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**Paul McDonald** • Jun. 12, 2018

Mentorships are a proven employee development tool, and CFOs' responses to a [recent Robert Half Management Resources survey](#) suggest they've received the message. Of those interviewed, 62 percent said they have served as a formal or informal mentor at some point in their career. Often seen as only a transfer of knowledge from experienced workers to new recruits, mentoring is, in fact, an asset to every party involved.

## Benefits for mentees

Even though your [recent graduates](#) have just spent the last several years preparing for their first job, there's still so much more they need to know. It can be jarring to go straight from school to the fast pace of a public accounting firm. Senior staff can serve as their trusted guide, career counselor and sounding board. Mentors help ease newer employees into the corporate culture and navigate office politics by allowing them to ask questions and explore options in a safe-to-risk setting.

Don't limit the opportunity to learn from a mentor to entry- and staff-level team members, though; everyone benefits from a mentor. Find senior-level colleagues to counsel managers and executives. Also consider reverse mentorships for higher-level employees, who can learn from less-experienced individuals about areas such as what motivates different groups of staff, new technology and diverse approaches to work.

## Benefits for mentors

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## Benefits for accounting firms

The advantages of mentoring accrue to more than two people. It's also an excellent way to attract, develop and hold on to top accountants and auditors. New hires who encounter a colleague with an interest in their professional success are more likely to stay committed to your firm.

## Setting up a mentoring program

Eighty-six percent of CFOs in a [separate Robert Half survey](#) said they believe having a mentor is important for career development. But despite all the positives, only 26 percent of workers surveyed reported having an advisor. If mentoring isn't currently among your firm's priorities, it's time to reconsider.

Keep these tips in mind when launching a mentoring program:

- **Know what it is and isn't.** For the program to succeed, it needs to become an integral part of the corporate culture rather than just a prolonged period of orientation.  
In addition, a mentor does not serve as the person's boss. Rather, the duo meets occasionally to explore big-picture topics like career development.
- **Have a time limit.** Employees are more likely to sign up if they know it's a finite relationship rather than a permanent commitment. An end date also helps keep meetings focused and productive.
- **Make it official.** Get buy-in from management, including senior partners. Put someone in charge to organize efforts and maintain momentum. Promote the mentoring program during recruitment, and then match new hires with tenured employees during the onboarding process. Revisit it during performance reviews.
- **Keep it voluntary.** Don't force employees to participate. On the other hand, do emphasize the program's many benefits, and encourage employees to opt in.

- **Serve as matchmaker.** Have interested participants complete a questionnaire

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Mentees will know what to work toward, and mentors can then offer feedback on performance and recognition for good work.

- **Request feedback. At regular intervals, survey participants on what's working and what's not.** Use constructive criticism to improve the experience, and take advantage of positive testimonials to recruit future participants. If necessary, adjust the program and pairings based on what you hear.

A successful mentoring program requires the employer and its staff to invest time and resources. But the end results are well worth the effort.

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*Paul McDonald is senior executive director at [Robert Half](#), the world's first and largest specialized staffing firm. He writes and speaks frequently on hiring, workplace and career-management topics. Over the course of more than 30 years in the recruiting field, McDonald has advised thousands of company leaders and job seekers on how to hire and get hired.*

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