

# The Value of a Mentoring Program

By GINA NAPOLI



Orientation for the Harrisburg Regional Chamber & CREDC mentoring program.



**M**entoring someone is like teaching. Mentoring touches the future and passes the knowledge torch, providing mentees with leadership and guidance for problem-solving, career mapping, sharing lessons learned—unlimited topics for exchanging ideas. Mentoring is also a wonderful opportunity for both the mentor and mentee to tap into each other's professional networks.

Mentoring programs are valued as a best business practice and a commonsense way to grow people professionally. Larger organizations have the luxury of larger pools from which to select mentors, so they often have their own mentoring programs in-house.

Small businesses, which comprise the large majority (99.7 percent) of employers in the U.S., do not have to rely solely on themselves for professional development.

SCORE, which began in 1965, is a local mentoring program that is part of a larger nationwide program, totaling 360 chapters and 13,000 mentors. The larger community offers myriad structured learning opportunities:

business workshops, roundtables, business education programs (legal, marketing, strategic planning, business management, and finance), grant writing, business plan reviews, and advisory boards.

Within Lancaster's SCORE program is a network of 50 volunteer mentors. They offer the value of combined experiences, insights, subject matter expertise, and overall professional seasoning. Tom Burgum is SCORE's vice president of member services.

"An ideal mentor has relevant experience and expertise; a 'servant' mentality; the desire to help entrepreneurs launch and/or sustain small businesses; good listening and communication skills; patience and non-judgmental attitude; willingness to complete required mentoring training; and the willingness to stay [professionally] current," Burgum said.

Through support of small businesses, SCORE mentors have helped create (and save!) new companies, jobs, and new revenue in Lancaster County. In 2011, SCORE Lancaster directly contributed to the startup of 35 new businesses, creating 75 new jobs in the community—all

through mentoring.

Carol Aubitz, a marketing and strategic planning consultant and SCORE mentor for the past four years, said, "SCORE's clients are a combination of entrepreneurs who are in the beginning and planning stages of starting a business, plus established businesses looking for expert guidance for growth and expansion of their businesses. We also work with nonprofit organizations as clients. We mentor businesses in every industry."

In Lancaster alone, SCORE has formed strategic alliances with the Kutztown University Small Business Development Center, the City of Lancaster, the Lancaster Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Library System of Lancaster County, the Lancaster County Bar Association, Millersville University, ASSETS of Lancaster, Community First Fund, and the Lancaster Workforce Investment Board. Other chapters within the national network have formed similar cooperatives as local grassroots efforts.

"One-to-one mentoring with a client—focused on his/her needs—is SCORE's best service and value. And it's free," said Burgum.

Aubitz agrees. "Working with people in face-to-face meetings provides the most opportunity for the foundation of SCORE mentoring."

Another local mentoring program is building its own foundation. Catherine Brindle, director of community and outreach at the Harrisburg Regional Chamber & CREDC, launched a formal mentoring program in 2011. Through marketing and membership, initial interest in the program was strong, yielding 10 mentor/mentee pairs—and counting. Five people (three paid staff and seven volunteers) co-administer the program.

Mentor pairs meet once per month, which is not too overwhelming for busy businesswomen.

"Once matches have been made, we use a 'hands-off' approach," Brindle said. "We allow them to make their own decisions out of the [mentoring] program."

There are about three groups of participants throughout the year to give participants a chance to network, share their experiences, and provide feedback about the program in general.

In selecting mentors, Brindle

Michele Detwiler (left), mentee, with Marilyn Walker (right), mentor, president and CEO of synergize! and catalyst of the "Kee To Your Future" mentoring program.



looks for professionals experiencing success and advancing positively toward achieving their goals, no matter their ages and backgrounds. They do their best to match people based on



Carol Aubitz, owner of C. Aubitz & Associates, LLC., and a SCORE mentor.

their goals and accomplishments.

Mandie Levan, continuing education admissions counselor at Central Penn College, is a mentee in the Chamber & CREDC's mentoring program. She can attest to their talent in matching mentor/mentee pairs.

"[My mentor and I] built a great relationship. Through our relationship, I learned something about myself and what type of career path I wanted," Levan said. "My mentor took me to different networking groups in the community to decide what clubs or organizations I wanted to be part of. It's really neat to be able to learn from successful women in the community who juggle a family and a successful career."

Another community mentoring program in the Lancaster area was launched by Synergize, LLC at The Lancaster Chamber of Commerce's

Professional Women's Forum. The recently initiated pilot is a catalyst for partnering seasoned professional women with women over 30 entering or re-entering the workforce.

Marilyn Walker, president and CEO of synergize!, said she named the program the "Kee to Your Future" after her sister, Kee.

"She was a huge encouragement during a difficult time. All of us need mentors in our lives to challenge us outside our comfort zones," Walker said.

Ideal mentors for Kee to Your Future are women who are authentic, available, open-minded, and willing to share their struggles, failures, and successes.

"Mentors are on our sides in a

different way. It's important for older women to offer themselves to younger women who don't often have assistance," Walker said.

The program is administered by a committee of six, a mixture of business professionals, chamber members, and one woman preparing to re-enter the workforce. The pilot has 10 mentor/mentee pairs who meet at least monthly and network at structured events.

Aubitz said, "I would encourage anyone in business—whether it is a new startup or an established business—to take advantage of free mentoring available. If you have business challenges, guidance from a mentoring program is invaluable." ❧

For more information, visit [www.scorelanaster.org](http://www.scorelanaster.org), [www.HarrisburgRegionalChamber.org](http://www.HarrisburgRegionalChamber.org), and <http://energizeyourworkforce.com/pages/womens-center/kee-to-your-future>.

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