

Role and actions of a mentor

As a mentor you will:

- Support your mentee in their plans and hold the focus on their agenda
- Listen to them actively with interest
- Be responsible for managing the framework of the sessions, and encourage them to take responsibility for the content
- Take appropriate approaches such as challenging them if they are not sufficiently focussed, sympathising and encouraging if they have had a bad experience
- Keep them moving on by encouraging them to take action
- Help them to see the bigger and longer term picture if they are concerned only about the present and the short term future
- Help them to focus on what is happening now that needs attention in order to achieve longer term goals
- Be confidential
- Be accessible at agreed times
- Be objective, non-judgemental, calm, positive, enthusiastic, and respectful
- Provide reflective feedback
- Contribute ideas and experience where appropriate
- Take an interest in your mentee's progress

The mentors' role is not to:

- Have magic answers or a 'quick fix'
- Talk too much about yourself
- Talk about luck
- Counsel mentees
- Do things for mentees
- Be managerial or directive
- Encourage dependence
- Be judgemental
- Hang onto the mentee when the relationship is not working

About the mentee

- Every relationship is unique: there is no one correct recipe
- By signing on for mentoring the mentee has accepted that they want, and have invited support
- You may need to jointly re-evaluate the mentee's goals in the light of unperceived opportunities which may arise both in the long term and short term

About the mentor

- Although a lot of what the mentor does seems common sense it is structuring the process that is important
- Make positive choices about the approach that you take and the techniques that you use
- Don't be put off by any limitations that you feel you may have as a mentor: a mentor can also learn from the mentee

- Be prepared to do a little work outside the sessions to get relevant information that might support the mentee
- Try to make connections and ask the right questions in order to help the mentee succeed in having that 'aha' moment or paradigm shift
- Emphasise that it is good to break things down into smaller manageable parts

About the mentoring relationship

- Spend a little time at the beginning of the relationship exploring what you each expect from it.
- Refer your mentee to others if this is appropriate
- Regularly review progress, reflecting on the mentee's achievements and the added value of the mentoring relationship
- Decide with the mentee when a mentoring relationship should be concluded

Techniques and tools

These are some suggested techniques and tools which mentors can use to support the mentoring process. Some techniques can help with structuring the mentoring process, others can be used when the mentor and mentee are stuck with an issue and need a device to help shift the process on. Some techniques or tools will be more appropriate in certain circumstances than others.

Tools and techniques can help raise awareness and increase understanding for mentees, they can also help with decision making, by identifying choice, options and preferences

Using a diary

Keeping a diary where the mentee can record meetings, action points, reflections, and goals can help her between meetings with recapping discussions and objectives and can become the foundation for forming an effective mentoring relationship. The mentor can keep a parallel diary if she chooses. The diary could be organised into sections such as agenda items, issues discussed, and action points for the next meeting. A separate section could be headed 'reflections' for the mentee or mentor to record their own thoughts.

Mind mapping

While diaries will appeal more to those of us who like our note taking to be ordered and linear, mind maps may be more useful for those who prefer a less formally structured diagrammatic approach. You can find out more about this tool at: <http://www.peterussell.com/mindmaps/mindmap.html>.

Force field analysis

This is a model to help identify factors most likely to support the changes and ideas a mentee has in mind - and those most likely to inhibit her changes. You can find a description of how to use this tool at <http://www.mindtools.com/forcefld.html> the idea is to somehow quantify the strength of force for change and weigh them against the strength of force against change, in order to understand better a change you are considering.

Drawing a lifeline

This is a reflective tool for looking back on one's life and experiences. The technique encourages mentees to investigate the meanings they attribute to events in their lives. Using coloured pens the mentee is asked to draw the path of their life, indicating the ups and downs and significant events. They can also draw pictures on the line to represent people or feelings. Looking back on and sharing these experiences may be helpful for focussing on future decisions. Another related technique is to create a collage using magazines and paste to depict a current issue or situation. These techniques are fun and creative and will appeal to mentees who enjoy using their creativity to free up their thinking about a problem/issue.

Personal quality profile

This can help where someone suffers low self-esteem. Asking the mentee to list their personal qualities can boost her confidence. A follow up exercise might be to encourage them outside the session to ask two friends to describe how they see them. If their opinions do not match you might encourage them to work out why this is.

Another way of raising confidence is the 'what do I have to offer list', where the mentee would list their particular skills and then ask others for an objective view for comparison.

Making lists

A simple, everyday technique, which can be very useful in a number of situations. For example, when a mentee is feeling low about their work life, making a list of their recent achievements at work can boost confidence and self-esteem (like the 'what do I have to offer list' above). Or making a list of all the choices that are available at a point the mentee wants to make a change, highlights the full range of options available. Brainstorming is a technique related to this, listing every option quickly on a piece of paper, without thinking through the possible pros and cons of each option.

Career visioning

The mentee maps out in writing up to three different career visions for themselves, taking into account their aims, abilities, constraints and knowledge of opportunities that might be available. Encourage them to add realistic timescales and to be prepared to move between her differing visions rather than to stick rigidly to one so that failing at certain hurdles does not have such a big impact. Identifying small steps towards bigger goals is likely to be important.

SWOT analysis

Here the mentee lists their strengths and weaknesses together with the opportunities and threats which she currently faces. The next step is to consider how weaknesses might be overcome, threats dealt with and opportunities best used.

Free fall writing

This is a type of journaling, where the mentee takes regular time out to write down whatever they are feeling and thinking at that moment. There are guidelines for

getting to most out of the technique (e.g. don't go back and cross out, don't think too carefully, say whatever you want). And it can help to begin with to have some lead in lines and phrases (e.g. the best thing that ever happened to me.... My work....) but once the mentee is comfortable with the technique, they should write about whatever they want. Use a pen that is a joy to write with and a book you like writing in. The writing remains private to the mentee, who can bring anything back to the mentor they feel would be valuable. Julia Cameron in *The Artist's Way* recommends this is practised every morning, as soon as you wake up, for 20 minutes or so, as a way of accessing our natural creativity and problem solving.

Homework

Agreeing some homework for the mentee is a good technique for finishing the mentoring session. The mentee and mentor would talk together about the best homework to set that would progress the goals of the mentee between sessions. It could be that action points are agreed, or that one of the techniques above is tried out by the mentee before the next meeting. It is important that the homework is something the mentee is committed to and ideally they suggest. Homework can be discussed at the start of the next session.

And finally....

If in doubt leave it out! Only use tools that support the ongoing work together.

Always try a new technique out on yourself if you can.