

Mentoring: background info

(Copy and adapted from James O'Brien, Training handbook, Feb 2006)

Mentoring is a powerful and popular way for people to learn a variety of personal and professional skills. In fact mentoring is one of the oldest forms of learning. However it is only in more recent years that mentoring as a planned activity has been used as a tool of professional development. In most cases a mentor is a more experienced person who provides support and guidance either for a fixed amount of time or on an ongoing basis for as long as is needed.

Some general examples of mentoring include:

- Successful business people helping new entrepreneurs
- Managers, supervisors or more senior staff members supporting junior or less experienced staff
- Senior teachers helping with the induction of new teachers

Mentoring should provide:

- **Advice:** on the range of options and solutions available to resolve problems or difficulties
- **Feedback:** on progress made to date
- **Counselling:** which supports the Mentee to find his or her own solutions
- **Coaching:** to introduce new ideas and teaches new skills
- **Guidance:** that teaches methods of solving problems more independently and confidently and therefore achieve expected performance
- **Nurturing:** that builds self-sufficiency
- **Support:** to overcome difficult and stressful situations

A good mentor is:

- Willing to share his/her knowledge, skills and ideas
- Interested in learning and supporting others to learn and develop in their profession and work
- Enjoys working in a team and with other people
- A good listener and communicator
- An open and genuine person (the mentor does not have to be perfect, nobody is)

The person who is receiving the mentoring is called a '**Mentee**' and for mentoring to be of value the mentee must be interested in professional and personal development and must be willing to co-operate with a mentor. Mentoring is more effective when both parties are relaxed and able to discuss issues without fear of being undermined, humiliated, envied, judged or criticized. Mentoring relationships are a co-learning process, which benefits the participants and the organization. An effective mentoring relationship is characterized by trust, understanding and empathy.

The mentoring process can be divided into three phases:

1. Planning phase

Getting to know each other and agreeing about the mentoring process. These include the practical things such as:

- When to meet, where to meet and how often to meet? This will be influenced by the timeframe
- How long should each meetings last? The timetable for meetings should be realistic and fit within the framework of work commitments and responsibilities.
- The objectives of the mentoring relationship:
- The expectations of both the mentor and the mentee?

It is valuable to write down a plan as a reminder to both parties and also to assist with the evaluation of the mentoring process at a later date

2. Implementation phase

Once a plan had been made it is then important to commence with the mentoring process. Although it is important to follow the plan both parties must be flexible enough to constantly monitor the mentoring process in an open and honest way and adjust the plan where needed.

3. Phasing out

In most mentoring relationships there is a time when the objectives have been met and the need to continue has gone

Overcoming (interpersonal) conflicts

It is an important function of the facilitator to manage and resolve any conflict that arises. The first step in solving problems of (interpersonal) conflicts is to acknowledge the problem and then it can be discussed and resolved collectively. There are some basic rules to be followed in the process of finding solutions to problems of interpersonal conflict.

1. Discuss the problem directly with the person or persons openly (not behind his/her back)
2. Encourage each person to honestly express his or her feelings and experiences without accusing the other person
3. Insist that all parties listen to the other person's point of view and give him or her space and time to express him or herself
4. Check that both parties have understood each others' points of view
5. Work together to find a solution or if possible a number of alternative solutions for the conflict
6. Clarify that both of parties will accept the chosen solution,
7. Act upon the solution model selected

Solving problems together can strengthen the mentoring relationship and be valuable to the mentor and the mentee.