

Mentoring Circles Cement Bonds at Lumen



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“I don’t collect baseball cards or technology – I collect talent,” explained Shawn Draper, VP of Enterprise Platform Engineering at Lumen Technologies. “The mentorship program is an excellent way for mentees to expand their networks, and for leaders to engage with growing talent they can cultivate for their teams.”

The mentoring circles program at Lumen has been an ongoing project since 2019. The first 6-month wave of listening circles focused on female employees, while a wave of minority-focused mentors and mentees came along in 2020. The program at Lumen is specific to employees who have been with the company at least 18 months and who are considered high performers in their role.

“I was initially out of my comfort zone, networking with this diverse group of strong women,” said Karen D. Sherrod, Manager NOC 1 at Lumen Technologies. “But once I pushed through the initial discomfort, I had a lot in common with people I never would’ve met outside of my somewhat silo’d department. We were able to bond over current events like BLM protests and COVID that affected us and our employees.”

These structured meetings allow employees to exchange ideas outside of their existing interdepartmental networks – leading to relationships that can help Lumen innovate products and services we as a company can use in the evolving 4th Industrial Revolution. But mentorship involves more than talking through that problem you’re having with a coworker, or strategizing how best to advance your career.

“I’ve been both a mentor and a mentee,” said Stephanie Calhoun, VP of Talent Management at Lumen Technologies. “I’ve learned just as much if not more from my mentees than they’ve learned from me. My meetings with them instantly move me up the mood elevator because it is such a bonding experience. We all go through the same challenges, regardless of where we are in the organization, and that’s comforting to share in.”

Draper added that you get out of the program what you put in. “It’s not just about dispensing advice to your mentees – I’ve learned the most from listening to them than anything else,” he said.

Both Calhoun and Draper continue to interact with their mentees outside of the program, and Sherrod said her mentor chose to continue the meetings quarterly after the initial program ended. They exchange books, stories and accomplishments, both personal and professional. In an era of work-from-home setups displacing the usual water cooler socializing, mentor-mentee relationships can be a lifeline when trying to navigate the adjustment to our “new normal.”

“Not only is the mentorship program about developing talent internally, but it also helps retain our most valuable employees,” said Calhoun. “When people have the tools to overcome obstacles and establish their own brand, they are more likely to stay here at Lumen, and that benefits everyone.”

“If you’re invited and are able to participate, come with an open mind and ready to share,” added Sherrod.

“I’m not done yet, and I would definitely do it again!” said Draper.

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