

By Christine Beyaert

## BEST PRACTICES

# BIOTECH PROFESSIONALS

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Access to talent continues to be a prominent issue in the life sciences industry. Better talent can be developed through mentoring and experienced professionals can be accessed through a stronger network within the life sciences industry.

In September, The Biotechnology Initiative launched a mentorship program to help build the life sciences community, while providing individuals with opportunities to learn from each other and grow. The program offers participants the opportunity to connect with other professionals with similar interests or backgrounds, while building the human capital and knowledge sharing in the biotech industry.

“Success is a function of two ingredients: talent and opportunity,” said Adi Treasurywala, long-time TBI member and president of ArrowCan Partners. “We need to find avenues to provide people with opportunities to meet and grow professionally. Mentors can open doors, offer advice and give confidence. Through being mentored a protégé can learn about how successful people built their careers and receive guidance on how to get where they want to go.”

Mentoring is about building relationships with like-minded professionals and contributing to a community. These networks are where companies often look for experienced people. In their 2009 Canadian Life Sciences Industry Forecast, PricewaterhouseCoopers found that companies were having difficulty attracting and retaining employees. This forecast also identified that senior executives felt that access to an experienced talent pool was the most critical success factor for Canadian life sciences companies. To survive, biotech companies need skilled employees to help develop and commercialize their products and services.

Access to great employees is limited by the lack of connectivity within the industry. To move beyond this limitation, companies are looking for talent through their employees. By asking people who work for them to suggest quality candidates and providing incentive to refer good people, organizations have the opportunity to hire talent they know. This is more and more becoming the hiring strategy of choice among life sciences companies.

“Most people look for a job the wrong way,” said Dave Howlett, founder and managing director of Real Human Being Inc., and a global speaker on sales

and networking skills. “They first try going online and then they find a recruiter. The last thing they try is networking. Companies do the exact opposite. They generally reach out to their network first. As a former TBI member, I discovered many valuable opportunities and I continue to stay in touch with TBI professionals.”

Networking opens up doors and provides opportunities. However, networking is not a short-term project. Relationships are built over longer periods of time, sometimes years. One-on-one partnerships and mentoring is the first step towards building networks and long-term relationships. For many networking is intimidating, so they do not have an opportunity to see the benefits first-hand. Networking, like many business activities, can be learned. Entering a mentoring relationship and meeting other mentors and protégés facilitates networking and demonstrates its value.

“People treat networking like dieting, only doing it when they need something,” said Howlett. “You go on a diet when you need to lose weight. Similarly, people network when they need a job, a mentor, an employee or capital. They stop networking when

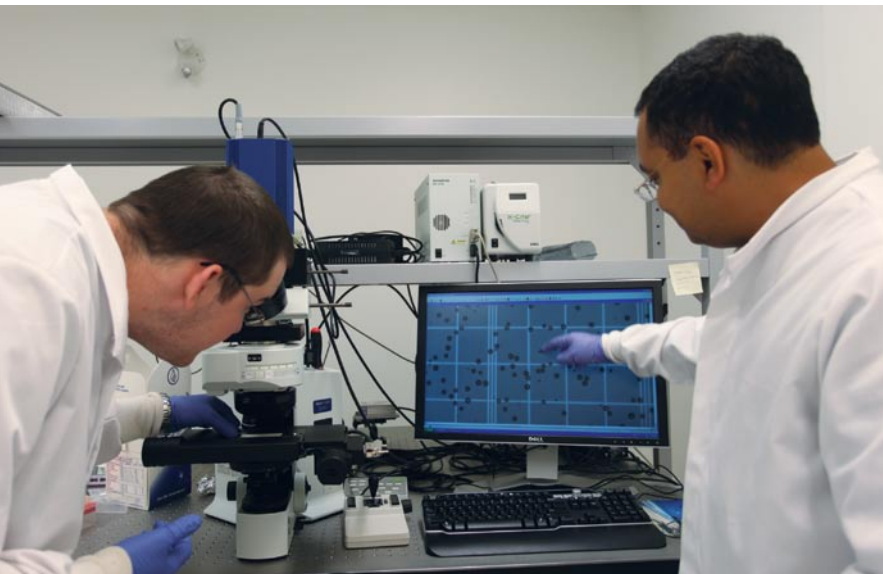
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**THE SECRET TO A BIOTECHNOLOGY COMPANY'S SUCCESS IS NOT ITS SCIENCE BUT ITS PEOPLE. EMPLOYEES WHO DEVELOP PRODUCTS FROM IDEAS AND BRING THEM TO MARKET ARE WHAT MAKE A COMPANY PROFITABLE.**



professionals develop and be more effective in their pursuits.”

