Mentoring Fundamentals

What is Mentoring?
Mentoring is a partnership between two people that supports a personal and professional development strategy. Mentoring is a term generally used to describe a relationship between a less experienced individual, called a mentee, and a more experienced individual, known as a mentor.

What is a Mentor?
A mentor is an experienced person who provides information, advice, support, and encouragement to another person (mentee), often leading and guiding by example through his/her expertise or success. In a more general sense, a good mentor is anyone from whom you can learn something. Mentors can serve as trusted and significant advisors, providing a sounding board for professional issues impacting the mentee.

Below are some general attributes of effective mentors and mentees:

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<th>Effective Mentors</th>
<th>Effective Mentees</th>
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<td>✓ Are experienced and willing to share skills, knowledge and expertise</td>
<td>✓ Are open to receiving feedback and coaching</td>
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<td>✓ Serve as a confidant for work-related issues</td>
<td>✓ Seek challenging assignments and new responsibilities</td>
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<td>✓ Help mentees to shift his/her mental context when needed</td>
<td>✓ Set their own professional goals and take responsibility for their growth and development</td>
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<td>✓ Provide tacit knowledge and insight (what can’t be learned in a manual)</td>
<td>✓ Take initiative in arranging meetings with their mentors and meet those commitments</td>
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<td>✓ Provide guidance and constructive feedback</td>
<td>✓ Motivate by setting a good example</td>
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<td>✓ Enhances skills in coaching, counseling, and listening</td>
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Benefits of Mentoring
Research shows that individuals who are mentored have an increased likelihood of career success due to the targeted developmental support they receive. From increased morale to greater organizational productivity and career development, the benefits of mentoring are numerous for both parties. Some specific benefits include:

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<td>✓ Renews enthusiasm for the role of expert/leader</td>
<td>✓ Transitions into leadership positions more smoothly via coaching, counseling, and guidance</td>
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<td>✓ Gains a greater understanding of the barriers experienced at lower levels of an organization (or serves as a good reminder of these challenges)</td>
<td>✓ Furthers his/her development as a professional</td>
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<td>✓ Enhances skills in coaching, counseling, and listening</td>
<td>✓ Gains capacity to translate values and strategies into productive actions</td>
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<td>✓ Develops a more personal style of leadership</td>
<td>✓ Complements ongoing formal study and/or training and development activities</td>
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<td>✓ Increases generational awareness</td>
<td>✓ Increases career networks and receives greater agency exposure</td>
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**Mentee Tips for Success**

**Mentoring is Mentee-driven**

A common belief is that mentors provide advice while mentees simply sit back and take guidance from their mentors. However, this perception is incorrect. Successful mentees must be *active participants* in the mentoring relationship. What’s more, *they* define the experience. Therefore, mentees should be as clear as possible about what they hope to gain from the partnership through specific goals and desired outcomes. Below is some advice to clarify your responsibilities and ensure your partnership is personally and professionally beneficial.

**Mentee Responsibilities**

- Develop professional goals and determine benchmarks for achieving them
- Be willing to candidly discuss issues and consider advice
- Provide feedback to the mentor
- Respect mentor’s time and schedule
- Maintain confidentiality
- Be willing to mentor others in the future (pay it forward)

**Establishing an Effective Mentoring Relationship**

In order for the relationship to be successful, the mentee should also actively manage the relationship. Below are some suggestions for being successful:

- Take responsibility for setting up and preparing for meetings
- Commit to your own personal and professional development
- Know the goals you want to work on and the topics you want to discuss
- Suggest learning activities that would be the most useful (attending meetings, shadowing)
- Give feedback; state needs or expectations from the relationship
- Evaluate the mentoring relationship. Ask yourself:
  - Are your assumptions frequently challenged?
  - Do you have a clearer idea of what you want to achieve and why?
  - Do you emerge from mentoring sessions energized to take action?

**Getting Started: Know Your Goals**

To achieve their full potential and gain the most from a mentoring relationship, it is important that mentees understand what they want to achieve and develop a plan for how to get there. The simple process of writing down goals and objectives is a big step toward making them happen and can provide the mentor with greater understanding of the mentee’s professional challenges and/or desired outcomes.
**Goals** define what mentees want to achieve over the next several years. **Objectives** are the specific milestones (key accomplishments) that make those goals happen. Developmental needs are the smaller steps needed to improve skills, abilities, and competencies.

**Examples of Specific Goals**
- To improve presentation skills
- To better understand leadership attributes and challenges needed to be a successful manager
- To learn how state government operates, both tacitly and explicitly
- To secure a position within a specific classification that requires strong leadership skills

While a mentor’s role is largely to provide guidance and support, it should be noted that mentees should **not** seek a mentor to help them with the launch or completion of a project or initiative.

**Examples of Objectives**
- To develop and deliver a high level presentation for an executive audience; to develop a great “elevator speech”
- To attend one (or several) meetings where the mentor is a key player
- To have your mentor help arrange (if possible and appropriate), a job shadow opportunity with someone within a desired career path

**Meeting with Your Mentor: Making the Most out of Your Time**
- Show initiative and commitment—take the lead in contacting your mentor and offering suggestions for times/places that are mutually agreeable/comfortable for meeting; try to choose someplace free of distractions
- Set up a series of recurring meetings to better ensure meetings will not have to be rescheduled
- Create an agenda for each meeting and provide it to the mentor ahead of time—be specific in the topic(s) you would like to cover
- Do some homework to demonstrate initiative, leadership, and responsibility (for example, do some background reading on a topic you and your mentor plan to discuss and come to the meeting with questions prepared)
- Be on time; don’t waste time

**Final Tips for Success**
- Commit to personal and professional development
- Clearly define goals
- Be assertive, ask for help
- Be open and able to accept advice and feedback
- Consciously build trust; be honest, keep your word, and maintain confidences
- Practice good listening skills
- Actively participate in the mentoring relationship; learn about the mentor’s world
- Exercise confidence in your abilities but be willing to admit weaknesses
- Take responsibility for making the experience a positive one
- Show appreciation and share credit with mentors for accomplishments