

MENTORING IN PRACTICE.

Checklist 083

» INTRODUCTION

Mentoring is a relationship in which one person (the mentor) – who is usually more experienced and often more senior – supports another (the learner or mentee) with regular guidance, feedback and confidential discussion, so that he or she can become more self-aware, knowledgeable and confident, and develop their potential and capability. A mentoring relationship may be informal, between two people who respect and trust each other or it can be a more formal arrangement agreed upon as part of an organised mentoring scheme. The relationship differs from that between a trainer and a trainee, or a line manager and their reports, where seniority comes into play. The mentor can be any person with appropriate experience, ability and knowledge. His or her role is to listen, ask questions, act as a source of information and guidance, build confidence and signpost opportunities for learning from which the mentee can benefit. The mentor's aim is to help mentees form their own views, develop different perspectives, grow as a person and work towards or achieve their goals, not to instruct them or tell them what to do.

Mentoring currently enjoys widespread popularity. For example it is widely used in education, business and in health services. In addition, in the UK, a National Mentoring Scheme has enabled 18 to 24-year-old unemployed people to work with mentors from their chosen career and industry path to gain an understanding of their desired area of work from an experienced professional. In addition apprenticeships which are being promoted by the UK government and becoming increasingly popular are based on a form of mentoring relationship, with an on-site supervisor available to support apprentices through their learning journeys. As a development process, mentoring has advantages for the mentor, the mentee and organisations.

For the mentor, mentoring offers:

- › the opportunity to help and guide others in their career development
- › the opportunity to help others learn from their mistakes
- › increased job satisfaction, sense of value and status
- › the opportunity to develop their own management and leadership skills.

For the mentee, mentoring offers:

- › an objective and safe source of support in the development of new skills and directions
- › access to someone who understands their industry's or organisation's culture and ways of working
- › knowledge about options and ideas they may not have considered
- › increased confidence in their ability to achieve their goals.

For organisations, mentoring offers:

- › a cost-effective way to support talent development and succession planning
- › better staff retention levels and recruitment prospects
- › improved communication and acclimatisation of employees to the organisation's culture.

» DEFINITION

Mentoring is understood here as a form of employee development whereby a trusted and respected person – the mentor – uses their experience to offer guidance, encouragement and support to another person – the mentee.

1. Check the mentor has the appropriate skills

Mentors must be equipped to take a non-directive but guided approach, using open-ended questions to inspire the mentee to think creatively and innovatively thereby helping them to form their own strategic goals. It is essential for mentors to have:

- › good listening skills
- › questioning skills - open, closed, probing etc.
- › the ability to suspend judgement and prejudice, and to refrain from pushing the mentee in a particular direction
- › the ability to give both positive feedback and constructive suggestions for improvement in a way that motivating for the mentee
- › the ability to offer insights into challenges the mentee is facing
- › skill in helping to define goals, and plan ways of achieving them
- › the ability to signpost opportunities for the mentee, drawing on the skills and experiences of others.

It is also extremely important to ensure that all mentors have a clear idea of boundaries with regard to personal information and problems and a clear understanding that what is discussed in a mentoring session is confidential and must not be shared outside the session without the mentees explicit agreement, especially if the mentor works for the same organisation as the mentee. In addition, the mentor must be a person with sufficient experience to offer fresh perspectives based on their wider experience. Mentors may need training and development to sharpen and refine their skills.

2. Clarify the relationship

Ensure that both mentee and mentor are clear on what the relationship is - and is not - about. This will avoid confusion or disappointment at a later stage. Give due attention to safety and protection issues for both parties, and consider whether any legal checks are required. For example, in the UK, mentors may need to apply for a DBS check, especially if a mentee is under 18, has special needs, or is vulnerable in any way. The National Mentoring and Befriending Foundation can provide help in this area, and offers publications and good practice examples for mentoring (see Internet resources below.)

If appropriate, consider drafting a mentoring contract, with specifications that include:

- › the respective roles, responsibilities and commitments
- › the likely number and frequency of contact as agreed between the mentor and mentee
- › arrangements for review and amendments
- › the required sharing of personal data, such as telephone numbers and email addresses
- › a statement of the importance of confidentiality within the relationship.

Remember that the mentor's aim should be to support the mentee in developing himself or herself - not to get them to adopt the mentor's ideas. Dependency is to be avoided at all stages.

