

What is mentoring?

QUICK GUIDE FOR MENTORS AND MENTEES

GCA MENTORING PROGRAMME

7th Edition

Contents

1. What is mentoring?.....	2
2. Definitions of mentoring	2
3. Benefits of mentoring.....	2
4. Roles and Responsibilities.....	2
6. Building rapport.....	4
7. Listening.....	4
8. Questioning.....	4
9. Career and skills discussion questions	4
10. Providing advice.....	5
11. Problem solving.....	5
12. Managing the mentoring relationship.....	5
13. Mentoring meetings.....	6
14. Tips for your first meeting.....	6
15. Goals setting.....	6
16. Mentoring plan.....	7

*Document adapted from: http://sydney.edu.au/sun/docs/mentoring_skills_workbook.pdf

Introduction

If you have knowledge or experience or are simply a good listener you have probably already been a mentor –helping someone to learn, sort out a problem or devise a plan. It may have happened spontaneously and the word ‘mentor’ may never have been used. The term ‘mentoring’ is being used more widely now in our society and people are often encouraged to seek out a mentor. So, what is mentoring and how does one become a mentor?

1. What is mentoring?

Mentoring is often seen as a relationship between a senior and a more junior person – like a master and an apprentice. This can be a useful approach to mentoring but can also pose some problems for adult learners. Mentors can get just as much out of the relationship as a mentee and being seen as a teacher, coach etc can be unhelpful and limiting. Mentors may also be asked, often inappropriately, to lobby on behalf of their mentee.

Viewing mentoring as a learning partnership can be more helpful. Status and power can be ignored, mentors do more listening and questioning, and advice is only offered once the mentee has had the opportunity to explore the options for them. This approach has a lot to recommend it.

2. Definitions of mentoring

Mentor: “A wise and trusted guide”

The Macquarie Concise Dictionary (2nd Edition)

“Mentors are helpers. Their style ranges from that of a persistent encourager who helps us build self-confidence, to that of a stern taskmaster who teaches us to appreciate excellence in performance. Whatever their style, they care about us and what we are trying to do.”

Shea, Gordon (1992) Mentoring – a practical guide Crisp Publications

“Mentoring is a relationship which gives people the opportunity to share their professional skills and experiences, and to grow and develop in the process. Typically, mentoring takes place between a more experienced and a less experienced employee.”

3. Benefits of mentoring

Mentoring benefits both people in the mentoring relationship. By approaching mentoring using the model described above the mentee does not become dependent but develops their critical thinking skills. The mentee is empowered and they take responsibility for their actions. In this model, the mentor does not have to be older, wiser or specialized in a particular field. Both parties can find the experience rewarding and satisfying. Below are some benefits mentors have identified.

- .. Contribute
- .. Acquire and practice a coaching style of leadership
- .. Re-energise a plateaued career
- .. Extend your network
- .. Obtain new perspectives, opinions
- .. Gain additional recognition and respect
- .. Awareness of own skills
- .. Challenge and achievement
- .. Self-development
- .. Put something back
- .. A sense of satisfaction
- .. Grow people better
- .. Contribute to the future
- .. Involvement, focus on others

4. Roles and Responsibilities

Mentor's role and responsibilities

The mentor's role is to listen, provide constructive feedback and help their mentee consider options. They may refer them to resources and facilitate decision making and share their own experiences. They might help to identify areas for development, coach their mentee and allow opportunities to practice new skills. They may be a sounding board, ask questions to cause further exploration of ideas or to challenge their mentee's thinking. They provide guidance, not direction and do not solve problems, but act as a collaborator in the problem solving process.

Primary responsibilities you have as a mentor include:

- Maintaining confidentiality
- Being accessible
- Listening actively to your mentee
- Promoting responsible decision making
- Motivating and supporting your mentee to achieve their goals
- Ensuring a professional relationship
- Acting as a role model
- Recognizing when it is time to relinquish the mentoring role

Mentee's role and responsibilities

Mentees can approach their mentors to discuss issues and ideas. They may want feedback or advice or a chance to get something off their chest. Through the questioning of the mentor, the mentee may achieve a greater clarity about a situation or see a different perspective.

