Prevalence and Success of Reverse Mentoring in Public Relations


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The full text of our article is online at:

Overview – Project Background, Participants, Results

Reverse mentoring, defined as a structured or unstructured workplace relationship between senior practitioners and younger less experienced workers, continues to gain in popularity due to rapidly changing technology and channels of communication. However, little is known about the extent to which public relations professionals recognize and use reverse mentoring. We found that the academic literature in public relations offered no significant studies on this topic – so we began our work with the study that is detailed in this article. We are pleased to be able to make this small contribution, and we hope that our work will spur other scholars and professionals to explore the issues surrounding reverse mentoring (as well as other forms of mentoring) in the public relations workplace.

This study was an initial effort to learn more about the ways reverse mentoring is used in the public relations workplace. It involved in-depth telephone interviews with 23 public relations professionals who work in the western United States. Those surveyed were all members of the Public Relations Society of America and the majority (65%) were senior-level professionals working for a for-profit entity (70%). Close to three-fourths of respondents (74%) reported that their organization did not practice reverse mentoring, and, of those that did, only one claimed the existence of a formal, structured program. Only one respondent identified the use of any training for mentors or mentees. Reverse mentoring that did exist was described as “voluntary mentorship” or an “internship program.”

Technology was the clear favorite subject area for reverse mentoring, particularly social media. The practice was considered successful by those surveyed but no formal measures of success were utilized. Success in reverse mentoring is defined as having tangible success, cooperation and respect, and the sharing of knowledge and new ideas. Benefits of a reverse mentoring program included improvement in social media skills and improvement in social media vocabulary.

We welcome questions, and look forward to engaging session participants in a discussion of this important public relations issue!