

Annexe 6 - Mentoring in practice: advice for mentors and mentees

These guidelines aim to outline the basic ideas and principles of mentoring /coaching for those who are embarking on being a mentor or mentee perhaps for the first time.

What is mentoring?

You may find it useful to be mentored (or coached) at different stages of your professional life – perhaps when new to the University; in transition between posts; when wanting to progress or change direction; or for some other reason. But what is mentoring? The term is sometimes used alongside ‘coaching’, because there is no one definition of either, and the boundaries between them are often blurred. One useful description is: ‘the practice of supporting an individual through the process of achieving a specific personal or professional result.’ This might happen at any point along a scale that has championing or sponsoring someone’s professional progress at one end; providing advice and support arising from the mentor’s seniority and / or greater experience somewhere in the middle; and a more facilitative process at the other end where the mentor or coach listens, questions and challenges the individual to encourage them to find answers and determine actions for themselves.

In the context of the University’s administrative functions, the way mentoring works will depend on the mentee’s individual objectives – although it is possible that all the elements mentioned above will play a part at some stage. Nevertheless, because what will happen will be based on the mentee’s individual objectives, a crucial first step in the process is for both parties to set out and agree upon expectations, objectives, and logistical aspects. This ‘contracting’ stage is essential to the success of the mentoring process.

Contracting

1. Logistics: You should aim to reach agreement on:

- *How often and for how long to meet*
- About once a month for about an hour is generally considered to be the normal arrangement, although this can be adjusted according to what is appropriate for the people and objectives involved. Consideration should be given to the time restrictions of both parties, particularly the mentor.
- *How many meetings / how long should the process last?*
- Again the usual cycle is about 6 meetings over 6 months, but this may vary depending on what suits the mentoring pair. Certainly there should be clarity at the beginning about how long the process will continue. You may also want to consider whether to set dates and times for all the meetings at the beginning of the process, or to set each one as you go along.
- *Where to meet*
- As well as considering the practicalities of a suitable place to meet, think about what kind of perspectives the environment might bring to the mentoring process. Somewhere neutral might be preferable to the mentor’s or the mentee’s office. Above all wherever you meet it should provide privacy and be a place where the mentee will feel confident and secure enough to discuss concerns openly.
- You may also want to consider whether ‘meeting’ by phone or virtually through something like Skype might be appropriate for you.
- *Communication between meetings*

- How much communication do you expect between meetings? How will you communicate? – By phone, email, face to face? Discuss and agree each party's preferences. What will happen if one party is unable to make a scheduled meeting?
- *Keeping records*
- Who will be responsible for keeping a note of what is discussed and actions to be taken? In what format?

2. Content

It is worth thinking about these aspects in preparation for the initial meeting so as to be clear about expectations.

Mentee

- What are your objectives for the mentoring? If these are not entirely clear don't worry, but discuss why they may not be clear with your mentor.
- What do you hope to get from the process? – sponsorship, advice or direction, sharing of your mentor's knowledge, experience and expertise, skills development, personal development, specific goals – something else?
- What do you hope or expect to get from your mentor in relation to your objectives?
- How will you know / measure whether objectives have been achieved?
- Is there anything you do not wish to discuss as part of the mentoring?

Mentor

- Are you clear about what the objectives are?
- What and how much are you able / willing to provide in respect of the mentee's objectives and expectations?
- How much 'work' are you happy to do for the mentee between meetings?
- What other boundaries do you have?

Both

- An understanding of confidentiality is essential to the process being productive. What is your individual understanding of what confidentiality means, and do your ideas align with each other? How will you manage it if they don't?
- How will you manage things if either of you wishes to end the mentoring relationship before the agreed time?

The Mentoring Process

Very broadly, the mentor is responsible for holding the process and the mentee for working on the content. However this is a flexible definition and the extent to which the dividing line is blurred depends on how the pair have agreed to work together. What is important is that you work to establish a relationship that is based on mutual respect.

What should the mentor do?

- Hold the process: maintain an awareness of the time; although the conversation will invariably explore many related areas, you should ensure that ultimately the focus stays on the issue in hand, and retains a constructive tone; hold any boundaries that have been agreed
- Listen actively: see separate notes
- Adopt an observational stance rather than an interpretive one
- Summarise and reflect back in your own words what you think you have heard (and seen)
- Ask questions appropriately: see separate note

- Challenge: you might challenge perceived inconsistencies or assumptions in what you are hearing from the mentee; or you might challenge them to take action to stretch themselves. Whatever the reason, it needs to be done sensitively and appropriately so as to open up possibilities rather than to close them down
- Encourage the mentee to explore a wide range of options and possibilities
- Provide advice / share expertise and knowledge appropriately and within what has been agreed at the contracting stage
- Encourage the setting of action points that are specific, realistic and time bound
- Review progress

If this is the first time that you have been a mentor, it might be helpful to talk about what you might expect with someone who has more experience.

What should the mentee do?

