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# Women's History Month Webcast Focuses on Mentorship

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WASHINGTON, March 10, 2016 — The U.S. Office of Personnel Management hosted a mentoring webcast today in recognition of Women's History Month, focusing on how mentorship affects ability to meet the mission.

Rebekah McCloud, director of student development and enrollment services at the University of Central Florida, spoke about five key aspects about mentoring women: employee retention; leadership development; organizational learning; growing the talent pool, especially in cybersecurity and science, technology, engineering and math education; and increasing diversity.

McCloud said research reveals that a low number of women work in upper management and executive positions, that there therefore is a low number of women role models, that there are differences in the way men and women are mentors, and that women tend to undervalue their achievements and experiences.

### **Employee Retention**

"Mentoring programs have reported a significant improvement in employee retention," McCloud said. "Having someone to walk with you, to walk side by side with you, it's important."

She said mentors can help employees think through their job responsibilities, find ways to use their skills and talents, and help employees plan, develop and manage their careers.

Employees can feel valued when the organization values mentoring, she said, and employee recognition programs can show that commitment. She also suggested that salary decisions, raises or increases or bonuses be based on mentoring or other kinds of coaching and activities.

"If you get recognized for mentoring someone, that says your organization values you, and it values mentoring," McCloud said. "It also can be a part of your performance appraisal, the things you get evaluated on. It may not be a part of your job description, but somebody says, 'These are valuable, value-added assets to our company. We value the things we pay for. We put our money where our mouth is, and we pay for it. We value it.'"

McCloud said mentoring could also be part of the process as new employees enter the organization.

“Think about how people get a mentor,” she said. “Is somebody ‘voluntold’ they had to do it, or is it someone who volunteers to become a mentor? There’s a big difference. That tells how much you value it. Mentorship also impacts leadership development.”

### **Leadership Development**

Most organizations have all the leaders they need within the organization already, McCloud said. “These employees with deep experience are in a unique position to develop mentors,” she said. “We need to utilize them.”

These people can help with the development of leadership competencies, she said, adding that they may not always be in the top positions -- they may be the secretaries or the “gatekeepers.”

Mentors can help employees improve their job performance, McCloud said. “People lose their jobs because they don’t perform well,” she added. “It is my contention that people don’t start off as bad employees. We all want to do a good job. A mentor can help you out. A mentor is a person who can say, ‘Let me talk to you about that performance’ and ‘Let me talk to you about that decision.’ Let me help you frame the conversation you’re going to have with this employee.”

McCloud said organizations should focus on developing and advancing middle-management women to upper-level positions and should develop a mentoring culture that embeds mentoring throughout the organization and in everything they do.

### **Organizational Learning**

Organizational learning is a key indicator of success, McCloud said. “Veteran employees can help organizations preserve knowledge and transfer it to younger employees,” she explained.

“Organizations need succession plans for all positions, especially those occupied by veteran employees and those who are poised to retire.”

McCloud said energy is necessary when mentoring young employees, because “they come in with a lot of energy and excitement and a lot of ideas.” But “reverse mentoring” also should be part of the equation, she added.

“Reverse mentoring is when young folks mentor the novice,” she said. “We can learn across the multigenerational mentoring grade; you can learn young from old. Mentors can shorten the time between an employee being newly qualified or fully qualified.”

For example, she said, younger employees have helped her with the advanced technology and social media platforms. To get the younger employees fully qualified, she said, everyone should consider some level of mentoring to help them.

“You want those people to become fully qualified. They are newly qualified, especially folks right out of college, but you know they have potential,” McCloud said. “You have to have some mentoring to make that happen. It’s empowering. It’s frustrating, but it’s necessary in an organization. Mentors can provide career guidance to the less-experienced but high-potential employees, and mentors can bridge the skills gap.”

### **Growing Talent Pool**

“Women are often underutilized,” McCloud said. “We are growing in numbers in the workforce, but when there are jobs to be done, when we think they are important, women are overlooked and underutilized. Women have so many talents, and sometimes we don’t speak up for ourselves. Sometimes we don’t let people know we have talents. Mentoring can grow women.”

She said visibility is the key. “It’s not who you know but who knows you,” McCloud said, repeating it for emphasis. “When people start thinking about who to involve in a team, do they know you? Do they know your work, your accomplishments?”

As mentees grow, they become mentors themselves and pay it forward over and over, she said. “You never lose your flame by lighting another one,” she added.

McCloud noted that few women work in the STEM areas. “Those women really need support,” she said. “If you are mentoring women in those areas, think about what extra support you can give employees in those areas. Reach out and make connections. It may not necessarily be within your department, within your division or within the government. It may be elsewhere. But make those connections to support those women. Think about mentoring like any other business decision.”

### **Diversity**

“Diversity is something we must do in organizations,” McCloud said. “Diversity will help your organization in so many ways. People who are not people of color get just as much out of diversity as people of color do. Diversity includes all of us.”

She said inclusivity means looking around and seeing who is missing from the table and making sure there is room for them at the table. McCloud also said grassroots efforts are great, but only if diversity starts top-down and from the bottom-up. “The top has to buy into diversity as an initiative and be involved in mentoring,” she added.

Mentoring should be fostered and cultivated, McCloud told the webcast audience. “Go out and start reading, be a part of a formal initiative,” she said. “Get started with mentoring.”

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