy to continue with this line of discussion or whether they wish to move on to another subject or cease the session altogether should they start showing signs of distress.

Be aware of the limitations

Your mentors are sharing their own experience only. They should not be expected to speak on behalf of their entire community. Reverse mentoring should take into consideration intersectionality and the range of perspectives and experiences within one community or one characteristic.

Remember to reflect

Make time for reflection. Take a few minutes at the end of each session to summarise the experiences and feedback you have heard and note any important takeaways. This provides an excellent knowledge-sharing experience without the time commitment of formal mentorship. One of the pluses of knowledge sharing in this way is that the focus of the interaction is on sharing information, not so much on building a relationship, and can provide mentees with a variety of perspectives in a short amount of time.

Give credit

Finally, give credit where it's due. In a traditional mentoring experience, you don't need to offer credit. But, with a reverse mentoring experience focused on inclusion, you need to recognise feedback or ideas that may influence your future decisions on DEI initiatives or programmes, organisational culture, or your own leadership. Take time to thank your mentor for sharing and discuss how you intend to build on the knowledge gained in your sessions, whether it be that you have been inspired to start a reverse mentoring process in your own organisation or a gap in your organisational knowledge you wish to address.

Next steps...start a reverse mentoring programme

Starting a reverse mentoring programme comes with a myriad of benefits for your organisation and your employees. Boost your diversity and inclusivity initiatives by empowering employees to develop their skills, build their network, and improve your leadership succession.

This guidance is based on a [TEDtalk](#) by reverse mentoring expert, [Patrice Gordon](#).

Resources & further reading

[Business in the Community: What is reverse mentoring](#)

[CIPD: Reverse mentoring: the motives](#) (CIPD members only)

[Reverse Mentoring: A Complete Guide to Getting it Right](#) - Guider

[10 reverse mentoring tips you should know](#) – Inclusive Employers

[Why Reverse Mentoring Works and How to Do It Right](#) – Harvard Business Review

[Reverse Mentoring: Closing the Skills Gap on Both Sides](#) - Mindtools

[REVERSE MENTORING: Removing Barriers and Building Belonging in the Workplace](#) - Patrice Gordon, booked released in November 2022.

Brené Brown 'Dare to Lead' Podcast: [Patrice Gordon on Reverse Mentoring](#) (2020)

TED talks The Way we Work: [Reverse Mentoring](#) - Patrice Gordon

[How to do reverse mentoring right](#) - LinkedIn, Patrice Gordon

You may find that talking about your experiences has raised issues which you wish to discuss further with an organisation that can provide you with further guidance or support.

Further guidance

[ACAS](#)

[Business in the Community](#)

[Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development](#)

Relevant networks

[93% Club](#)

[Black Professionals in Construction Network](#)

[Black Women in Real Estate](#)

[Race Equality Matters](#)

[Social Mobility Foundation](#)

[The 30% Club](#)

[Women in Property](#)

[Women in Real Estate](#)

Emotional support

[MIND helpline](#)

[Samaritans](#)

[Shout crisis helpline](#)