3. Open the relationship

Recognise that, in the early stages, the mentor will take more of a lead, while later, as the mentee's confidence and understanding grow, the balance will shift. Set objectives for what the mentoring process is to achieve, and make these achievable, specific, relevant and time-limited. Distinguish between short- and long-term goals and give thought and consideration to formulating them and finding ways tackle them.

4. Develop the relationship

At the start of each mentoring session, and whenever the mentee achieves a milestone, review their success, and identify what they have learnt about themselves and the process. Ask the mentee:

- › What happened?
- › Why?
- › What was learned from the experience?
- › What will you do differently the next time you are faced with a similar issue?

Identify jointly what needs to be explored in order to achieve the mentee's objective/s. Compare the desired outcome with what the current situation, identify gaps and outline what needs to happen to bridge them.

If an objective is knowledge-based, or attitudinal, the action needed may be harder to pin down, so explore options, discuss experiences, and always allow mentees to decide on what they will do for themselves.

If an objective is skill-based, break the required action down into steps - small and self-contained 'chunks' - so that each one can be tackled as a manageable entity. This will build in opportunities for regular progress reviews, and for success to be recognised and celebrated.

Select and agree appropriate actions towards achieving objectives, whether these are learning experiences that can be provided or facilitated by the mentor, knowledge that can be passed from mentor to mentee, or an increase in the self-awareness of the mentee through discussion and feedback.

At the end of each mentoring session, clarify what has been achieved, and be precise about what is to be done between this session and the next - especially if the mentor is to arrange something on the mentee's behalf. Ensure that responsibility for the mentee's development passes increasingly from the mentor to the mentee; this is essential as it will enable the mentee to develop the capability of standing alone when the mentoring process comes to an end.

5. End the relationship

Mentoring relationships between people outside work may exist for years, as an on-going process; however, it is important to recognise that, in a workplace context, there is likely to be a point when mentoring ends - when the objectives set have been achieved. When this point is reached, celebrate the success with a final review of all the progress made. It is always a good idea to start with the assumption that the mentoring relationship will last for a finite amount of time. Otherwise, it is too easy for the timescales to slip.



POTENTIAL PITFALLS

Managers should avoid:

- › assuming that any line manager can act as a mentor
- › assuming that an individual's direct line manager is an appropriate mentor
- › disclosing information that is obtained while mentoring others
- › being afraid, as a mentor, to be open and honest. If you don't know the answer to something, admit it and try to reach agreement with the mentee on how to move forward
- › trying to tell the mentee what he or she needs to know - the mentoring journey is one of guided self-exploration.

To be successful with mentoring, try to:

- › ensure a good match between the mentor and the mentee, so that the mentee can respect, trust and open up to the mentor
- › ensure that either the mentee or the mentor can end the relationship if it isn't working, without blame being assigned to either party

- › concentrate on the mentee's needs and aims, and allow flexibility in the approach
- › remember that a key part of the mentor's role is to open doors to other people's experience and learning
- › ensure that each session starts with a review and ends with a clear action plan
- › develop the relationship in such a way that it can be adjusted as necessary to give the mentee increasing responsibility.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BOOKS

Everyone needs a mentor, 5th ed, David Clutterbuck
London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2014

A practical guide to mentoring: using coaching and mentoring skills to help others achieve their goals, 5th ed, David Kay and Roger Hinds
Oxford: How to Books, 2012

The fit mentor: how to give people the mentor they need, Michael Heath
Birmingham: CGW Publishing, 2012

Coaching and mentoring: practical conversations to improve learning, Eric Parsloe and Melville
Leedham
London: Kogan Page, 2009
This book is also available as an e-book.

Coaching and mentoring: what they are and how to make the most of them, Jane Renton
London: Economist in association with Profile Books, 2009

Mentoring in action, 2nd ed, David Megginson and others
London: Kogan Page, 2006
This books is also available as an e-book.

This is a selection of books available for loan to members from CMI's library. More information at:
www.managers.org.uk/library

JOURNAL ARTICLES

Is mentoring the new black? Jenny Garrett
Training Journal, February 2013, pp66-69

Bringing on the next generation, Susan Hewitt
Training Journal, June 2011, pp45-49

Somebody's watching me, Amy Duff
Director, vol 63 no 8, April 2010, pp37-39

RELATED CHECKLISTS

- 053** Counselling your colleagues
- 082** Developing a mentoring scheme
- 222** Giving feedback
- 224** Devising coaching programme



NATIONAL OCCUPATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MANAGEMENT & LEADERSHIP

This checklist has relevance for the following standards:

- › Unit DC3 Mentor individuals



MORE INFORMATION

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