You need good people in your department to make your organization shine. Capable deputies allow you to stretch to new goals, and a thriving and successful organization advances the interests of staff, customers, and stakeholders. A key step, then, is simply to hire great staff. Did I say “simply”?

The ideal employee is hard to find in any industry, even harder when what you want is management-caliber staff. You need someone who is not only technically competent, but an adept communicator, savvy with office politics, perceptive of implicit cultural issues, clear on big picture priorities, and a good people manager. And if that isn’t tricky enough, you are contending with the fact that this person is in great demand, even in today’s job market.

So what can you do to meet the staffing demands of your department? The best answer to this challenge is not only to find and keep the perfect person, but also to create a system that identifies and grooms the people already in your ranks who show the most potential. Developing your staff by utilizing the internal human resources you already possess is a sensible way to advance your department’s success in the current “do more with less” era and ensures you have competent managers-to-be waiting in the wings. It also supports the retention of key knowledge and skills within the organization, which can support organizational learning.

The Leverage in Mentoring
In today’s leadership environment, the word “mentor” has become like flypaper, catching all the assumptions and grand ideas that people throw at it. But what does this word actually mean? What goes into being a good mentor and creating an effective mentoring program in your department? And how does it foster employee talent?

To understand how mentoring can serve your department, let’s begin by considering some simple definitions, starting with teaching and coaching, terms sometimes used synonymously with mentoring. In addition to distinguishing these three words, we’ll explore appropriate applications of these concepts to an in-house development program aimed at elevating the caliber and loyalty of your staff. By untangling these terms, you can better assess what is needed in your setting and leverage what you currently have to develop successful and sustainable leadership from within your department.

Teaching
Teaching refers to instructing and imparting information, knowledge, and wisdom. The teacher/student relationship implies that the teacher has the information, knowledge, or wisdom that needs to be transferred to the student. The challenge for a teacher is to impart relevant information in such a way as to ensure that the receiver absorbs it. This kind of information-sharing is enhanced by the ready availability of off-the-shelf training modules, podcasts, HR manuals, and Internet searches.

Teaching Application: Consider what technical knowledge a potential manager would need to be proficient in the job: for example, an IT manager would need working knowledge of the hardware and software systems, vendors, customers, management structures, HR policies, budget process, etc. Now consider who (or what) is best suited to deliver that information and gauge proficiency. In many ways, this aspect of development is the easiest. You are attempting to strengthen the technical knowledge a person would need to serve in a higher capacity. The metrics of competency are easy to observe.

Coaching
Coaching focuses on the repetitive practicing of skills until mastery is attained. Athletes, musicians, artists, and professionals of all kinds spend lots of time practicing the skills that will make them proficient. Good coaches know how to break down skill sets into distinct, learnable segments that can be practiced over and over until they become second nature. In a coaching relationship, the coach may be teaching some valuable information; however, the...
The rigorous nature of organizational development necessitates a shared connection and should never be imposed without joint agreement. The mentor/protégé relationship supports deepening of capacity and broadening awareness. The mentor is not told what to do. Instead, he prompts the protégé to go into the relationship to talk about his own successes, achievements and insights of his clients, have helped him diagnose and treat the succession dilemma faced by many leaders today. For more information, visit www.gilburgleadership.com.

Jonathan Gilburg of Gilburg Leadership Institute has been developing leadership for 20 years. His background in education and management, and the experiences and insights of his clients, have helped him diagnose and treat the succession dilemma faced by many leaders today. For more information, visit www.gilburgleadership.com.