

## **Approaches to mentoring**

You can waste a lot of time if you are not properly prepared, by not knowing something about your learner or not preparing the paperwork. This also gives the impression that you are either incompetent or indifferent and this can affect your learner's response to you.

You can overwhelm your learner by being too talkative, the learner may not feel that they are given the opportunity to speak, and you will not find much out about your learner.

If you do not reserve your opinion you may run into conflict with your learner, neither will you find out much about your learner's attitudes or views. This can lead to antagonism with either of you focusing on issues that lead to conflict.

Losing attention, active listening as we have said earlier is hard to do, and if you do become inattentive during a meeting then you may miss an important point or your learner may think they are boring you.

Asking too many direct questions can mean that the learner is not able to give a full account of themselves and again this means you are not gaining the trust and confidence of your learner. All questions that you ask must help the learner develop a good relationship with you if you ask leading questions, use too complex language you will fail to establish a good rapport with your learner.

This does not mean you must overreact and be too fraternising you need to keep hold of your objectivity and not identify too much with your learner.

Overconfidence can also cause problems. If the learner is overconfident they may end up controlling you. If you are too confident you may run the risk of thinking that you know best and negate any of the learner's values, thoughts or feelings. On the other hand not being able to ask questions because you may embarrass your learner can also cause problems as you might miss out on important information to enable the learner to move on.

### ***Exercise***

Select a topic you know well. Consider what would be important to take into account when discussing this with people, who are familiar with the subject and those with no background knowledge.

Break the topic into chunks so that they are easily identified.



## **It's not what you say but how you say it**

Freud developed a theory that we react to a hidden message in how we take messages on board. Just as we do not read each letter and word on a page we listen to the whole concept, taking into account the tone, highlighting the important part of the message. Look at these two sentences;

*'Get off the ladder, you'll fall!'*

*'You are going to drop that!'*

The emphasis on these two sentences is at the end, 'you'll fall', 'drop that', to some extent it becomes an order. The focus of attention will be given to the area of the sentence where the emphasis lies. Think about what you say to your learner and how you say it, what is the hidden message behind your words.

### ***Hidden messages***

*"Well, you said that you didn't like the English course because it didn't relate to your viewpoint, and you didn't think you could cope with the drama because you felt you needed to develop your English. Where does that leave you now'?"*

The message could imply a judgement or a programmed expectation or even an implied command.



True understanding is made easier when our behaviour matches our beliefs and values. When we are discussing subjects with others and we are in full agreement our body language will change, our mannerisms will show that we are in harmony with our words. If we have to make compromises this can lead to us giving mixed messages. To get round this we may need to focus on what we want to be understood to circumvent what might be misunderstood.

## **Getting mixed messages**

If you feel that you are getting mixed messages, you may focus on what is being said and you may ask questions to qualify what is being said. But a small voice inside might question what is being said it may just be a small feeling of unease, it is this little voice that is observing the other messages that your correspondent is giving out. You may feel uncomfortable with what is being said because you do not believe what the person is saying.

## **Group activity**

Form a group of 3 people one to be mentor, one the learner and one the observer.

Carry out an advice session, the mentor should be blindfolded so that they cannot see the body language of the learner.

Make a note of types of questions asked.

Discuss what questions could have been asked.

Swop your roles over so that all of you have the opportunity of trying out each role.

## **Learning ways**

It is important to be aware of the ways in which people learn understand how specific conditions and principles of learning can be applied.

There are many theories about what motivates people to learn. People use different mental or physical activities to acquire new skills. Some people can pick up a training manual and understand immediately what to do. Others will need to follow instructions on a step by step approach, others will not be able to use the training manual but will need someone to physically show them how to do something.

The five basic ways people learn new knowledge or skills are:

Trial and error: practical application to a task and learning from mistakes.

Mental mapping: Learning a sequence of events by thinking through the process.

Imitation: Watching Nellie.

Communication: Learning from workbooks or tutor led.

Feedback: Learning from what has been done and how they can be followed on.

## **Barriers to access to learning**

Understanding how people learn is important in the understanding of how to encourage people to take up a training and development. Many people have bad experiences in the learning field and this can inhibit them from learning new skills.

Other barriers to learning can include: the type of learning, the level of support needed to enable the person to develop, the access to learning, time, place or even cost can all inhibit learners taking on new training and development.

### **Exercise**

Think about your own learning experiences. How do you learn best?

Think about a particularly bad experience. How does it make you feel about taking on something new?

We all have inhibitions about learning new things, but with the advances in technology and the pace of change in the world today to keep up organisation, need to encourage employees to develop their skills. An organisation which understands the development needs of the individual and understands the difficulties which inhibit the learning process is well on the way to matching training and development in the organisation.

### **Defining needs**

The following list is one that you need to consider at each stage of the process of mentoring the items in italics refer to the next stages of the mentoring coaching process. Each time your learner achieves a certain objective or realises an achievement the action plan based on the Learners needs, need to be reassessed, confirmed that they still have the same aim and maybe new targets set.

- Confirm needs
- Agree overall purpose and objective
- Identify the learning profile
- Select strategy and agree direction
- Specify the learning
- *Design the learning*
- *Deliver*
- Monitor and evaluate. This should happen throughout the mentoring process whenever new targets have been made or achievements have been analysed.

