

Principles of Mentoring

Within an organisation, a mentoring culture has the capacity to not only increase the ability to retain (and attract) excellent staff but to increase work satisfaction, staff motivation and ultimately personal productivity. A mentor relationship is designed to provide access to another individual with the knowledge, encouragement and support to further a person's research portfolio and long term career development.

Mentoring is the partnership between a more experienced person and either someone new to a role or someone who is seeking advice and input into their personal development. The mentor teaches, counsels, and provides support and motivation for their mentee. The mentor is usually outside the mentee's direct reporting line.

Mentoring Programme

To achieve the best results, it is recommended that a mentoring partnership is in place for between 12 and 18 months. During this time, mentors are expected to meet with the mentee regularly, particularly in the early stages where meetings may need to be more frequent. How often mentors meet is up to the mentor and the mentee to agree but the experience of previous programmes has shown that face to face meetings on a regular basis (e.g. once a month for about an hour) are an important factor in the success of the mentoring partnership.

Proposed Approach

An organisation wide, all encompassing mentoring programme, would no doubt be beneficial, but is likely to require a significant investment of time and resources. One approach may be to use a mentoring programme to support new staff. For example, newly appointed staff who are employed for greater than 12 months could be invited to participate in a mentoring programme. Another approach might be to extend the invitation through Annual Performance Review discussions for staff looking at developing their professional profile and/or leadership opportunities.

A template form has been attached (appendix 1) which can be used to record expressions of interest as the first step in establishing a mentoring relationship. Using this type of form helps to ensure that the expectations of the mentoring programme are understood and subsequently allows for informed matching of mentors.

The person organising the mentoring programme would then need to approach senior staff who have been identified as potential mentors, and ask if they would be willing to undertake this leadership role in support of the company's strategic objectives and its ongoing commitment to staff development. The information for mentors (appendix 3) might be appropriate to accompany this request.

Once senior staff mentors have been confirmed, the next step would be to align them with potential mentees from the list of staff members who have expressed an interest in the programme. Both the mentor and the mentee should be given the opportunity to decline the match before the arrangement is confirmed.

What to consider in establishing mentoring relationships

Effective mentors are those who are considered by the mentee to have specific discipline-related skills and expertise and have a genuine interest in the mentee's growth and development. The mentor needs to be willing to spend the time necessary to teach, counsel and provide support to their mentee, and while treating them as a colleague they do need to maintain and observe strict confidentiality.

Gender composition has significant impact on the relationship with mentees best responding to a mentor of the same gender.

Mentoring relationships are most effective for the mentee when they have a commitment to their own professional development, are aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and are receptive to constructive feedback.

The mentoring partnership focuses primarily on the needs of the mentee. The mentee is strongly encouraged to take responsibility for driving the mentoring relationship, for arranging the meetings, and for negotiating what things they would like to achieve and how they would like the mentor to assist them.

The mentee's manager should be aware of the relationship and involved in any reporting where appropriate. This also means that any development opportunities identified can be supported.

Support for Mentors

An initial introduction session would need to be held for mentors to ensure that they are familiar and comfortable with their responsibilities with a further optional networking session for mentors. The networking session would serve to provide an opportunity to discuss how the mentoring relationship is going, and to receive support and advice from HR and from other mentors as appropriate.

Appendix 1 – Expression of Interest**Expression of Interest for participation in the****COMPANY NAME MENTORING PROGRAMME****Name****Department****1. What do you hope to gain from a mentoring relationship?**

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2. Would you prefer your mentor to be:

- Female
- Male
- No preference

3. Having thought about your goals and areas for development please suggest possible mentors:**4. Is there anything you want us to be aware of when matching you with a mentor?**

Please return to *Name* by *Day Month Year*

Appendix 2 - Information for Mentees

Mentoring is the partnership between a more experienced person and either someone new to a role or someone who is seeking advice and input into their personal development. The mentor's role is to teach, counsel, and provide support and motivation for their mentee.

The first meeting is an introductory one, where you and your mentor are encouraged to share background information and to explore ideas for the relationship to determine if it is likely to be rewarding and productive for both of you.

To keep the meeting relaxed you may like to meet over coffee, preferably somewhere free of interruptions.

The relationship needs to work for you. Don't start/continue a mentoring relationship with someone you do not feel able to be open and honest with. While you need to trust and respect your mentor, the relationship is not primarily a friendship. Stay focused on what you can learn from them and gain from their experience.

Be pro-active and make the time for the mentoring to work. Don't be discouraged if you and your mentor are unable to meet as frequently as you would like, or if meetings have to be postponed, etc.

Go into the relationship with some clear goals defined, no matter how big or how small. Use the goals you identified after the retreat as a starting point for discussion. Commit your expectations to writing before you meet with your mentor. While your mentor may not be able to address everything on your list, it is important they know what it is you are wanting to get out of the relationship. Use these expectations to review the relationship after a set period.

It is important to identify your weaknesses and be prepared to get your mentor's help with developing in these areas.

Don't worry if you don't always have specific issues to discuss with your mentor. Simply meeting and talking with them may spark off ideas for you to work on together. Your mentor will have a range of self-management and leadership skills that you can tap into and gain valuable experience from.

Appendix 3 - Information for Mentors

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The first meeting is an introductory one, where you and your mentee are encouraged to share background information and to explore ideas for the relationship to determine if it is likely to be rewarding and productive for both of you.

To keep the meeting relaxed you may like to meet over coffee, preferably somewhere free of interruptions.

The relationship needs to have objectives with measurable outcomes. While your first meeting is likely to be a relatively informal opportunity to discuss expectations and get a feel for how each other operate, subsequent meetings should have some form of structure and/or agreed expectations.

Don't do all the talking. Ask questions. Hold the mentee accountable for what they have set out to achieve. Remember the mentee may only need a sounding board on some occasions, and advice is often redundant once they have verbalised a concern.

Regular communication is important – quick phone calls/emails/catch up's outside of regular meetings. You may need to initiate these, but don't do all the talking.

Review the arrangement after an agreed time. Ask them what has worked, what hasn't happened. Be prepared to accept that you will not have been able to meet all of their expectations. If the relationship is to continue, review the original expectations and ensure new objectives are forthcoming – IE that the relationship is continuing to be relevant.