

This is a transcript from a January, 2013 HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW audio interview of Jeanne Meister. She conducted an interview with 1100 working professionals. Her findings:

1. Boomers are the most disengaged employees in your organization. They need a shot in the arm. It's not hard! And there is a payoff for taking the time to get them engaged.
2. For Millennials, the concept of having one Mentor is very 20<sup>th</sup> Century. They are creating informal advisory Boards of Mentors for different purposes. These Mentors will come from inside and outside your companies.

## **TRANSCRIPT**

SUSAN FRANCIS: Welcome to the HBR IdeaCast from Harvard Business Review. I'm Susan FRANCIS. And I'm on the phone today with Jeanne Meister, a partner at Future Workplace, which helps organizations redefine their corporate learning and talent management strategies. She's the co-author of *The 2020 Workplace: How Innovative Companies Attract, Develop, and Keep Tomorrow's Employees Today*. Jeanne, thanks so much for talking with us.

JEANNE MEISTER: Thank you for inviting me, Susan. It's a pleasure to be here.

SUSAN FRANCIS: So tell us, what's the greatest benefit a mentor can offer to someone looking to manage up and across their organization?

JEANNE MEISTER: I think one of the greatest benefits is increasing that employee's engagement. Future Workplace just finished a very large study called *The Second Annual Generations at Work Study* where we interviewed online a sample of roughly 1,100 working professionals across the generations. And what we found was that employee engagement, not surprised, is at an all time low the older you get in an organization.

So the boomers-- ages between 46 and 64-- are the ones with the highest levels of disengagement. And these are the individuals that are, in many cases, leaders in organizations. And they're feeling a lot of frustration and disengagement. So I think just giving someone a shot in the arm to reinvigorate them in their career is one of the biggest benefits for the organization to really impact increased revenue and increased customer satisfaction.

SUSAN FRANCIS: And speaking of knowledge sharing, we know that a mentor can share her deeper institutional knowledge with you, but how does that actually happen?

JEANNE MEISTER: Well, one of the first things we have to deal with on the topic of mentors is it's not just one mentor. And the individuals that are most successful in tapping mentors, or in a sense, creating their own personal board of directors. So they're very deliberately saying what are the skills gaps that I have? And it could be building cultural intelligence or a deeper global mindset. Or it could be building better innovation skills. Or it could be simply just learning a new language because that's the language of the country where your company is investing in.

So it's really developing deeper institutional knowledge. It's how can you put together a network of mentors both inside your company and outside to fill those skill gaps. And that's what we see the really clever working professionals doing. And I might add that this is something the millennials are doing without our knowledge.

In that same survey of generations at work, when we asked all workers and then segmented it by generation, we found that with millennials, mentoring and strong coaches was the number one preferred method to develop your skills way ahead of classroom training. And actually, e-learning was on the bottom of that list. So these young professionals have figured out that learning is personal, it's social, it's collaborative. And they're making deliberate attempts to seek out people that can help them.

And as we know, Susan, with LinkedIn, it's really easy to find the individuals you think you need to fill the skill gap. So mentoring is a lot less formal than it once was 10 or 20 years ago.

SUSAN FRANCIS: Right. And what about your boss-- how can your mentor help you with that relationship?

JEANNE MEISTER: Well, I think, first of all, everyone should be linked to their boss on LinkedIn, right? So you're going to be able to find out who is in your boss's network, if your boss is doing daily or weekly updates on LinkedIn, what are the articles that your boss is sharing? Are you connected to your boss on Twitter? What is he or she saying on a regular basis?

So I am advocating a bit of start lurking your boss and your boss's network. And it's actually a good thing. It's how you're going to learn what's important to your boss. Now that you know what your boss is interested in, you can be much more proactive in sharing content, articles, conferences, whatever that will help your boss reach their individual business goals.

SUSAN FRANCIS: Right. And sort of aside from following them on LinkedIn, how can your mentor help you understand what else is happening at your boss's level to get a sense of what's on her radar or what her challenges are-- things that might not be publicly posted on LinkedIn or might not be able to be as easily gleaned from something like that?

