

Increasing Mentoring's ROI

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CPAs spend many hours studying accounting and tax rules and become very knowledgeable, with CPE insuring that they are fully conversant with any changes. In the very large firms, the training and education offered has a very interesting mix, as a good deal of it doesn't deal with technical knowledge but on the softer skills that can actually contribute more to the success of the individual and the firm. This is readily apparent in the structured way mentoring is conducted in these larger firms. Mentors are trained, mentoring processes and procedures are established, the details of the mentoring program are communicated, and staff members participate in a prescribed manner.

And why do larger firms spend so much time and money on mentoring? They see the success in the performance of those who complete the program, and are very happy with the ROI.

Because of the limited resources of small firms, ROI on spending is extremely important and gets very close scrutiny. The problem is, in new areas like mentoring small firms, because of their lack of familiarity, often overspend and don't get a good ROI.

Small firms therefore need to be creative. I recently came across *Mentoring Process for CPA/CAs-- Third Edition*, by Rex Gatto, that can be helpful in that regard. There is a roadmap to creating structured processes quickly, tools and tips for mentors, and advice for mentees on getting the most from mentoring.

The book doesn't pull any punches, such as when it is pointed out that the mentees' best role is that of the listener, and warns mentors not to be sidetracked by the mentee who is an analyzer (overanalyzes facts), a whiner (complainer), a rejecter (not me!), a victim (poor me!) or a controller (talks too much). Equally important, the book tells mentees what they should look for when selecting a mentor.

"When choosing a mentor, a mentor should be someone:

- *with whom you are comfortable discussing your goals (personal action planner);
- *with whom you can build the rapport needed to help develop your skills;
- *who will listen without judging;
- *who will help you problem solve;
- *who will advise but not tell, guide but not direct;
- *with whom you will feel safe to discuss business and personal issues;
- *who will question and help to challenge your thinking; and
- *who will use his/her wisdom with care and compassion toward you."