Protégés connect with someone more experienced who can share knowledge and advice. They meet higher level individuals in a comfortable atmosphere, building their professional network and increasing visibility. Through speaking with a mentor with experience related to their field of interest, protégés gain insight into the skills required in the current market. Protégés also receive feedback on their current projects and improve soft skills such as communication and self-marketing.

“Those who are mentored develop faster than those who are not,” said Meikle. “They learn business, gain confidence and can take on increasingly more difficult tasks as they grow. Mentoring is designed to develop the protégé where they need help. Protégés identify areas where they would like assistance and mentors work with them to achieve their goals.”

The relationship allows mentors to extend their professional networks and recruit known talent. It also gives them an opportunity to give back to the community while receiving personal satisfaction for making a difference in a protégé’s life. Knowledge is shared and mentors further develop valuable business skills including coaching, communication and leadership.

“Through mentoring, experienced professionals can give back to the community,” said Meikle. “There is so much experience in TBI and so many people who want to contribute in a meaningful way. Sharing my knowledge and experience has assisted those whom I have mentored. I get satisfaction from seeing them grow throughout their career and knowing that I had a part in this process. Relationships that develop through mentoring can be very rewarding for both parties and can last a lifetime.”

Mentoring is cyclical in many ways. Companies benefit from individual professional growth when their employees gain skills and confidence. This produces more talent and expertise within Canada, making the biotech industry stronger. Companies also gain access to a larger known talent pool through employee networks. Today’s protégés become tomorrow’s mentors. People who have seen the value of being mentored first-hand pay it forward to the next generation of professionals, ultimately strengthening the whole life sciences community.

“Scientists are people who want to give back,” said Howlett. “Scientists choose this field because they want to make a difference. By being a mentor for younger professionals you have the opportunity to help them. Mentoring is the best way to make a difference in this world.”

*For more information on the TBI Mentorship Program please visit [www.ontbi.org/mentorship](http://www.ontbi.org/mentorship).*

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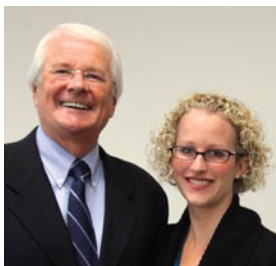
Mentors voluntarily provide guidance and support to protégés who are asking for and are receptive to their advice.

they get what they need. When you diet you inevitably end up gaining weight again. If you go to the doctor and say you can’t keep the weight off, the doctor will tell you to stop dieting and change your lifestyle. In building communities, we need to stop looking for people when we need something and adapt to a lifestyle of always networking and connecting to others, reaching out to them and offering help, adding value to people’s lives.”

Mentorship provides an environment conducive to building communities, connecting people in a non-threatening environment. Mentors voluntarily provide guidance and support to protégés who are asking for and are receptive to their advice. In the life sciences industry this builds networks and strengthens the community, providing a solution to one of the industry’s longest-standing and pressing concerns.

TBI’s program is the first of its kind in Canada, focusing on individuals in the life sciences industry. Industry professionals gave their insights into biotech’s need and their own mentoring experiences, and the program was developed based on this feedback. Mentoring is available to both science and business professionals in many areas of life science at any stage in their career. To become involved, professionals complete an online application and a profile outlining their interests, experience and availability. One on one matches are primarily determined by the interest of the protégé and the mentor’s experience. The program is flexible, with meetings set by the pairs around their schedules. Quarterly “Meet and Greet” networking events and an exclusive LinkedIn group are offered to participants to increase networking opportunities.

“Making connections and developing relationships is important to professionals. Many people join TBI to meet people,” said Lorne Meikle, TBI president. “The program’s wide scope accommodates the industry’s breadth, allowing participants to explore areas of opportunity and share ideas. This exchange helps



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Photo: Lorne Meikle and Jill Osborne

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