

Guidelines for Mentors

What is a Mentor?

A mentor is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as an “experienced and trusted adviser”. This description reflects how we would like to see mentors work with their mentees. Your role as mentor will cover at least some of the following:

- Listen
- Ask questions to help develop your's and the mentee's understanding of a situation or problem
- Provide information and knowledge and share informal networks
- Provide advice on career development
- Offer different perspectives
- Provide support and encouragement
- Provide an insight into your work and career
- Offer guidance and advice in regards to qualifications
- Be a sounding board
- Be a critical friend
- Encourage self-reflection
- Help mentees identify areas for development

As a mentor you will have the opportunity to use your experience and knowledge in a facilitative manner to support the development of the mentee. However, the responsibility for making things happen and putting plans into action lies primarily with the mentee - not with you.

Skills and experience required to be a Mentor

- *Self Awareness* – you should have a good understanding of your own strengths and development needs.
- *Credibility* – you should have personal and professional credibility; this may include being a member of relevant organisations.
- *Accessibility* – you should be willing and able to commit sufficient time to your mentee to offer support and guidance.
- *Communication* – you need excellent communication skills and be able to understand the ideas and feelings of others. You also need to be a great listener.
- *Ability to empower* – you should be able to create a working environment where it is safe for individuals to try out different things, allowing them to contribute in different ways.

- *A desire to help others develop* – you should understand how individuals develop and have experience, either formally or informally, of developing others.
- *Inventiveness* – be open to new ways of doing things and different ways of working.
- *Empathy* – Ability to empathise with others.
- *Understanding* – You should be prepared to try to understand different perspectives, approaches and possibly backgrounds of different mentees.

Different mentoring approaches may be required

Coaching

This is a very active role for the mentor where you will be working with the mentee to encourage them in the development of relevant skills and attitudes for the future. The focus of the coaching role is on the ability to help the mentee see beyond the current situation and to identify what the future can look like and what needs to happen to help achieve this. This is helpful in setting goals and identifying what actions an individual needs to take next.

Core skills needed:

- Listening with an open mind and suspending judgements
- Being able to see the issue from a different perspective, that of the mentee
- Identifying behaviour that needs to change
- Helping mentees to recognise their own individual strengths and areas of weakness
- Providing constructive feedback
- Setting projects that will stretch the mentee
- Ability to clarify so both parties have a shared understanding
- Being able to take a mentee back through and experience, to help them to evaluate it and to recognise what could have been done differently

Counselling

In counselling mode the mentor acts as a sounding board when the mentee is solving a problem or making a difficult decision. As a confidant, the mentor helps the mentee to clarify the real issues involved and to see the bigger picture.

Core skills needed:

- Listening – withholding comments unless it helps the mentee to clarify their thoughts
- Focusing on observable behaviours rather than personality traits
- The ability to handle negative information without driving the mentee into an emotional corner
- Avoiding unconstructive arguments
- Being able to help move the mentee into constructive problem-solving mode
- Knowing when to call in specialist advice

Networking

In the role of networking the mentor alerts the mentee to the use of contacts both formal and informal outside of the official structure of their department or organisation. They also explain how these individuals can add value to the mentee in the achievement of their goals.

Core skills needed:

- The ability to define and understand networks, what adds value and why
- Understanding key areas you need to influence and who are the key individuals
- Creating opportunities for mentees to meet others who will help provide information or opportunities to help develop gaps in the mentee's knowledge

Facilitating

The mentor as facilitator and takes action that will indirectly smooth the way for something else to happen. This could be as simple as passing on a phone number or making an introduction to someone who will be helpful for the mentee either now or in the future. By facilitating you are starting a process that will help the mentee to pursue their goals.

Core skills needed:

- Being clear about what needs to happen and why
- Recognising potential barriers and what causes them
- Provide advice and guidance on ways to overcome barriers
- An understanding of the politics of management
- Smoothing the path for mentees for example by providing introductions, backing ideas and spreading the word on projects the mentee is working on

Mentoring using the GROW model

The GROW model is a good way to structure a meeting with your mentee. You can either start with the goal and work logically through the model or you can move the model around, starting with the reality and then the goal, if this works best. Remember to always finish with the way forward and ensure that this is set and owned by the mentee. The model is outlined below.

Goal – Get the mentee to focus on the future and on what THEY want to achieve as an individual. It is not where you think they should be aiming.

Reality – Ask questions to help the mentee establish where they are now. If you work with the individual directly you may need to give feedback on actual performance. Encourage the individual to get feedback on their performance from their direct line manager if you do not work with them directly as this will help them to identify their current reality.

Options – help the mentee to identify what different options are open to them and ask questions to help them explore the reality of each of these options. Share your own experiences if the mentee is struggling to identify sufficient options and beware of being too directive.

Way Forward – Encourage the mentee to design an action plan which they have set and encourage them to set SMART objectives, objectives that are specific, measurable, achievable and realistic for the mentee in their current position and that have clear timescales attached.

Remember to:

- Focus on what the mentee needs to achieve
- Listen more than you talk
- Support and encourage the mentee
- Encourage the mentee to address challenging issues
- Keep an open mind.

Don't:

- Take responsibility for the action plan
- Assume that what worked for you will work for your mentee
- Take action on behalf of the mentee unless you jointly agree that this is the best course of action
- Assume you know what the problem or the answer is.