

Transcript – The importance of mentoring for students and companies

Host: Audrey Decou

Guest Speaker: John Duncan (AVIVA)

Audrey Decou 0:16

This podcast has been brought to you by the University of the Highlands and Islands careers and employability centre. In this episode we will be talking to John Duncan the lead performance consultants for property claims at Aviva about the importance of mentoring for students and the company. I am Audrey Decou and I'm joined today by John Duncan. Hi John, would you like to tell us a little bit about yourself?

John Duncan 0:40

Sure. I started working for Aviva 20 years ago. I worked for the company in various different roles since I was 22. I currently look after a business intelligence team. So that involves us, looking at all of the financial information around property claims and understanding where, as a company, we spend our money and when fixing people's houses after they've had a claim. I have four people working for me at the moment, they are a small team of specialists. And away from my day job, I spent a lot of time working with schools, and secondary education as a whole, to try and help build the skills gap between leaving education and coming into the workplace. I've been involved with a few different mentoring programs over the last 10 years. And I have to say that's one of the most positive things I've ever done in my career. At home I have four kids, my wife and my dog, I run my local football team in Crieff. So, I spend quite a bit of time doing things away from the office as much as I do in the office.

Audrey Decou 1:48

So, apart from your day job and your, you know, official role at AVIVA, I understood that you are facilitating every mentoring opportunities which are coming to AVIVA. Could you tell us a little bit more about that?

John Duncan 2:04

Yeah, sure. So started off when we got involved with Career Ready back in 2012. Career Ready is a focused mentoring program that works with s5 and s6 students in Scotland and is designed to help put people, experienced business people with students in order to help them raise their aspirations, break through the self imposed ceilings or the all "I can, I wouldn't be able to, I shouldn't" so very specifically looks for a group of students that wouldn't naturally go to university or second grade, you fall on to college and stuff like that, and then help them understand what their potential could be. And I've been involved with that, now, for the last 10 years. And we've had loads of successes over that. Including employing people that have been in the Career Ready program. In addition to that, we've also done a mentoring program called Resolutions, which is aimed at kids from S2 S3. So as people that tend to disengage from school and trying to help them understand that there are different ways and different paths and hoping to get them to reengage within education at later stage. I've also done career mentoring within the workplace so we're working with people. I'm a strength coach so work with people to try to understand how to use their strengths to develop their career and mentoring within that space as well. And we've also worked with Perth UHI around mentoring in the last calendar year,

probably one looking at the alignment of people from Perth UHI with AVIVA in order to help with their degree qualification.

Audrey Decou 3:40

You just mentioned that you had a lot of success story and that you actually did employ some, students who went through the mentoring. Do you have a couple of examples for us?

John Duncan 3:52

Yeah. So we employed one young lad who had been through the Career Ready programme. Nobody from his family had ever been to university or went on to college after they left school. And when he started in the Career Ready programme, he didn't really know what he wanted to do. He was really doing really well at school, but didn't have the network and didn't really know where he was going. As a result of being mentored, and working in that space, he then started to explore the possibility of going on to do further education. When he left school he had passed his higher maths, had gotten good grades in a number of his other subjects and was still looking at the possibility of going into go on to further education. At that time we had a pricing actuarial role that came up, which he actually applied for because it was all based on statistics, maths, and that was a skill set that was required. And he beat to that apprenticeship people that had been to university because he had the experience of working with a business mentor and knew what he wanted to do by that stage and performed excellent. He still works for AVIVA, he is now through his apprenticeship. He's qualified and is a full time member of staff still within Perth. Other people, we've had seven people in total that we've employed through a direct mentoring experience within Career Ready. And one person that we employed through a different mentoring program that we've been working on. And out of those eight people that we've employed we still have six currently working for us. The other two people chose to move on to follow different career paths, which is absolutely the right thing for them to do at that time.

Audrey Decou 5:34

Thank you. Well, that's really good. And, of course, in a mentoring setting, you know, they have both sides, you've got the students side, but you also have the mentor side. Could you tell me a little bit more what is the company getting out of it? What is the benefits for a company to have mentors?

John Duncan 5:51

There's a lot of personal development that you can take from becoming a mentor. So mentoring isn't a one way conversation. Mentoring is about the relationship. And it's all about working together to get the right outcome. So, whenever you're in a mentoring situation, you're learning as much as you're teaching. Because you're learning about the person, you're learning about their outlook on life, you're learning about how young people see employment, see employers. So you're constantly getting that new fresh information to bring into the company to help make informed decisions about what and how should you recruit, what are the expectations of young people coming into the workplace now. We still at times base employment on information that we had from 20 years ago and life has moved on. What makes a company attractive to somebody leaving school now is different to having that mentoring relationship helps. You also get fresh views and ideas around, current situation what's

happened in their life and social media interaction, a list that just keep going on and on. On top of that, we are also developing coaching capability. Particular people management side you've got that, you absolutely have to be a good listener to be a good mentor. So if you don't have that as a primary skill, you will have to develop them really quickly in order to get there. But that active listener you get from being a mentor. It really is a massive skill that you can take into the workplace. Some of our mentoring relationships also include work experience. So as a result of that what happens is we get young people come in generally young, younger people coming into the workplace. So it gives you enthusiasm and gives you that knock on impact new fresh ideas. You see people that potentially within the workplace that aren't usually engaged suddenly when they are asked to coach and support a young person within a work experience placement, really starting to see the opportunity themselves to become coaches again and it reinvigorates people. And ultimately, it's about talent pipeline. It's about us looking into recruit people, you know, every organization is looking for the best talent is looking for, for new people to come in. And it's not just about what are the scores on your on your exam results. It's about what kind of person are you, would you fit into our team and our ethos and be the personality that we want people to come into. So mentoring opens that world up to us it makes the decision makers within companies understand that there are more to people than just the numbers because it gives us a real experience of working with those individuals. And as a result of the people that I mentioned previously, there's three or four of those people wouldn't have got jobs with AVIVA through a normal recruitment process because on paper, they probably would have been discounted. But because we knew them, because we've had the experience of working with them, that gave them the opportunity. They had the network and the support of mentors and coaches that they come in contact with, to help to give them credibility to support their skills and their enthusiasm and their abilities. Each one of them in their own right, had all of those skills, we didn't give them to them. We just helped them find them for themselves.

Audrey Decou 9:00

Thank you very much, John. And it was really nice talking to you today. Thank you.

John Duncan 9:06

Thank you. Appreciate that.

Audrey Decou 9:07

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