Bulletin Board: Finding a mentor is a do-it-yourself chore

by Amy_Winter

LACK OF MENTORS

New staff members may have to search for a mentor themselves in order to learn more about the company or business. Fifty-eight percent of more than 1,400 chief financial officers polled in a survey by Accountemps, a staffing service, said it's unusual for new hires to be placed with mentors within their organizations.

Within the accounting and finance departments of the surveyed companies, only 13 percent of the CFOs responded that mentors were very common. Twenty-five percent answered somewhat common, while the majority at 58 percent said not common at all.

"Mentoring is a valuable way to transfer wisdom, foster talent and promote best practices within the company," said Max Messmer, chairman of Accountemps and author of "Motivating Employees for Dummies" (For Dummies, $22). "The faster a business can help new employees get up to speed, the more quickly these professionals can begin contributing."

Katharine Hansen, creative director for Quintessential Careers, says a mentor serves as a guide who can care for a new worker and help him or her on a career path. A mentor usually has connections or wisdom to assist the new hire.

Hansen suggests professional organizations in a person's field of study as good resources for finding a mentor. She says experts recommend monthly meetings to exchange ideas.

Mentors can help new staff members to review their strengths and weaknesses. In addition, they may assist new hires in developing skills in order to be more successful in the workplace, according to Hansen. This could include overcoming workplace problems.

Mentors offer a new perspective.

"A confidant also is useful for explaining aspects of an organization that are sometimes not obvious to a newcomer," said Messmer. "Mentors can provide insight into the prevailing culture of a company, including the preferred modes of communication and other often-unspoken rules."

For more information, visit www.accountemps.com or www.quintcareers.com.

OFFICE ON VACATION

Some workers can't seem to leave the office at home when it is time for vacation. Twenty percent of workers say they will stay in contact with the office while on vacation this year, according to CareerBuilder.com's annual vacation survey in which Harris Interactive polled more than 6,800 workers.

Those wanting to climb the career ladder might feel guilty for taking time off. Twenty percent of 25- to 34-year-olds said they feel very guilty while on vacation.

Some workers might take a short vacation or not go on one at all this year. Twenty percent plan to eliminate a vacation, while 27 percent will take fewer than five days. Approximately 9 percent will take their vacations as weekend getaways.

"There are a host of reasons why employees feel compelled to forgo a vacation or obsessively check in," said Rosemary Haefner, vice president of Human Resources at CareerBuilder.com. "Some may fear if they are gone and things go smoothly, it will send a message that they aren't needed. However, the opposite can actually be true. If you prepare in advance and anticipate issues, it can positively reflect on your management and organization skills."

Haefner offers some tips so that workers can enjoy their vacations without worrying about work:

- Write down important information, contacts and deadlines for co-workers. This gives them the ability to understand projects so you won't have to be contacted.

- Set limits for yourself and your co-workers. Tell them when you will call to avoid interrupting their activities.

- Try to plan your vacation before or after big projects at the office.

EXCUSES FOR BEING LATE

Workers who come to the office late might be lying to save face. Twenty-five percent of workers polled in a CareerBuilder.com survey admit to making up excuses for being late.

Sixteen percent of workers say they come to the office late at least once a week. According to the survey, males appear to be on time more often than females. Forty-one percent of males compared to 37 percent of females have never been late to work.

Thirty-one percent of workers blamed their tardiness on traffic. The other top excuses were falling back to sleep and getting their children ready for school.

"While 44 percent of hiring managers say they don't care if their employees are late as long as their work is completed on time with good quality, others are much stricter in their policies," said Rosemary Haefner, vice president of Human Resources for CareerBuilder.com. "In fact, one in five hiring managers say they would consider terminating an employee if he or she arrives late two or three times in a given year. The key is to know your individual manager's expectations."

For more information, visit www.careerbuilder.com.

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