

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 able to develop their potential and capability. A mentoring relationship can be informal, or it can be a more formal arrangement between two people who respect and trust each other. It does not usually involve a bringing together of a trainer and a trainee or a line management arrangement, 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, probe for facts, act as a source of information and guidance, and signpost opportunities for learning from which the mentee can benefit. The aim of mentoring is to help mentees form their own views, develop different perspectives, grow as a person and work towards or achieve their next, intended goals.

Mentoring is popular at present. It is often used in education and in the health service. In addition, a National Mentoring Scheme has helped 18 to 24-year-old unemployed people to work with mentors from their chosen career and industry path; also, apprenticeships 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
- increased job satisfaction, sense of value and status
- increased honing of the mentor's own skills in management and leadership.

For the mentee mentoring offers:

- a visible demonstration of how he or she is valued by the mentor
- 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.

For organisations, mentoring offers:

- a cost-effective way to support succession planning, and develop human potential
- 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.

Action checklist

1. Check the mentor has the appropriate skills

It is essential that the mentor has:

- good listening skills
- questioning skills - open, closed, probing etc.
- the ability to suspend judgement and prejudice, and avoid driving the mentee in one direction
- the ability to give both positive and negative feedback in a constructive and motivational way
- skill in helping to define objectives, and plan ways of achieving them
- the ability to signpost opportunities for the mentee, drawing on other people's skills and experiences.

In addition, the mentor must be a person of relative experience who can open doors for the mentee, and offer viewpoints from a valued perspective. If necessary, the mentor will need training and development to sharpen and refine his or her 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 later confusion and disappointment. Consider safety and protection issues for both parties, and whether the mentor needs to apply for a CRB check (especially if a mentee is under 18, has special needs, or is vulnerable in any way). The National Mentoring and Befriending Organisation can 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 commitment
- planning for the likely number and frequency of contacts, and for review and amending as required
- the required sharing of personal data, such as telephone numbers and email addresses
- great stress on 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 grows, the balance will shift. Set objectives for what the mentoring process is to achieve, and make these achievable, specific, relevant and time-limited. Also, distinguish between short- and long-term goals that will need thought and consideration, and discuss ways and means of tackling these.

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 learned 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 exists now, 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 leave mentees able to decide on what they will do for themselves.

If an objective is skill-based, break the required action down into milestones - 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 action to achieve the objectives, whether it is 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 will happen between this session and the next - especially if the mentor is to arrange something on the mentee's behalf. Ensure control of the mentee's development passes increasingly from the mentor to the mentee; this is essential as it leaves the mentee capable of standing alone when the mentoring process ends.

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 work, there is likely to be a point when mentoring ends - when the objectives are achieved. When this point is reached, celebrate the success with a final review of all the progress made.

Managers should avoid

- assuming that any line manager can be thrown in 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 about yourself. If you don't know the answer to something, admit it and agree with the mentee how you will work on it between you
- 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 the mentee finds the mentor suitable, and can respect, trust and open up to him or her
- concentrate on the mentee's needs and aims, and allow flexibility in the approach
- remember a key part of the mentor 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
- control the relationship and adjust as necessary so that the mentee has increasing responsibility.

National Occupational Standards for Management and Leadership

This checklist has relevance to the following standards:

D: Working with people, units 1-2

Additional resources

Books

Coaching and mentoring: practical conversations to improve learning, Eric Parsloe and Melville Leedham
London: Kogan Page, 2009

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

Further techniques for coaching and mentoring, David Megginson and David Clutterbuck
Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann, 2009

Mentoring in action: a practical guide 2nd ed, David Megginson and others
London: Kogan Page, 2006

Mentoring: a Henley review of best practice, Jane Cranwell-Ward, Patricia Bossons and Sue Gover
Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004

The situational mentor: an international review of competences and capabilities in mentoring, David Clutterbuck and Gill Lane eds
Aldershot: Gower, 2004

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

Related checklists

Counselling your colleagues (053)
Developing a mentoring scheme (082)
Devising a coaching programme (224)
Giving criticism as a coach (223)
Giving feedback as a coach (222)

Internet resources

The Coaching and Mentoring Network www.coachingnetwork.org.uk
Offers news and information and a referral service.

Exemplas Ltd www.exemplas.com/Skills-and-Training/Mentoring--Coaching/
Non-profit organisation offering coaching and mentoring services.

Mentoring UK www.mentoring-uk.org.uk/default.asp
Offers a range of information and advice and a 'find a mentor' service.

Mentoring and Befriending Organisation <http://www.mandbf.org/contact>
Promotes mentoring and befriending through a range of initiatives.

Organisations

The European Mentoring and Coaching Council
PO Box 3154, Marlborough, Wiltshire, SN8 3WD
Email: [EMCC.Administrator\(at\)emccouncil.org](mailto:EMCC.Administrator(at)emccouncil.org)
Tel +44 121 222 8808 Web: www.emccouncil.org

This is one of many checklists available to all CMI members. For more information please contact

t: 01536 204222

e: enquiries@managers.org.uk

w: www.managers.org.uk

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