**Why Mentoring Matters (**(from AskEARN.org: Resources to Help Employers Hire and Retain Employees with Disabilities)

Workplace mentoring has many benefits for federal government employers and agencies as well as protégés and mentors.

**Benefits to Employers**

Mentoring can help federal agencies, which face fierce private sector competition, to attract, support and retain talented employees at all levels. In an age of rigorous performance standards and severe budget constraints, mentoring aids in improving employee performance, motivation, and accountability. As masses of Baby Boomers prepare to retire from government service, mentoring may be most valuable as a means of transferring knowledge from one generation to the next and preparing future leaders to fill the vacancies of retirees.

Mentoring can also help federal agencies increase employees' cultural competence by expanding their awareness and deepening their relationships with other employees who differ from them. As Younes (2001) explains, "Diverse customers need a diverse workforce to serve them." Federal agencies need a diverse workforce to appropriately respond to an increasingly diverse citizenry. Offering mentoring for and between employees of diverse backgrounds and with various differences helps agencies foster collaborative relationships and open communication among all employees. For more information about mentoring in a diverse and inclusive workplace, [click here.](http://askearn.org/?pg=fed_home_diverse)

In her April 2010 testimony to Congress, the U. S. Office of Personnel Management's Associate Director and Chief Human Capital Officer Nancy H. Kichak described the important role mentoring plays in developing a diverse federal workforce:

"Mentoring is...an integral part of developing and retaining a diverse workforce. Federal agencies need managers and supervisors with the skills to manage and mentor diverse populations. Managing diversity within the workplace means creating an environment where everyone is empowered to contribute to the work of the unit; it requires sensitivity to and awareness of the interactions among staff and between staff and leadership, and knowing how to articulate clear expectations. Effective mentoring in a multicultural setting involves understanding diverse learning styles and approaches to problem-solving, as well as other cultural differences, and appreciating how to use those differences to serve the organization's mission. Mentoring to diverse populations is crucial to meeting and exceeding organizational goals" (U. S. Office of Personnel Management, 2010).

While federal agencies primarily use formal classroom based or online training and education to achieve talent development and performance improvement goals, mentoring complements these strategies by promoting continuous learning and skills development guided and supported by the mentor. Mentoring also fosters positive workplace relationships across generations of employees or among groups of peers.

Employees who receive ongoing training, support and encouragement from a workplace mentor often report greater job satisfaction, an important factor when it comes to increasing employee retention and productivity. Mentoring is a common practice in many private sector workplaces for this very reason. A KPMG employee explains how mentoring benefits their company as follows: "It has resulted in higher employee satisfaction, lower turnover and professionals who are better aligned with the organization and feel part of the team" (Owens, 2006). The Social Security Administration credits its use of mentoring at all levels of the agency with increasing employee job satisfaction and engagement ratings (Walker, 2007). The SSA moved from a number 21 ranking in 2005 to a number 7 ranking in the 2007 "Best Places to Work in the Federal Government" study conducted annually by the Partnership for Public Service and American University. More ways in which mentoring benefits employers are outlined in [Table 2.](http://askearn.org/?pg=fed_mentoring_benefits)

While most mentoring research focuses on individual outcomes among protégés, some studies demonstrate tangible organizational outcomes. Most notably, a five-year research study of the mentoring program at Sun Microsystems found the annual job performance ratings of employees who received mentoring were 40 percent higher on average than the performance ratings of non-participants (Dickinson, Jankot, & Gracon, 2009). The study also found the job retention rate of both protégés and mentors was about 20 percent greater than the job retention rate of non-participants (Holincheck, 2006, cited in Triple Creek Associates, 2010).Researchers calculated the return on the company's investment in the mentoring program to be 1000 percent based on the higher rates of retention and job performance among mentoring participants (Dickinson, Jankot, & Gracon, 2009).

**Benefits to Protégés**

As a guide, the mentor can help the employee choose the best path or strategies to accomplish his/her work thereby increasing the protégé's productivity. As a sounding board, the mentor can help the employee assess his/her interests, values, and skills, but ultimately leaves it up to the employee to define his/her goals. The mentor can also help the employee consider various options when faced with tough decisions and identify and remove potential barriers to success. The ways in which mentoring benefits employees are outlined in Table 2.

Various research studies confirm the benefits to protégés are significant. In their review of research findings across multiple studies, Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, and Lima (2004) found individuals who received career-related mentoring consistently reported better career outcomes including higher rates of promotion and higher job satisfaction when compared to employees who did not participate in mentoring.

**Benefits to Mentors**

Although the primary aim of mentoring is to support the protégé, mentors also benefit in the process. According to Pardini (2006), mentoring has the following positive effects on mentors:

* Mentors gain personal and professional satisfaction from helping another person;
* Mentors gain recognition from their peers and the agency for contributing their time and expertise;
* Mentors improve their interpersonal skills by exercising many of same skills required to effectively supervise and manage their own employees;
* Mentors have an opportunity to focus energy outside of themselves;
* Mentors gain a deeper understanding of other employees' experiences; and
* Mentoring prepares those who serve as mentors to take on greater responsibilities and leadership roles within the agency.

Higher job retention rates found among mentors in the Sun Microsystems mentoring program study are a concrete example of how participation affects mentors (Holincheck, 2006, cited in Triple Creek Associates, 2010).