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 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 from a manual)</td>
<td>✓ Take initiative in arranging meetings with their mentors and meet those commitments; <em>mentoring is mentee-driven</em></td>
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<td>✓ Provide guidance and constructive feedback</td>
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<td>✓ Motivate by setting a good example</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>✓ Obtains a greater understanding of the barriers experienced at lower levels of an organization</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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The Role of the Mentor

While mentors often give advice, they should refrain from telling mentees “what to do.” Good mentors ask questions, provide guidance, and help mentees think through alternatives. They know how and when to give advice (and when not to) and how to withhold judgment. Below are some specific and appropriate roles for mentors:

- **Role Model** - Serves as someone their mentee can emulate; demonstrates specific leadership competencies
- **Sounding Board** - Gives honest feedback regarding a mentee’s plans for tackling an issue or a professional goal
- **Coach** - Helps a mentee analyze problems and alternative solutions; helps mentee explore consequences/impact of potential decisions from a personal and political standpoint
- **Listener** - Lends a sympathetic ear; offers encouragement
- **Career Advisor** – Assists in determining career options and career goals; helps steer the mentee in the “right direction”
- **Networker** - Provides access to others that can help the mentee achieve future career goals
- **Teacher** - Instructs the specific skills and knowledge necessary for successful job performance, particularly if the mentee wishes to secure a position with more leadership responsibility
- **Motivator** - Provides encouragement to act

While a mentor’s role can include any or all of these elements listed above, it’s important for both parties to understand that a mentor’s role is not to help a mentee launch or complete a project or initiative.

**Mentor Responsibilities**

- Help mentees work toward their professional career goals
- Be willing to share experiences, successes, failures, and observations, particularly that tacit knowledge that has been learned over the mentor’s career
- Respect mentee’s time and schedule
- Maintain confidentiality
- Facilitate professional contacts when appropriate
Getting Started

Setting Ground Rules for a Successful Relationship

Ground rules provide the norm for how mentors and mentees manage their relationships. Below are some examples you may find useful.

- Keep what’s said between us
- Come to meetings prepared—recommend the mentee prepare an agenda that can be sent and reviewed ahead of time
- To cancel or reschedule, provide 24-hour notice if possible
- Speak up if we’re not getting something that we expect or need
- Really listen to each other and be open to suggestions and feedback
- Recognize we are two different people and that’s okay; we can learn from each other

Starting the Conversation

During the first few weeks, mentors and mentees concentrate on getting to know each other. In their Orientation Guide, mentees are encouraged to identify specific professional goals they wish to achieve before their first meeting. However, mentors may need to help mentees extract some of this information. Below are some conversation starters to assist mentors with this process:

- Why were you interested in finding a mentor?
- What do you hope to get out of this mentoring relationship?
- What are your worries, frustrations, or concerns at work?
- What career options do you want to pursue?
- What are your goals for the job you are in now?
- What are the top five opportunities available to you right now? (Think of opportunities in terms of things your mentee could do, act on, or take advantage of to help them develop their full potential.)
- What actions could you do achieve a specific goal?
- What excites you about your job?
- What professional challenges do you want to work on? If you were to succeed in solving this challenge, what would success look like?

Evaluate and Track Progress

Periodically, mentoring partners should look at their relationship and discuss how it’s going. It is also a good idea for mentors to take some minimal notes to assess progress and track conversations. Some questions mentors and mentees can address together include the following:

- Are we meeting expectations in terms of amount of time spent together?
- Have we established enough trust so we can work together?
• Are each of us getting what we expected out of the mentoring relationship?
• Do we need to make any mid-course corrections to enhance the mentoring relationship?
• Have we made headway on activities centered on mentee goals?

Final Tips for Successful Mentors

• Reflect on past mentors; what did you like about them and their approach?
• Be open and receptive to all potential mentees
• Recognize that good relationships take time to develop; get to know your mentee and learn the things that are important to them
• Challenge mentees to be accountable for a developmental plan including their training needs; encourage mentees to act on their goals and meet time frames
• Listen and ask questions; withhold advice unless it is asked for
• Be empathetic to what mentees are going through; but don't get caught up in the problem yourself
• Maintain and respect privacy, honesty and integrity
• Ask for feedback on how you’re doing