

## CREATING AN INFORMAL AND STORY-BASED MENTORING PROGRAM AT BORAL

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I've been a manager here for 15 years and this is the first training program I've attended that uses our own experience as the source material.

Boral senior manager

Boral Plasterboard is a division of Boral, a major Australian diversified building products company. The division has approximately 900 staff across Australia.

Boral Plasterboard (PB) people are highly motivated and committed to the business. Staff survey results show there are high levels of engagement and satisfaction. To a great extent Plasterboard leaders have created the conditions where their people can excel in part because of the investment in leadership and developing people and the support provided to a range of initiatives like Frontline Leadership, competency-based training, Cert III in Competitive Manufacturing, safety initiatives and sales training, just to name a few. Leaders knew it was important to keep building on this solid foundation especially in the light of emerging challenges such as increased competition, changing markets and increasing customer.

In 2009 the HR team asked the leadership team where they should as a business focus next in building capability. After a Visioning and SWOT exercise the leaders decided to focus on enhancing Plasterboard's mentoring capability.

### PURPOSE OF THE MENTORING PROGRAM

The purpose of the mentoring program was fourfold:

- provide potential mentors and kouhai<sup>1</sup> with skills on how to get the most from the mentoring relationship
- inspire people to be mentors and kouhai
- deepen the culture of mentoring at Plasterboard

### DESIGN PRINCIPLES

We designed the mentoring program with these principles in mind:

**Informal**—for the majority of staff we won't match-make or provide a directory of mentors. Rather we will make people aware of the value they can get from a mentoring relationship and what a good one looks and feels like.

**Word of mouth dissemination**—rather than heavily promote/launch the program we created ways for people to talk about the program so they want to be part of it.

**Intranet site- Tools and Guides**—we created a simple guides for people to download.

**Focus on bright spots**—we sought out great mentors and kouhai (bright spots), helped participants to understand their behaviour and work out ways to replicate this throughout the business.

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<sup>1</sup> 'kouhai' is a Japanese work meaning someone with less experience than an elder or teacher (*sempai*). We wanted to avoid the term 'mentee.' Other alternatives to kouhai include protégé, collaborator or colleague.

**Participants work much of it out themselves.** We avoided the expert telling the participants what to think. Rather we created conditions where they will work things out for themselves. This is stickier.

## THE PROGRAM

Like many other Anecdote projects we started by collecting stories from the Boral workforce. In this case we sought out stories of good and bad mentoring. We ran a handful of anecdote circles (see our guide on how to run anecdote circles) and collected 60+ anecdotes. We selected 40 for the workshop.

The workshop is designed for the participants to experience the stories and discover for themselves what's good mentoring. With this knowledge we then go on to help them to build the skills of a good mentor.

The participants learn for themselves, from reading and discussion the mentoring stories we collected, that good mentors are good listeners, ask good questions, tell relevant stories, provide advice and challenge their kouhai. Mentors also care about their kouhai and that mentoring can be short-lived or long lasting.

After the workshop the participants receive an email every two weeks with a challenge to apply a specific skill they learned during the workshop. We call this our deliberate practice program. For example one of the skills they learn is how to find and tell a story to convey, for example, a value. They are challenged, for instance, to tell three stories within a week and keep a note of what happened as a result.

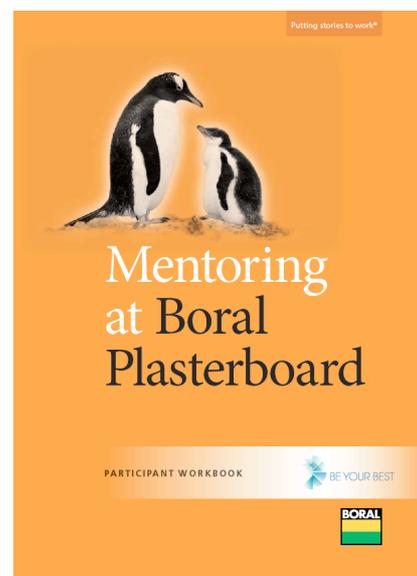
The deliberate practice program keeps the lessons from the mentoring workshop in their minds and hopefully they will try some of the things they learned and act their way into a new way of knowing.

## VIDEOS OF THE LEADERS

We wanted the workshop participants to also discover that the senior leaders have also benefited from mentoring. We didn't want to just tell them this information because we know it is a far more powerful message if the participants discover it themselves. So we filmed a range of leader telling stories of how mentoring has affected their career. We then use the videos in the workshop to identify specific behaviours good mentors display and in doing so the participants learn that mentoring works.

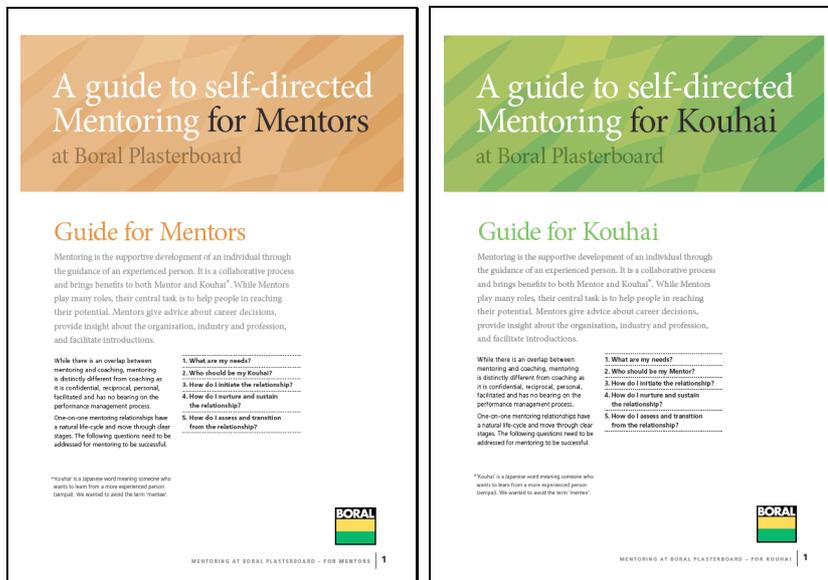
## WORKSHOP GUIDEBOOK

The workshop guidebook is designed for the participants to record things they learn during the workshop and as something to refer back to after the workshop.



## DOWNLOADABLE GUIDES

In addition to the participant workbook we also created a self-directed guide for mentors and another one for kouhai. These guides can be downloaded from the PB intranet and used to work their way through exercises to enhance their understanding of mentoring.



## VALUE OF THE PROGRAM

The first round of workshops has occurred across Australia. We are now a couple months into the deliberate practice program. We are planning to assess the impact of the mentoring program using a technique called Most Significant Change. We will ask attendees two questions: What is the most significant change you've seen from the mentoring program? Why is it significant for you? These questions will result in some impact stories which we will share with the leadership team in a facilitated session where the leaders will determine which impact story is most significant for the business. This conversation approach will give everyone in the leadership team a concrete understanding of how the program is making an impact.