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Leadership Essentials

Mentoring

Achieving leaders are mentored and mentor



There are many definitions of mentoring reflecting how the practice of mentoring has evolved over time.

Mentoring models have shifted from hierarchical relationships where a mentee benefits from the knowledge and experience of the more experienced senior mentor, to more reciprocal models which acknowledge the benefits to both parties of the mentee-mentor relationship.

There are many types of mentoring programmes but they fall into four main categories:

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| 1-1 mentoring an experienced mentor, who does not have to be the mentee's line manager, with a less experienced mentee | Group mentoring where a team or group is supported to achieve planned outcomes | Training based mentoring links a mentoring scheme to a training programme | Executive mentoring programme is a succession planning programme to grow senior executives from existing pool of senior staff |
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The main focus of any mentoring scheme, however, is developmental.

Mentoring is a relational activity in a specific context where two people benefit from having conversations. Traditionally, mentoring was considered as the passing on of the experience of an older colleague to a younger less experienced one. Recent Institute of Leadership & Management research challenges this definition having identified that both parties may obtain significant benefit from the relationship.

How to be a good mentor

According to Demers (2014), mentors are experienced leaders, who seek to provide a safe, supportive space for mentees to explore issues. If you want to be a good mentor you need to demonstrate:

- A willingness to communicate what you know. This means teaching your mentee what you have learnt in a way that they can understand and reflect upon
- Availability for regular mentoring meetings, which shows your commitment and interest in the person you are mentoring
- You are approachable and willing to listen to their perspectives so that your advice is meaningful and helpful
- Honesty and tactfulness. This means saying what needs to be said, because honest feedback enables change and development
- Curiosity and supporting individual development using a reflective approach, and continuously learning
- You can be objective and fair in your interactions with your mentee, but also in any advocacy work you agree on their behalf
- At all times being compassionate and genuine in your dealings with your mentee

How to be a good mentee

- Demonstrate your eagerness to learn from your mentor
- Take the mentoring relationship seriously and showing respect
- Show initiative by being clear about your goals and your learning needs
- Demonstrate flexibility and understanding of your mentor's demanding schedule
- Be prompt and well prepared for all your appointments
- Feedback what you are learning
- Show an interest in your mentor's contribution to your learning
- Acknowledge the contribution your mentor makes to your development

Mincemoyer and Thomson (1998)

1-1 mentoring relationship process

Mentoring needs careful planning, delivery and evaluation.

Preparation

- Both mentor and mentee must prepare a list of what they want from mentoring and then share it with each other. This will establish the motivation for the mentoring relationship and begin to establish parameters for what will be discussed in the mentoring meetings

- Both mentor and mentee need to explore their readiness for this relationship, and have some insight into personal areas for learning and development. It is helpful to highlight strengths but also areas you would like to develop so that each party shares the responsibility for making the relationship work

Agree how you will work together

- Both mentor and mentee need to agree the outcomes of the mentoring relationship, define the learning goals, and the process for meetings. Establish ground rules and arrive at a shared understanding about assumptions, expectations, goals, and needs
- Agree issues of confidentiality and boundaries. These discussions should include where to meet, responsibilities and criteria for success, how progress is reviewed, and when mentoring will end.
- All agreements need to be summarised, and both parties should sign the agreement. This document can be referred to if problems arise
- Agree how difficulties will be addressed

Meetings

- Agree how to structure the meetings to optimise opportunities for learning
- Mentoring needs open communication, which requires discussion time and reflection, as well as a summary at the end of what has been learnt
- It is helpful to find a way to record progress to ensure that the learning goals are being delivered

Endings

- Record what has been achieved and evaluated at the end of each meeting
- If the meetings are not delivering what is expected, this needs to be explored, and changes made if needed
- At the end of the mentoring process have a meeting to review the experience and to highlight what has been achieved

As an aspiring leader, accessing a mentoring opportunity could be very useful to you and to members in your team. To make the best of any mentoring opportunity you need to assess if mentoring is right for you.

Overcoming Barriers to Mentoring

Although mentoring in the workplace has undoubted benefits and is widely popular today, there are potential barriers to mentoring that should be considered when designing and implementing a mentoring programme.

| Barrier | Solution |
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| Insufficient resources arising from a lack of planning, i.e. needing to create a mentoring program, not knowing how to do it, and being given an impossibly short timeline | Have a solid plan in place with a process that outlines how you intend to proceed, the resources required to support your programme, and a methodology that confirms not only what you are doing but also why you are doing it |
| Lack of buy-in from senior managers, who may see mentoring as not providing value for money and view a mentoring programme as ‘nice to have’ rather than a necessity | Pitch your mentoring program as an organisational strategy with built-in KPIs and measurements to prove your success |
| Assuming that your mentors and mentees automatically know what their role entails within your program; the combination of no training or guidance and your participant’s misunderstanding of their roles can result in an unsuccessful program with floundering mentors and mentees | Communicate your expectations continuously throughout the mentoring program. Consider mentor training to lead your communication efforts. This will make sure everyone is on the same page when you position mentoring within your organisation |
| A new member with different ideas or problems within a mentor-mentee partnership | Spot check throughout the program to ensure that everyone is still on the same page. The first spot check should be done at about 6–8 weeks into the program |

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| <p>Common misconceptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring won't fit into busy schedules • Mentoring has no value to careers or personal lives • Mentoring is not an organisational strategy | <p>Overcome misconceptions by setting expectations at the beginning. Provide a strategic planning workshop and role profiles in order to set participants straight on misunderstandings they may have about your program</p> |
| <p>External pressures such as the economy, budget cuts, and organizational politics</p> | <p>Ensure that leadership and management take the program seriously, prove your success and ROI, point to specific problem areas you can improve</p> |

Adapted from Insala (2019)

References

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Demers, J (2014). **7 key qualities of an Effective mentor** www.inc.com/jayson-demers/7-key-qualities-of-an-effective-mentor.html

Dimensions of Leadership

The Institute of Leadership & Management's Dimensions of Leadership offer, often elusive, insights into great leadership. This is not a static representation but an evolving description of the complex nature of leadership activity.

Find out more at www.institutelm.com/learning/dimensions-of-leadership.html