



## Help When You Need It

As you read this column, you may be planning a project that requires new information, skills or contacts your office does not have. Or perhaps you are interested in your own career development. Could you benefit from the advice of a trusted expert but don't know where to turn? If so, our Situational Mentoring Program can help.

The State Department's Situational Mentoring Program was created in 2005 to help interns, contractors, Civil Service and Foreign Service employees, and Locally Employed Staff at all grade levels solve problems, uncover talents and learn new skills. Currently, we have more than 400 situational mentors with a wide array of expertise, from foreign affairs, consular issues and public affairs to human resources, information technology and program management.

Unlike other Department mentoring programs that involve a longer-term commitment between mentor and mentee, situational mentors provide advice on a specific issue or circumstance. Here are some examples of the more than 430 employees who have taken advantage of the Situational Mentoring Program this year:

- When an entry-level employee with a high school diploma wanted advice on how to advance, she contacted an office director who discussed her educational options and referred her to the Career Development Resource Center, where she could get specialized job counseling.
- When another employee was working in a position that was not clearly defined, she found it helpful to talk to a situational mentor who understood the challenges of initiating changes within a bureaucracy. Her mentor encouraged her to be more assertive and to attempt to create opportunities instead of hoping they would arise.
- Another employee was offered a coveted detail after following her situational mentor's advice to conduct informational interviews with Department professionals to learn more about what they and their offices do. Now, that employee is herself a situational mentor and has set up informational interviews for her mentees. In her words, it is "a great way to learn about another bureau or office, get to meet new people and get your name out there in a positive, low-risk way."
- A mentee in an IT position wanted experience with Human Resources but was reluctant to request a rotation until he had his next career ladder promotion. His mentor suggested that he check with his boss on whether

participating in a rotational assignment in HR would hinder his ability to get promoted on time. He followed this advice and got the green light. He will now be doing a rotation in HR, where he can utilize his IT experience while learning HR work.

- A locally employed staff member in Tunis was called to mentor an employee in Algeria in procurement activities. She went to Algeria for a three-day temporary duty and was a great help to that post.

None of us has all the answers to the wide variety of issues and challenges we confront on a daily basis. Whether an entry-level employee or a senior official, we all can benefit from a network of experienced advisors with whom we can brainstorm ideas and from whom we can solicit impartial guidance. That's what our situational mentors provide, and I encourage you to take advantage of this valuable resource.

For further information about our Situational Mentoring Program or to sign up to be a mentor, please visit the mentoring Web site at: <http://intranet.hr.state.sbu/Workforce/Development/Pages/Mentoring.aspx>, e-mail [mentoring@state.gov](mailto:mentoring@state.gov), or speak with Sue Beffel at (202) 663-2144.

If you have any general comments or suggestions on this or any other topic, please feel free to send them to me via unclassified e-mail at DG Direct. ■

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