JEANNE MEISTER: Assuming your mentor is inside the company, versus outside the company-- and what we're seeing is a lot more mentors are a combination of both. So it's not one. It's a community or this personal board of director. So these mentors can really help you develop a deeper understanding of your boss's priorities. Once you know them, and really you've developed a plan-- I think you have to be very deliberate in developing a quick one or two pages on these are the priorities of your boss. These are the areas that your boss is looking at to further their agenda within the company.

And then it's really working this with your mentor in as many different ways as possible. Maybe you need to develop new skills in order to help your boss further their agenda. And that's something your mentor can help you with-- filling those skill gaps not necessarily directly, but sharing where you can go to do that. So I think if you almost develop a strategic plan of what

your boss is trying to accomplish. And then how can you be deliberate in making yourself the go-to person to meet your boss's objective? And so that's key.

I think the mentor can also help you work better with your boss. As we know, getting immediate feedback is key. So my advice in working with this community of mentors is to really start asking for regular and immediate feedback from your boss to really understand how you can do a better job in what you're assigned to do and in meeting your boss's objectives.

SUSAN FRANCIS: And once we start working sort of across the company, and with different groups, and maybe people we don't now as well, sometimes that doesn't always go as well as we would like. So how can your mentor sort of help you figure out which battles to fight and how to most effectively fight them?

JEANNE MEISTER: Well, I think really being honest and open with your community of mentors. That's really what's going to be the difference between being successful and not-- picking those battles and understanding how you can socialize your point of view and continually socialize your point of view both within the organization and, I think, outside the organization. I'm beginning to see a lot of VP level individuals that are really wanting to take on speaking and writing articles where you really didn't do it so much years ago. And now everyone really sees being their own subject matter expert in an area, and nurturing that, and developing their own personal brand either through writing and speaking is one of the ways to bring your point of view inside the organization.

So I think being visible and understanding what you really care about-- what your point of view is. And then understanding how to build your personal brand around that point of view both inside the company and, importantly, outside the company. I mean, how often do you hear the added my company really only respects those that are outside consultants because they've been astute in marketing their point of view?

Well then how can you, inside the company, do the same thing? That's what you want to really build-- your personal brand to align with whatever agenda you have. And then it's going to be pretty clear which battles you're going to fight because you're going to be pretty well-known around a particular point of view.

So I think we need to build our relationships in a very deliberate way now. And then, of course, there's the whole work that Doctor Robert Cross has done at the University of Virginia on social network analysis. Really understanding who are the go-to people in an organization and aligning yourself with those individuals that can help further your point of view on a particular project. So that has become really quite a big area.

And companies are spending a lot of money understanding their internal social network analysis. And use this and how it furthers a project you're working on. And then, finally, share all this with your mentor. One of the interesting questions, then, is how do you benefit the mentor?

SUSAN FRANCIS: Right. Right. Which is the perfect segway because I was thinking that we've been speaking a lot about what you can get from your mentor or your community of mentors, but

finding ways to add value to the relationship for your mentor or the people on your personal board is obviously a good practice for managing up. So what kind of things can people do to benefit their mentors?

JEANNE MEISTER: Well, it's the same as understanding what's important to your boss. So let's say I have a mentor that is working in one of the emerging countries around the world-- the brick part of the world or South Africa. Really understanding what is important to this mentor, and then being very deliberate in helping the mentor learn more about what could be of value to them.

So I would do something really simple, like put in your Google alert the top three things that are important to the mentor. Let's say it's doing business in Brazil, or innovation, or mobile learning, or whatever. And use technology to further your own knowledge, but importantly, in a deliberate way, further the knowledge of your mentor.

The other great thing that you can be doing is understanding what's important to your mentored by looking at their Twitter feed. What kinds of conversations are they having? And how can you be part of that conversation and add value to the mentor? So I think there are some very simple tools that we all take for granted that we should be using to help our mentor further their strategic agendas because we have to give as well as take.

SUSAN FRANCIS: Right. Well, Jeanne, thanks again for joining us today.

JEANNE MEISTER: You're welcome.