- Own and take responsibility for the content – don't expect the mentor to solve your problems or provide quick fixes. Remain aware that the purpose of mentoring is for you to work on your professional development
- Be open to developing your self-awareness and to making changes
- Be open to what the mentor has to say and to their advice; this does not mean you have to agree with it. It does mean you should receive it, reflect upon it and decide later whether you agree and whether to act on it
- Reflect between sessions on what has been discussed
- Take the action agreed

A selection of models and tools that might be useful in the mentoring process accompanies this document.

Finally....

However thorough your contracting has been, it is possible that issues will arise that have not been covered by the process – or that take you beyond its boundaries. It is important that you remain open in these circumstances and consider whether it would be appropriate to review and revise the agreement together, or to bring it to an end.

Whether this happens, or when the process comes to its natural end, do ensure that it and the relationship are closed appropriately. This can be done by reviewing and celebrating the progress and achievements made, and considering how the mentee is going to continue to work on their development.

Alison Trinder (MPLS Division), 2012

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Appendix 1 - Tools and Models for Coaching and Mentoring

These are suggestions for things you may find useful in the course of the mentoring.

1. GROW (Adapted from John Whitmore, Coaching for Performance, 1992)

GOAL: What do you want to achieve?

REALITY: What is the current situation? Where are you now?

Options: What are the options available to you? (be creative and explorative, but also realistic and practical)

Will: What will you do now? How much will do you have to do it?

2. CLEAR (From Peter Hawkins and Nick Smith, Coaching, Mentoring and Organizational Consultancy, 2006)

Contract: establish the aims for the session

Listen: listen and understand what the mentee wants to achieve, and their situation

Explore: the situation, the options

Action: define and agree what the mentee is going to do

Review: review both the current session, and revisit at the beginning of the following session.

3. Drawing and Mind mapping

Using drawing to explore a situation or goal can sometimes open up new possibilities by engaging creativity. Another creative technique is to mind-map an issue, goal or situation. A mind map is a pictorial representation of an idea. The central concept, situation or idea is placed in the centre of a piece of paper and associated ideas are shown as radiating out from it. See *The Mind Map Book*, Tony & Barry Buzan or

<http://www.mind-mapping.co.uk/make-mind-map.htm>

4. Journals (Adapted from Anne Brock bank and Ian McGill, Facilitating Reflective Learning through Mentoring and Coaching, 2006)

Keeping a mentoring journal is a way to capture and reflect on what has been discussed during sessions. You might simply record what was said; include your thoughts, feelings and any insights about the discussion. Or if you want to be more creative, some techniques are:

- Five minute sprint: take five minutes to answer these three questions: *Who am I/ Why am I here? What do I want?*
- List of 100: take 20 minutes to make a list under one of these headings: *'What I want'* *'How I feel'*; *'Why not?'*; *'Things to do'*; *'People to see.'*
- Perspectives: take 20 minutes to see thing from an altered point of view, e.g.: *a year from today; roads not taken – what if?*
- Dialogues: *write two sides of a conversation with anything or anyone.*

5. Walking and Talking

Changing the venue for the mentoring, or walking while you are talking can energise a session and bring fresh perspective.

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Appendix 2 - Listening and questioning for mentors

Active listening

Listening well is a key skill and one that needs practice. On occasion we may not listen well because our attention is on something other than what the other person is saying: perhaps comparing what is being said to our own experience; rehearsing what we are going to say when the speaker stops; solving the speaker's problem for them; or thinking about something else entirely such as what we are going to have for dinner. To listen well:

- Practise turning yourself off completely and concentrating on the other person and what they are saying. When you notice yourself not listening well, bring your attention back to the speaker, and gradually you will find that it becomes easier to concentrate on what is being said
- Practise listening for the unspoken messages underneath the words. Often these become easy to 'hear' when you turn your awareness to them
- Be aware of body language – both your own and the other person's
- Indicate you are listening with 'Mms' and 'Ahs'
- Keep your mind open and suspend judgement. Concentrate on the content of what is being said
- Develop an awareness of how you respond. Do your responses seek to explore, clarify, understand and reflect back what you think you heard?
- Reflect on a time when someone listened to you with their whole attention and demonstrated that they understood you and your issue. What behaviour and skills did they use to do this and how could you emulate them?

Asking questions

There are two main types of question – open and closed.

Open questions encourage the opening up, expanding and exploration of a topic and tend to start with words or phrases such as What, How, Where, Describe, Tell me about....', for example

- Tell me about your experience of.....
- How do you feel about....?
- What were your reasons for.....?

Try to avoid asking *Closed* questions 'Why?' as it can sound accusatory.

Control the limits of the person's reply and can be used to focus, summarise, move to action and round off a discussion. Examples might be:

- Have you completed that action?
- What are your next steps?
- When are you going to do that?

Both types of question are useful for different purposes and it is important to think about what results your different questions will have and which will best serve the purpose of the mentoring and any given time.

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