



MYOB

TOMORROW'S WORKFORCE FINALIST



THE STORY

A mentoring programme to address a significant shortage of skills in the tech industry has not only encouraged more young people into vacant roles, it's had the added benefit of increasing the skills of mentors.

Three years ago MYOB – Australasian business software providers with 500 New Zealand employees – developed the Future Makers Academy (FMA), a programme designed to accelerate the growth of young software designers. It is founded on the concept that technical mentorship is one of the best ways to grow young and upcoming talent, and open a career in the ICT industry to a younger and more diverse group of candidates.

One of the key issues behind the current skills shortage in the New Zealand tech industry is a lack of young people, young women in particular, entering the industry. It's an industry that until recently has struggled to embrace the benefits of diversity and an open and equal workplace. Engineering Protégé Manager Mark Pearl says improving gender diversity has been a key component of the FMA.

In the FMA, a protégé developer (young software developer) is put under the care and guidance of two experienced technical mentors. These mentors work alongside the protégé to take them through a guided learning experience which lasts anywhere from six to 18 months. Initially, mentors provide a series of coding problems designed to stretch the protégé's competency in software design principles and practices, including working in teams and agility. The mentors are actively involved in the protégé's day-to-day growth, regularly working alongside them and meeting weekly to review progress and define objectives.

As the protégé demonstrates their growing competency, the problems increase in complexity until they are close to what are termed ‘real-world problems’. At this point the protégé is deemed ready for crew rotations, working in a series of delivery teams with experienced software practitioners on production software. Each crew rotation takes between three and six months.

“The FMA was borne out of the desire of people in our business to share their passion for the industry, open up opportunities for a wider range of potential candidates and help a new generation get a leg up in their career,” says Mark.

To begin with, the programme was organised by volunteers who prepared material in their own time. However, as the benefits were realised a dedicated budget and more resources were allocated. Two full-time staff are now dedicated to its ongoing success.

The role of mentors is an integral part of the FMA, and they are well supported to make sure the programme remains sustainable.

“Mentors work in co-mentorships, strategically paired so developing mentors learn from more experienced ones. As well as providing continuity for individual protégés, should one mentor be redeployed or leave the business, it also ensures the role of mentor is rewarding and engaging for each member of the programme,” says Mark.

The programme has the support of leaders across the organisation. Senior leaders review the programme weekly, with a meeting of the senior leadership and sponsors to discuss the health, happiness and progression of protégés within the FMA.

“At every level of the business, leaders and managers are major advocates of the FMA, believing it shapes the culture of MYOB as an environment for continuous learning that centres around mentoring,” says Mark.

THE CHALLENGE

The tech industry faces a significant skills shortage, with one of the key issues a lack of young people, particularly women, entering the industry.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

- The MYOB Future Makers Academy (FMA) accelerates the growth of young software developers by putting them under the care of two experienced technical mentors.
- An associated programme assists and develops mentors in their role, and ensures they receive support.



RESULTS AND BENEFITS

- In three years, 31 protégés have participated in the FMA programme. The average age is 24, with eight being 22 or younger.
- Protégés have developed a wide range of valuable work skills suitable for work in the ICT sector.
- More than a third of protégés have progressed to become associate developers, with ongoing opportunities for career development through the business.
- About half the participants in the programme have been women, substantially higher than the software norm.
- Basing the programme on internal mentoring has had the added benefit of growing the skills of the mentors.
- Parallel programmes encouraging diversity have been introduced such as DevelopHer, a programme teaching women with no formal qualifications how to code, and student initiatives such as hackathons and sponsored competitions.

KEY LEARNING

Implementing the FMA has allowed MYOB to consider a much wider pool of candidates when recruiting because it now has the capability to take on less skilled people and develop them internally. This diversity in age, gender and background leads to broader perspectives and better problem-solving teams.

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