

Mentoring for the modern newsroom

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Mentoring definitions

“A personal development relationship in which a more experienced or more knowledgeable person helps to guide a less experienced or less knowledgeable person”

Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mentorship>

Newsroom staff typically interpret it as a type of coaching, with the emphasis tending to be on job skills – often writing skills – rather than career development.

Why formal mentoring in a newsroom?

- Goal setting
- Career development
- Engagement at a time of industry upheaval

The project: To provide a framework for a practical mentoring scheme specific to Herald on Sunday

The brief:

One-to-one help for people wanting to find their way more quickly in journalism.

A way for some of our senior staff to have a more meaningful way of passing on their experience to people who want to listen.

A proper mentoring system, with everyone knowing what they should contribute and aim to get out of it, will boost engagement in the newsroom.

- Bryce Johns, Herald on Sunday editor, December 2012

Mentoring schemes

Waikato Times (c. 2008) and Herald on Sunday (2012-13)

- Senior journalists mentoring juniors within single newsroom
- About six pairs in each newsroom
- Effort made to adapt mentoring principles to newsroom practice
- Mentoring could mostly be characterised as coaching
- Waikato Times focus tended to be on writing. HoS also had a noticeable strand focused on contact building.

Herald on Sunday

Feedback after 11 months:

- Started off very strong, from nearly all parties. Over time it did drop off, particularly with some mentees moving on. One felt mismatched to his mentor, but in general the mentees were more enthusiastic than the mentors. About half are still meeting months down the track.
- As much about empowerment as anything, mentees feel they have an outlet to engage with.
- At the very worst it has shown staff we want to engage them in the business, and we want to listen to them. Valuable in that alone, let alone some of the practical solutions that have been achieved.

from former HoS editor Bryce Johns and deputy editor Jonathan Milne

Fairfax

- Group-wide scheme with possibility of crossing job groups (not only journalists mentoring journalists)
- Uses Mentoring Works (Australian-based generic scheme run by Ann Rolfe)
- Runs April to September
- About 50 pairs
- About 60 percent of mentees and about 45 per cent of mentors are female.

Comments from members of Fairfax scheme

“I feel Fairfax has done a really great job at matching me with a mentor, which has been really important given we are based in different islands. My mentor has been able to provide me with great insight into the business and share his experiences with me in terms of the commercial environment and how I can excel and succeed in my career.”

“I think the learning has been two-way. I have learnt about the approach that the younger breed of journalists are now taught in colleges, etc. The mentoring has also opened my eyes to different techniques in journalism.”

Supplied by Fairfax from notice posted on staff intranet

Looking ahead

- The notion of a formal mentoring scheme is still new to newsrooms
- Fairfax has placed a value on mentoring within the group
- APN has a model to develop if it chooses
- Mentoring meets management's desire to be seen to be offering support
- How well can senior staff mentor junior staff in a time of rapid change?