



MENTOR ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

Leadership and Mentoring Program

What is Mentoring?

The concept of mentoring is not new. In fact, it can be traced back to Greek mythology and Homer's tale of *The Odyssey*. Legend has it that around 1200 BC Odysseus prepared to leave his home to fight in the Trojan War. Before he left, he appointed a guardian to his household. Athena, the goddess of wisdom, assumed the role of Mentor and for ten years acted as advisor, friend, teacher, trusted counselor, and surrogate father to Odysseus' son, Telemachus, the young scholar.

The Greeks believed that people learned skills, values and culture from other humans; especially from those they admired. This belief is perhaps one of the first attempts at mentoring.

Mentoring is typically a one-to-one, non-judgmental relationship in which an individual voluntarily gives time to support and encourage another in order to achieve an objective or several objectives over a period of time. Mentoring is the process of growing people as is illustrated by the following ancient Chinese proverb:

If you want one year of prosperity; *grow grain*,
If you want ten years of prosperity; *grow trees*,
If you want one hundred years of prosperity; *grow people*.

Mentoring can occur in different settings: informally, by a supervisor or superior, a family member, a member of the community or community organization; and formally, where a scholar (sometimes called a mentee) is deliberately paired with a mentor with the goal of developing specific skills and competencies.

Generally, formal mentoring programs focus on skills development. Informal mentoring programs usually focus on interpersonal development which is useful in helping one understand such things as organizational structure and culture.

The Mentor's Role & Responsibilities

The Mentor's Role

Overall, the role of a mentor is to assist a scholar in acquiring the skills to become an effective practitioner. Specifically, mentors perform roles in four key categories:

- **Coach**—they show their scholar how to carry out tasks or activities.
- **Facilitate**—they create opportunities for their scholar to use new skills.
- **Counsel**—they help their scholar explore the consequences of potential decisions.
- **Network**—they refer their scholar to others when the mentor's experience is insufficient.

Good mentors smooth out some of the rough places, cut through some of the “red tape”, and serve as comforters when tasks seem impossible. In general, mentors will keep their scholar moving forward.

Reasons to be a Mentor

It is a proven fact that scholars receive enormous benefits from mentor- scholar relationships. Mentors benefit as well. Following is a list of reasons why one should consider becoming a mentor.

- Mentors will **learn**. By serving in this capacity, mentors learn from their scholars. They will have knowledge their mentors do not have, may be able to teach their mentors a new job-specific skill, or help their mentors enhance their people-development skills.

² Adapted from What do Mentors Do? (2002). [On-line]. Available: <http://www.mentorsforum.co.uk/cOL1/tools/facts/Sheet1.htm>. Used with permission.

³ Adapted from Phillips-Jones, L. (2002). *Reasons to be a mentor*. [On-line]. Available: <http://www.mentoringgroup.com>.

- Mentors will have a chance to **pay back**. In the past, mentors may have received good mentoring from someone and never had a chance to show their gratitude to them directly. Now, mentors would have an opportunity to reciprocate and "put something back into the pot."
- Mentors could receive **recognition** from their peers and superiors. Being an effective people developer will not go unrecognized.
- Mentors may get some extra **work done!** Within ethical limits, scholars can work on projects, or finish other work that remains undone.
- Mentors will **review and validate** what they know and have accomplished. Teaching another helps one review and reframe all one has learned about that subject. Mentors might realize that they have accomplished much more than they thought.
- Mentors will probably **feel** satisfied, proud, and other **energizing emotions**. When mentors have a positive effect on their scholars, they can expect several positive feelings of pride, satisfaction, happiness, contentment, and excitement along with the enjoyable physiological reactions that go with them.
- Mentors **will leave the world better** than they found it. It has been said before, and it is still true; taking the time to reach out to others, share one's wisdom, and convey one's respect for them is probably the least expensive and most powerful way to change the world, one life at a time.

Tips for Mentors⁴

Success is more about attitude than it is about skill. Mentors want their scholars to become successful. Here are a few tips that might be useful in helping mentors to make their scholars successful.

- **Encourage and believe in one's scholars.** Research indicates that encouraging is one of the most important mentoring skills. Scholars value and remember encouragement from their mentors more than other help.
- **Give additional positive reinforcement.** Mentors should tell their scholars when they are doing something well. Dr. Albert Bandura, a psychology professor at Stanford University, notes that people learn faster and better when they are positively reinforced by persons they admire. Reminding scholars what they do well helps their confidence and self-esteem to grow. Bandura calls such praise "verbal persuasions".
- **Build upon successes.** Mentors should give their scholars challenging assignments that have a fairly high probability of success. When scholars are successful in accomplishing the tasks or projects, build upon that success. Help them choose more challenging assignments.

⁴ Adapted from Barton, K. (1998). *Tips for mentors* [On-line]. Available: <http://www.mentoringgroup.com>.

- **Meet with scholars at least one hour per month.** Commit sufficient time, one hour or more per month, to meet with your scholars. **As a mentor if you are not receiving communication with your scholars please contact the Program Coordinator**
- **Negotiate specific goals for mentor/ scholars relationship.** Assist scholars in developing their goals and activities. Also, support activities and projects to ensure the attainment of goals. **Scholars are provided with a Mentor-Scholar Activity sheet, please complete this form with your scholar.**

By believing in their scholars, encouraging them, giving positive reinforcement, and building upon their successes, mentors help their scholars build self-confidence. They will eagerly face new situations and enjoy greater success!

It is important to recognize that the mentored approach needs to be multidimensional. Techniques and strategies that work for one person may not work for another. For this reason, mentors need to draw on many “well springs” of knowledge to become the all-important, caring and willing persons who will coach, teach, advise, motivate, push, and encourage their scholars to reach their highest potential.