

The Meaning of Mentoring

Mentoring comes from the Greek word meaning enduring. It can be defined as a sustained relationship between an individual (the mentor), usually older, always more experienced, who helps and guides another individual's development (the mentee). This guidance is not done for personal gain.

Through continued involvement, the mentor offers support, guidance, and assistance when the mentee goes through a difficult period, faces new challenges, or works to correct earlier problems. Mentors can play a critical role where the mentee is a youth, and parents are unavailable or unable to provide responsible guidance for their children.

A bit of History and Background:

Mentor was the name of the person to whom Odysseus (a.k.a. Ulysses) entrusted the care of his son, Telemachus, when he set out on those famous wanderings of his that we now call an "odyssey" and which took him, among other places, to the Trojan Wars. Mentor was the wise and trusted counsellor of Odysseus as well as tutor to Telemachus.

Myth has it that the goddess Athena would assume Mentor's form for the purpose of giving counsel to Odysseus but, for many centuries now, the goddess has been unavailable for comment to confirm or refute this rumour.

Perils and Pitfalls of the Mentoring Relationship:

- Becoming too personally involved – *Advise in an objective way;*
- Failing to be honest about problems *There must be openness and trust;*
- “Taking over” from the task mentee – *To learn, people need to do it themselves;*
- Resist giving critical personal advice and counselling Pay attention to ‘the line’;
- Keeping concerns to yourself – If worried about an issue ask someone **YOU** can trust;

Remember being asked to be someone's mentor is an honour. Both members of the partnership must have confidence, respect and trust in the partnership.

Who has the Qualities of a good Mentor?

Wondering about whether you could be a mentor?

A **YES** response to the questions outlined below will indicate that you **DO** have the qualities needed. .

- Do you know what it's like to have worries, frustrations or concerns about your work?
- Do people seek you out to talk about their worries, frustrations, and concerns?
- Is the amount of time you spend listening at least four times what you spend talking?
- Has anyone helped you gain knowledge about how things work or how to get things done?
- Has anyone provided you with a quote that had great meaning for you? If it influenced your thinking or behaviour, did you pass on to others?
- Has anyone encouraged you to find a way to deal with challenges in your life or work?
- Has there ever been anyone in your life who had a profound positive effect on you, but you didn't realize it until much later in your life?
- Has anyone inspired you to shift the direction of your life in a constructive way?
- Have you ever had something you observed, read, or experienced have a profound effect on your strengths and abilities?

If you find you can't answer yes to these questions, use this information to help you identify how you may develop your qualities further. We can all contribute as a mentor if we can share our areas of experience and knowledge with others.

Essential Qualities of a Mentor are:

- A desire to help;
- Have had positive experiences;
- Good reputation for developing others;
- Time and Energy;
- Up to date knowledge;
- Learning Attitude;
- Demonstrated effective managerial (mentoring) skills

Characteristics of a Mentee are:

- Committed to expanding their capabilities
- Open and receptive to new ways of learning and trying new ideas
- Able to accept feedback and act upon it
- Focused on achieving desired results
- Able to communicate and work cooperatively with others
- Knows when to ask for help
- Have a sense of personal responsibility and commitment
- Willing to meet on a regular basis.

The Mentoring Mentality:

The important message is that it is not about a mentoring relationship, but rather a mentoring mentality. You don't need a single mentor but rather a mindset that allows you to learn from those around you, no matter who they are. A few key points are:

1. **Deliberate learning is the cornerstone.** The mentor's job is to promote intentional learning, which includes capacity building through methods such as instructing, coaching, providing experiences, modelling and advising.
 2. **Both failure and success are powerful teachers.** Mentors, as leaders of a learning experience, need to share their "how to do it so it comes out right" stories. They also need to share their experiences of failure, i.e. "how I did it wrong". Both types of stories are powerful lessons that provide valuable opportunities for analysing individual and organizational realities.
 3. **Leaders need to tell their stories.** Personal scenarios, anecdotes and case examples, offering valuable, often unforgettable insight, must be shared.
- Mentors who can talk about themselves and their experiences establish a rapport that makes them "learning leaders."
4. **Development matures over time.** Mentoring when it works taps into continuous learning principles. The benefits escalate as a result of ongoing events, experiences, observation, studies, and thoughtful analysis.
 5. **Mentoring is a joint venture.** Successful mentoring means sharing responsibility for learning, regardless of the facilities, the subject matter, the timing, and all other variables. Successful mentoring begins with setting a contract for learning around which the mentor, the protégé, and other people that are involved, can agree with and work to achieve.

Getting Started

1. Clarify what you want to achieve. Mentoring serves the following broad purposes:
 - **Educational or academic mentoring;**
 - **Career mentoring;**
 - **Personal development mentoring.**
2. Find an appropriate mentor. This can be done formally through a mentoring program, or simply by finding a person that you see as a positive role model and approach them and ask.
3. Have a first meeting where both parties can discuss their expectations. More detailed objectives can be defined and adopted as the relationship evolves.

4. Maintain regular communication with your mentor so that the mentor/protégé relationship can survive.
5. Make sure you both enjoy the experience!

© Copyright Australian Region Board of Directors for promotional use in Australia