**Mentoring Skills**

**Using Your Knowledge and Experience to Help Others**

Whether it's some advice for a friend on helping them look for a new job or guidance for a child embarking on their first day at school, many of us regularly use our knowledge and experience to help and guide others.

But this type of help and guidance isn't just useful for our friends and family - by mentoring in the workplace, you can help people increase their effectiveness, advance their careers, and create a more productive organisation. Being a mentor can also be very rewarding.

**Benefits of Mentoring**

Mentoring is a relationship between the "mentor" and the "mentee." As a mentor, you pass on valuable skills, knowledge and insights to your mentee to help them develop their career.

Mentoring can help the mentee feel more confident and self-supporting. Mentees can also develop a clearer sense of what they want in their careers and personal lives. They will develop greater self-awareness and see the world, and themselves, as others do.

For an organisation, mentoring is a good way of efficiently transferring valuable competencies from one person to another. This expands the organisation’s skills base, helps to build strong teams, and can form part of a well-planned **Succession Planning** strategy. Many apprenticeship schemes are based on the principles of mentoring.

**Note:**

There are two main types of mentoring:

* **Developmental mentoring** - This is where the mentor is helping the mentee develop new skills and abilities. The mentor is a guide and a resource for the mentee's growth.
* **Sponsorship mentoring** - This is when the mentor is more of a career influencer than a guide. In this situation, the mentor takes a close interest in the mentee’s progress (or, more commonly, the protege). The mentor "opens doors", influencing others to help the mentee or protege's advancement.

**Skills for developmental Mentoring**

To be a good mentor, you need similar skills to those used in **coaching**, with one big difference - you must have experience relevant to the mentee's situation. This can be technical experience, management experience, or simply life experience.

To be an effective mentor, you need to:

* **Have the desire to help** - you should be willing to spend time helping someone else and remain positive throughout.
* **Be motivated to continue developing and growing** - your **development** never stops. To help others develop, you must value your growth too. Many mentors say that mentoring helps them with their personal development.
* **Have confidence and an assured manner** - we don't mean overconfidence or a big ego. Rather, you should have the ability to critique and challenge mentees in a way that's non-threatening and helps them look at a situation from a new perspective.
* **Ask the right questions** - the best mentors ask questions that make the mentee do the thinking. However, this isn't as easy as it sounds. A simple guide is to think of what you want to tel1 the mentee and to find a question that will help the mentee come to the same conclusion on their own. To do this, try asking open questions that cannot be answered with just yes or no. Or ask more direct questions that offer several answer options. Then ask the mentee why they chose that particular answer.
* **Listen actively** - be careful to process everything the mentee is saying. Watch body language, maintain eye contact, and understand which topics are difficult for the mentee to discuss. Showing someone that you're listening is a valuable skill in itself. lt shows that you value what the person is saying and that you won't interrupt them. This requires patience, and a willingness to delay judgment.
* **Provide feedback** - do this in a way that accurately and objectively summarizes what you've heard, but also interprets things in a way that adds value for the mentee. In particular, use **feedback** to show that you understand what the mentee's thinking approach has been. This is key to helping the mentee see a situation from another perspective.

Remember, mentoring is about transferring information, competence, and experience to mentees so that they can make good use of this, and build their confidence accordingly. As a mentor, you are there to encourage, nurture, and provide support, because you've already "walked the path" of the mentee.

Also remember that mentoring is about structured development you don't have to tel1 the mentee everything you know about a subject, at every opportunity.

**Tip:**

**Heron's Six Categories of intervention** provides a useful framework for analyzing how you can help people more effectively.

**How to Manage a Mentoring Relationship**

Below are some guidelines for setting up and running a successful mentoring arrangement:

**Set regular mentoring meetings**

A mentoring relationship is one of mutual trust and respect. So meet regularly, and lead by example. The mentoring conversation may be informal, but treat the overall arrangement with formality and professionalism.

If possible, conduct mentoring meetings away from the mentee's normal working environment. A change of environment helps remove the conversation from everyday perspectives.

**Be honest and open**

If you're not honest, a mentoring meeting will probably be a waste of time for both of you. Discuss current top issues or concerns. Sometimes an honest exchange leads to the mentor and mentee deciding that they don't really like or respect each other. It's better to know upfront and build from this sort of understanding, rather than have it hurt the relationship.

**Build sustainable improvements, not quick fixes**

Use the mentoring session to exchange views and give the mentee guidance, and don't just give the mentee immediate answers to a problem. A simple answer to a problem is rarely as valuable as understanding how to approach such problems in the future.

**Play by the rules**

Establish some rules or a charter for the mentoring arrangement, with desired outcomes. This could be a set agenda for points to cover or some performance goals for the mentee to pursue outside of their regular appraisal structure. (One of the key reasons that mentoring can fail is that there's a fundamental misunderstanding about what's expected from the mentor and mentee.)

Most mentoring arrangements work best when they're outside of the day-to-day line management relationship between people. That doesn't mean that you can't mentor the people in your team, but it's often best to have a mentoring relationship that crosses reporting lines.

In a small organization, you may not have this option. If this is the case, make sure everyone knows when you're acting as a mentor, rather than as a manager.

**Key Points**

Mentoring is a great way to progress a person's professional and personal development and help create a more productive organization. lt can also be very rewarding - for the mentor and the mentee.

Treat the mentoring relationship with the respect it deserves. Focus the relationship on the mentee's needs, and use the powerful skills of smart questioning, active listening, and value-added feedback to achieve the best outcomes from your mentoring.

To keep the mentoring relationship on track, set regular mentor meetings, be honest and open, and don't look for quick fixes. Mentoring is a long-term commitment.