

Mentoring MATTERS

Traditional mentoring pairs real estate professionals to facilitate the sharing of skills, expertise and insight into the industry.

BY JESSICA ABELSOHN

The benefits of mentoring in any profession mean you never have to go it alone. A major key to success is surrounding yourself with the right people. When it comes to real estate, it's beneficial to learn from those who come before you, those with more experience and those who have seen it all.

Never go it alone

A mentor can help cultivate leadership skills, reduce anxiety in taking big steps in your career, help you answer client questions and generally help you focus on your goal.

For Vickie van Heuzen, Department Manager at Fitzpatrick's Real Estate Wagga Wagga, mentoring is a fundamental part of how she manages her team of property management professionals. "The reason why I mentor my team is to ultimately help them learn new skills and gain knowledge in property management. It's also about encouraging staff and guiding them to the right tools to help make better choices," she said.

The benefit of having a mentor close by means they'll always have access to new ideas and a new way of thinking. In the real estate industry, this can be crucial. Have a difficult client? Need to answer some challenging questions? Just pick up the phone and call your mentor.

More than just answering questions, mentors are there to help you figure out the solutions yourself. "To be a good mentor I believe you need to have an open door approach, be able to listen to your mentee's needs and make them feel comfortable with any questions they may have," Ms van Heuzen said. "It's about encouraging thoughts."

It's also important to remember that mentoring isn't just about junior or new staff members. Everyone in the industry can benefit from having someone to talk to and bounce ideas off.

Buddy up

According to Laing+Simmons General Manager Leanne Pilkington, the buddy system is a great place to start. "I think it's essential that you have a period of time where you just shadow a good agent. It's important to give an understanding of what the day-to-day tasks are," she said. "A lot of people learn from observing, so it's important

to listen to the way an experienced agent communicates with clients and potential clients. It just gives the mentee a better sense of what the industry is about and perhaps how to handle the more difficult conversations."

Beneficial for everyone

It's not just about the mentee. Mentors get a wealth of experience out of the process as well.

On top of the personal satisfaction of knowing you've helped someone along their way, the benefits to a mentor include being known as an expert in your field, the opportunity to reflect on your own goals and developing your leadership skills. For Ms van Heuzen, it's always wonderful to hear that one of her team members has been successful. "I feel really proud when I hear of a successful outcome for one of my team members, especially when I realise I contributed to that outcome because of my advice and guidance. That's what keeps me going in the ever-challenging world of property management."

According to Ms Pilkington, it's also about effective communication. "As a mentor, you've got to challenge people to get to the conclusion themselves; you don't want to be giving them all of the answers."

It's all about collaborative learning. By helping others, mentors help themselves and improve their own skills. "Looking at things through other people's eyes also gives you a fresh perspective. When people are new to the business, they're quite often really enthusiastic and excited by it and that's always motivating for me to be around," Ms Pilkington said.

It's all about the one-on-one

Mentoring is specific. It's a one-on-one technique used to help further skills and foster success in the industry. Mentors keep you on track, help make an efficient plan and help you stick to it. For businesses, it's an essential retention and succession-planning tool. It can be difficult to keep people motivated and willing to stay in the one business their whole career. If you show interest in them and are willing to go the extra mile when it comes to fostering their knowledge, they may just be keen to stick around. ♦

Rebecca (left) was paired with Vanessa (right) in the mentoring program.



Morton & Morton

Morton & Morton has developed a one-on-one mentoring program that new staff members go through as soon as they step foot in the door.

Mentors become buddies for new staff members. This means having every question answered, job-related or not.

According to Vanessa Jacobs, assistant to Ewan Morton, the company started the program due to growth. "The number of staff was increasing rapidly and there was a need to ensure that new staff members didn't feel lost in the changing environment. Once the initial induction process has finished and the day-to-day job commences, questions inevitably pop up. It isn't always possible to ask the department head or manager every question."

Enter the mentoring program. The agency has found that new relationships between staff, that may not have been formed otherwise, between staff have been formed as a result of the program. The ability to ask staff members questions means the heads of departments are freed up to continue their management roles.

Ms Jacobs said the program has definitely been successful. "We've had instances where issues have been quickly resolved between mentor and mentee without any management becoming involved."

Property Manager Rebecca Ramsay took part in the program and said it helped her settle into the agency. "It's a great way to have someone to go to within the workplace on a more casual basis. It was easier for me to settle in the company and the job because I had a go-to person, who I was able to go to straightaway rather than figuring out who the appropriate person was. Also, the company chose someone who suited my personality and was a good fit for me."