



# TOP TIPS FOR MENTORS

## ROLE OF A MENTOR

As a mentor you will be viewed as a more experienced member of staff who is willing and able to pass on the benefit of that experience. However your role is not simply to 'tell' the mentee what to do, the role of the mentor is to:

- Listen and be supportive
- Provide non-judgemental support
- Provide guidance on issues raised
- Clarify goals of mentee
- Pass on knowledge and experience

Once you have agreed to be a mentor, you need to agree with the mentee how the relationship will work. This should ideally be done at the beginning of the first meeting. There is no need to formalise the arrangement by drawing up a contract, but there are key issues that need to be discussed and agreed.

Below is a suggested list of the topics to include in the discussion:

## MEETINGS

- Frequency and length
- Location
- Formal vs. Informal
- Who and how will outcomes/action plans be recorded?
- How will communication outside of meetings be dealt with; method, turnaround, frequency etc.?
- Are there any issues that will not be discussed?
- Are there any limits on confidentiality? Are the contents of the meetings to be kept confidential or can they be discussed with outside parties?

## WHAT IS MENTORING

Mentoring is a highly valuable development activity implemented in many Organisations. At the core of the activity is the relationship between the mentor and the mentee, where the development of the mentee is the key focus. The development needs satisfied through the relationship can vary in focus from guidance on settling into a new organisation, performance improvement to career management. The main point with mentoring is that the focus is determined by the mentee. They must lead in identifying issues and, with guidance from the mentor, resolving them. The mentor is not there to provide 'the answers', but to guide the mentee towards 'the answer' that is

right for them. The mentoring relationship can be both short and long term. It may develop to focus on a particular issue or it may be one that lasts for years covering a range of issues. Typically the mentor and mentee meet at designated times and places to discuss issues; make plans to resolve and then review. The formal vs. informal nature of the sessions is down to those involved, however each session must have a purpose.

## KEY QUALITIES OF AN EFFECTIVE MENTOR

A mentor-mentee pairing requires work, commitment, and follow-through on both sides if it's going to succeed. So, what aptitudes should you demonstrate to make sure that the mentoring you offer is effective and has lasting value?

Consider these seven key qualities that can help you become an effective mentor:

### 1. ABILITY AND WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE WHAT YOU KNOW

It goes without saying that as a mentor, you're regarded as an expert in your field or area of responsibility. But it's one thing to know what you're doing; it's entirely another to be able to clearly explain what you know--and to be willing to take the time to do it. Forget the jargon, the acronyms, and the buzzwords. Being clear when you communicate the lessons you've learned, or the strategies or guidance you're offering, is essential, as is your level of desire to communicate the intricate details in a way that makes sense and that your mentee can understand and learn from.

### 2. PREPAREDNESS

Being a mentor means making an important, serious commitment to someone, so give your mentee--and the process--the respect he or she deserves. Show your faith in your mentee's abilities and in the process by preparing for each mentoring session. This isn't a stream-of-consciousness deal or a "go-ahead-and-pick-my-brain" process. Yes, it's important for your mentee to actively participate and even take the lead in these sessions. But you should ask your mentee what topics or subjects he or she wants to talk about beforehand, and once you know, you should outline the key points you want to focus on ahead of time, and have a plan ready for imparting your details in an effective and expedient way.

### 3. APPROACHABILITY, AVAILABILITY, AND THE ABILITY TO LISTEN

Your mentee must feel comfortable approaching you for advice or consultation; however, he or she must keep your availability and your schedule in mind. So, it's good policy to establish a set day and time for regular sessions or meetings. In this hurry-up-and-make-it-happen world, it's important to be prepared and make the most of the time you've got with your mentee. You owe that to him or her, to the process, and to yourself. And once these time parameters are established, you must keep your commitments wholeheartedly and be ready to listen well and with an open mind, along with providing counsel and advice.

### 4. HONESTY WITH DIPLOMACY

Any questions that aren't addressed can lead to concerns and problems, so you owe it to your mentee to be candid and straightforward with him or her. Dispense with formalities and really help facilitate an open, even lively dialogue--a give-and-take--and don't beat around the bush in offering your constructive feedback, good and bad. Say what you think your mentee *needs* to hear from you, not what you think he or she might *want* to hear. Be willing to debate and discuss in a tactful way. Provide useful, honest guidance while ensuring that your mentee takes the reins and makes his or her own decisions as to next steps or the best course of action.

### 5. INQUISITIVENESS

Being a mentor also means you should continue learning about what's going on in your industry or business, your school, your community, or the world at large. Remember: What worked a decade ago may not be optimal today, and what works today may not work as well one, two, five, or more years from now. So, continual learning is essential if you plan to continue to be an effective mentor. Always keep an alert eye on trends, topics, and developments that may impact you or your role, both now and in the future. And if your mentee asks you something you don't know the answer to, do yourself and your mentee a favor and follow up to find the answer.

## 6. OBJECTIVITY AND FAIRNESS

Remember that a mentoring relationship differs from a friendship. Yes, you like your mentee and care about seeing him or her succeed, but that doesn't mean you have to socialize with your mentee or follow or friend him or her on social websites like Twitter and Facebook. LinkedIn, specifically designed for business networking, may be a more appropriate connection to establish with your mentee. Also, ensure that there's no hidden agenda or ulterior motives involved in this relationship. Outside of the mentor-mentee relationship, you don't owe your mentee any favors, and he or she doesn't owe you anything except his or her thanks. Equally, others who know you and your mentee don't owe either of you anything. You can be an advocate for your mentee while still retaining your objectivity and fairness and not unfairly influencing any process either of you may be involved in.

## 7. COMPASSION AND GENUINENESS

Just because you must maintain your objectivity and fairness doesn't mean you can't show your compassion. In fact, your mentoring relationship probably won't work if you don't show your interest and desire to provide one-on-one help and guidance. You must also be selfless about sharing what you know. Keeping your goal in mind--to remain worthy of someone's trust, model positive behavior and successful performance, and offer guidance and advice toward reaching a specific goal--should be the compass that guides all your actions as a mentor.

## FEEDBACK

Feedback is crucial for mentoring to work. If you notice actions which are affecting your mentee's ability to achieve their goals, whether good or bad, these need to be addressed. If you're struggling to prepare feedback, the BOOST model can help:

**Balance-** Make sure you're giving equal feedback- don't just give them a dump of negative comments!

**Observe-** Base feedback on what you have seen; ignore hearsay or even your own opinion.

**Objective-** Feedback should only be based on what has happened, rather than your personal opinion of them. For example, instead of saying, 'you're lazy,' try to angle it more as, 'you're consistently late in the morning.'

**Specifics-** Be as accurate as possible using specific examples of their actions and behaviours.

**Time-** Feedback should be given immediately, ASAP after the task or activity takes place. This way, feedback will be remembered and is less likely to be deflected.