

# New Sun Laboratories Technical Report “Sun Mentoring: 1996-2009”

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<http://research.sun.com/techrep/2009/abstract-185.html>



## > Overview

Sun Microsystems has benefited from a long-term successful culture of mentoring, especially in its worldwide engineering divisions. About 7,300 mentoring pairs have participated in one of Sun’s formal mentoring programs since 1996. Sun has developed several internal formal world-wide mentoring programs in which mentoring pairs focus on a business problem or goal of the mentee. To create this report, the authors analyzed Sun’s 1996-2009 mentoring program data, Sun-wide data, plus information from a Gartner report on Sun mentoring which focused on the ROI of Sun’s mentoring programs.

Mentoring has paid off for Sun in increased productivity, efficiency, and greater satisfaction among participants. This report presents what Sun did and how Sun did it to allow others to take advantage of the company’s extensive and successful experience with this remarkably effective and versatile business method. So far as is known, this report is unique: no other company has published a long-term detailed analysis about its corporate mentoring program.

## 1st Five Conclusions

- 1) Strong and visible long-term executive sponsorship and funding are needed for mentoring to thrive and become part of an organizational culture as the community develops. Continuity builds program strength over time. Mentees, mentors, and managers knowing that a program will continue to be available allows them to include mentoring in their formal and informal development plans.
- 2) Mentoring returns good value for the time and money it takes. The ROI on mentoring can be 1,000% or better and grows as the program matures.
- 3) Mentoring can be used for larger corporate purposes in addition to improving the performance of individuals. At Sun, mentoring has been used to bring in new or acquired individuals and groups, to improve the network between existing groups in different organizations, and to reduce isolation of those geographically distant from headquarters.
- 4) “Real work – real time” Mentoring and being mentored is professional work that can be done as a part of a day job, during business hours, not only during personal time.
- 5) It is important to collect and analyze data routinely on both subjective (satisfaction) and objective (promotion, retention, compensation) success metrics. Make program decisions based on those data. Maintain participant data long-term to see bigger patterns.

## Expert Mentor Advice from this Report:

Best Practices (There's More to Mentoring than Meets the Eye)	Worst Practices (How To Dis-serve Your Mentee)
<p><b>The Fine Art of Effective Listening</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two ears, one mouth...</li> <li>• Patience: problems can be more complex than you think</li> <li>• Sounding board, not “bored”</li> <li>• When remote, acknowledge frequently (paraphrase, clarify)</li> </ul>	<p><b>No time, no time...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cancel at the last minute because something really important comes up</li> <li>• Come late, leave early</li> <li>• Oops, I forgot</li> <li>• Why bother to schedule meetings?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Advise and Catalyze</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not just one answer: It's recognizing and weighing options</li> <li>• Share problem-solving skills and let the mentee find the solution</li> <li>• Discuss the impacts of various actions</li> </ul>	<p><b>Did you say something?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I'm the ME in MENTOR</li> <li>• When I want your opinion, I'll ask for it</li> <li>• If it worked for me, it will work for you</li> </ul>
<p><b>Flexibility (the Mentoring Asana)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect mentee's choice to do what's right for their situation</li> <li>• Accommodate changes in topics, goals</li> <li>• Life happens – reschedule, don't disengage (deadlines, holidays, illnesses)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Everything you do is wrong</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why in the world did you do that?</li> <li>• Well, if you can't explain it, I can't help you</li> <li>• Just do what I say and don't ask questions</li> </ul>
<p><b>Objective Support</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide timely constructive feedback as a <i>disinterested third party</i></li> <li>• Be a safe harbor for venting; be a trustworthy confidant</li> <li>• Evaluate progress and adjust goals</li> <li>• Encourage getting outside comfort zone (reward risk-taking; learn from failure)</li> </ul>	<p><b>No explanations necessary</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surely you can learn by osmosis</li> <li>• No need to share this since it was sent to an email group</li> <li>• If everyone knew about these resources, who'd need me?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Share Yourself, Be Committed</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet regularly – It's not mentoring if it doesn't actually happen</li> <li>• Meet in person whenever possible</li> <li>• Have an open door</li> <li>• Provide the connect between their goals and the company's goals</li> <li>• Connect mentee with your network, engage in theirs</li> <li>• Share your passion, have a passion for sharing</li> </ul>	<p><b>So, as I told your manager...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confidentiality, what confidentiality?</li> <li>• I didn't think you'd mind my sharing...</li> </ul> <p><b>Did you want to get something out of this</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goals? goals? we don't need no stinkin' goals...</li> <li>• Did I say I'd do that?</li> <li>• Your satisfaction is not my problem</li> </ul>

From “Mentoring Isn't Rocket Science” on p.46

For more advice, context, and examples, see the report's section called “Best Practices for Mentors”

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