Whatever is discussed, however, it is the mentee who makes the decisions and takes any actions required. The mentee is independent and responsible for their decisions and actions.

Good mentees are:

- Motivated
- Proactive
- Open minded
- Self-directing
- Introspective
- Self-disciplined
- Enthusiastic
- Communicative
- Appreciative
- assistance in forward thinking
- to set career goal and strategies for achieving them
- to expand networks and broaden horizons
- to learn new skills
- a person who has been successful to use as a role model
- to raise their profile
- to get the big picture view
- to develop better life perspective – balance work and home
- awareness of promotional opportunities
- help with job applications
- access to a variety of resources

They want:

- an advice on career paths/options
- to learn how to develop maximum potential

5. Skills of effective mentors

M – Manages the relationship

E – Encourages

N – Nurtures

T – Teaches

O – Offers Mutual Respect

R – Responds to the Mentee's needs

M – Manages the relationship

(Clutterbuck, David. (1985) Everyone Needs a Mentor. Institute of Personnel Management, Bugbrooke, UK.)

An effective mentor has been described as one who:

- Has high level self-management skills
- Models effective leadership and management skills
- Has excellent interpersonal skills
- Motivates others
- Is a good role model
- Able to provide clear and objective feedback
- Able to promote personal growth
- Has ability to maintain work-life balance
- Acknowledges need to maintain health
- Respects higher goals, values and spiritual needs
- Able to undertake needs assessment
- Able to facilitate learning
- Provides resources
- Accepts differences in values, interests etc
- Does not seek to impose advice on the basis of one's own needs

6. Building rapport

While offering unconditional positive regard may be beyond what can be offered in a mentoring relationship, mentors should, at a minimum, be objective and non-judgmental as far as possible. This does not mean necessarily agreeing on everything, but it is important to be able to relate to each other.

7. Listening

Active listening involves choosing to concentrate attention and expend energy on communication. It demonstrates your interest in the speaker and encourages them to communicate with you. Reflective listening involves reflecting back to the speaker. It can mean more than paraphrasing and repeating the speaker's message. It can allow you to explore and examine incongruence between verbal and non-verbal messages.

8. Questioning

The purpose of questions is to draw out information and to gain clarity. It is important that your mentee doesn't feel interrogated or that they are being judged. If they feel that they have to justify themselves, they may block communication which could prevent them considering alternatives.

10 tips to better questioning:

1. Rephrase questions to avoid beginning with a 'why'
2. Ask one question at a time
3. Wait for the answer
4. Ask questions that prompt deep thinking
5. Seek to promote insight
6. Ask about, and listen for feelings as well as facts
7. Respond to non-verbal communication with feedback
8. Use non-verbal communication to keep questions from sounding interrogative
9. Move from the general to specific
10. Challenge assumptions and generalizations

9. Career and skills discussion questions

Sample questions for a career discussion:

- What is most important to you in your life and work?
- What career options have you considered?
- Which are the skills you are best at and enjoy using most?
- What are your career goals?
- What potential constraints must you take into account when planning your career?

Skills development discussion:

- o What changes are you likely to need to deal with in the near future?
- o What results would you like to achieve, that you are not achieving now?
- o What new skills do you want to develop?
 - o What knowledge, information or qualifications do you need to acquire in the near future?

Probing – getting the person to talk more:

- o Can you say a little more about...
- o Would you expand on that idea...
- o Perhaps you'd like to tell me...

Cushions – softening a confronting question:

- o Do you mind if I ask...
- o I'm wondering...
- o Would you like to tell me...

10. Providing advice

Be cautious when giving advice. Sometimes advice given prematurely will prevent the real issue being discovered and resolved. Advice that sounds like a recommendation may detract from the mentee taking responsibility for their own decisions and actions. Remember, what worked for you might not work for them. If you tell your mentee what you think they should do, there is little opportunity for learning to take place – “Give a person a fish and you feed them for a day – teach them how to fish and they feed themselves for a lifetime”. Consider who bears the responsibility if you advise a course of action that brings unintended negative consequences. *Use anecdotes, examples and metaphors – they are powerful tools to impart wisdom.*

11. Problem solving

Try the following problem solving approach with mentees:

1. Define the problem, distinguishing between facts and assumptions
2. Specify objectives and determine a desired outcome
3. Develop options and alternative actions
4. Evaluate options, considering positive and negative aspects, before and deciding the most appropriate action
5. Take action and implement the decision
6. Evaluate and review outcomes

12. Managing the mentoring relationship

Phases in the relationship

The mentoring relationship is likely to pass through phases just like other types of relationship. These phases may include the following:

Initiation

Initial contact
Time to define the relationship
Rapport building is key element

Development

Focus on goals and tasks

Care needs to be taken to avoid over-dependence
Mentor helps mentee discover options

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Maturity

Mentee becomes autonomous
Mentor becomes less influential
Development has peaked

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Disengagement

Need for relationship is less evident
Can be sad/happy time as partners realise relationship is coming to an end
Acknowledgement of end is useful as transition may not be easy

..

Redefinition

Need for the relationship to be redefined

13. Mentoring meetings

Meeting structure

A typical mentoring conversation may follow the following structure:

1. Establish rapport
2. Reflective questioning for clarification
5. Summarising
6. Advice
7. Options exploration
8. Action planning

14. Tips for your first meeting

- Set aside at least an hour of uninterrupted time
- Use your rapport building skills
- Have a 'getting to know you' type of conversation
- Discuss the purpose of your mentoring partnership and some principles for its operation
- Have a draft agenda to provide structure
- At the end of the meeting, set a time and date and place for the next meeting and a draft agenda for it
- Aim to develop a pattern for your meetings

15. Goals setting

When people have clear goals, their efforts are more likely to produce the desired results. While goal setting is most likely to centre on the mentees needs, remember to consider your own needs as a mentor – you can expect to gain from the relationship too!

Goal Setting Model

Help your mentee achieve their goals by using the following model:

- A -- Ability
- C -- Clarity
- H -- Help
- I -- Implementation Plan
- E -- Environment
- V -- Value
- E -- Evidence

Testing the goal model

Ability – is the goal within their ability to achieve? How can the necessary skills, knowledge and personal attributes be acquired?

Clarity – Help them to become clear about what they really want. Why is it important to them? Getting clear about the gap between what is desired and the current reality is essential so that ways of making a change can be explored.

Help – What assistance do they need? What resources are required? Where can these be accessed? Who can help?

Implementation Plan – What steps need to be taken? What is the time frame? How will motivation be maintained? Have milestones been set?

Environment – Will factors in the personal, work or the general environment support or inhibit the achievement of the goal?

Values – the goal should be consistent with the mentee's sense of what is important in life. This helps to maintain motivation. Remember that these may not be the same as the organizations values or other people's values.

Evidence – How will they know when their goal has been reached? What will they see, hear, feel?

16. Mentoring plan

Steps in developing a mentoring plan:

1. Consider why you and the mentee are entering into a mentoring relationship. Write a statement of purpose describing why this is important.
2. Think about what you want to achieve through mentoring. What will you work to achieve? What outcomes will indicate you have achieved this?
3. Begin to plan how you will proceed. What special challenges might you expect as you work towards your goal? What will help you achieve your goal?
4. What else do you need to consider?
5. Time plan – list milestones, indicators of progress, actions steps and expected completion dates.

Mentoring Agreements

Many people in mentoring partnerships find it useful to create a formal mentoring agreement at the start of the relationship to help clarify the purpose and goals of the relationship. Some partnerships create a written document outlining how the relationship will work, what goals are to be achieved and within what timeframe, how the relationship can be ended, frequency of meetings etc. Of course, many relationships exist without such formal documentation, however it is recommended that, at the very least, some discussion of these aspects is covered in the initial mentoring meetings.