## **Advocacy**

Advocacy means taking action on behalf of your Learners, helping them to remove barriers by approaching others. Your Learners need to know what you intend to do and agree with your approach. You will need to explain the nature of your relationship explained to the person you approach on the Learners behalf. You are not expected to be an expert in everything. Knowing when to refer someone on and to whom to refer them to will play an important part of your function as a mentor. It is important to have a network of contacts these will need to be regularly updated, and you will need to know who to contact, the right person at the right level.

## **Exercise**

Your support networks. Who do you go to when you want:

honest feedback

some sympathy

enjoyment - a good laugh

to moan

a catalyst, to help you take some action

practical help

information about learning resources

information about work opportunities

information about training

For each of these areas try to identify why.

## **Moving on**

To help a learner you must be aware of them moving on. You need to constantly check and make adjustment to action plans as necessary.

Check yourself that you do not offer the same advice to all comers. **Just** because you see that IT is going to have a wide scope for development it does not mean that your learner is going to be happy with that. You need to be aware of and take into account, the background experience, the skills and abilities and the needs and expectations of the learner.

Good negotiating skills are necessary when approaching someone on your learners behalf; you need to plan what you are going to say, be clear about your objectives, so that your approach is clear, positive and constructive.

## Exercise

What could you do to improve your performance at this present moment?

## Define outcomes

Self-empowerment needs clearly defined outcomes, expectations. To make effective decisions, learners need to know what they need to do to achieve that outcome. They also need to be able to assess at intervals whether they are on course or whether they need to change the outcome. This will enable the learner to become more self reliant and confident having a clear sense of direction.

## Informed decision making

### Exercise

What resources for training and development have you available to you?

Successful outcomes include;

- determining what resource is needed plus what learner would like
- identifying resources you don't have
- draw up plan to help learner to acquire additional resource



## **Action Planning**

Action planning is an important part of the mentoring process. Without action plans you cannot be sure that you have identified the issues necessary for the learners' progress. Your discussions with your learner should be around the learners' background experience, their desires, expectations, hopes or aspirations. You need to ascertain that you know the 'true' facts before you can build up a picture and move on to project any outcomes.

Throughout your discussions with your learner you should be summarising important decisions. Ensure that both of you understand the meaning of any decisions made. Then agree actions, each person should be sure as to what has been agreed, and who is responsible for what. It is a good idea to put your action plan into writing with agreed goals and responsibilities. If your learner shies away from important points do not be afraid to challenge the issue, but be careful you are not challenging the individual.

Listening is an important part in this stage of developments. Being aware of your own agenda for the learner, you may make proposals that would fit in well with your own style of thinking but this may not fit in with the learner.

*"If you anticipate a response from your learner, which you approve of you may miss what they are trying to say".*

### **Key points**



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



Specify outcome

Agree target

Confirm progress

Summarise

Agree action

Give feedback in a way that the learner can envisage some additional information not previously considered.

### **Difficulties when delivering criticism**

Giving feedback can cause conflict between you and the learner. There are many areas where you may not feel happy with the course of events, you may feel that things have got out of control. Things that can affect feedback can be because you feel:

Jealous of your learner when they do well.

It is too time consuming.

They are coming to you with problems they could sort out themselves.

They have outgrown the relationship.

You may be judging the learners' personality not their performance.

Your learner is being marked as your protégé.

Your learner is not performing well and you have difficulty in explaining this.

You and your learner do not get on.

You may be failing your learner.

You treat your learner like a clone not a person.

If you come across any of these problems you need to discuss them with other mentor colleagues.

## **Motivating**

Motivating a learner can be difficult; first you may spend many hours sorting out what the learner wants, what interests them then agreeing what is possible. This will enable you to encourage them to take the necessary course of action. This means that you as the mentor must deal with people as they are not as you think they ought to be. To move things on you need to understand why people do the things that they do and why they choose certain behaviour.

## **Mcgregor's motivation theory**

McGregor developed an X and Y theory that he says explains peoples' motivation. He said you can make assumptions about people and it is important to look for the cause since behaviour is a symptom not a cause. He also said that what we believe of people will generally come true, i.e. the 'self fulfilling prophecy.

## **Theory X**

Man dislikes work and will avoid it if he can

Man must be forced or bribed to put out the right effort

Man would rather be directed than accept responsibility, which he avoids

Man is motivated mainly be money



Man is motivated by anxiety about his security

Most men have little creativity - except when it comes to getting around rules.

## **Theory Y**

Work is necessary to man's psychological growth

Man wants to be interested in his work and under the right conditions can enjoy it

Man will direct himself towards an accepted target

Man will seek, and accept responsibility under the right conditions.

The discipline a man imposes on himself is more effective, and can be more severe, than imposed upon him.

Under the right conditions man is motivated by the desire to realise his own potential.

Creativity and ingenuity are widely distributed and grossly underused.

(Adapted from D. McGregor's "The Human side of Enterprise".)

Discussions work best between people, who are highly motivated, where each person has a clear notion about how they will achieve their objective.

Discussions should be measured in clearly defined mutually understood expectations. Looking for the best in people will enable you to get the best results.



## **Negative attitudes**

Dealing with negative attitudes can be hard going. It is here that you need all your listening skills to listen between the lines. Are they saying they can't, or won't. Are they saying can't because of a physical problem, or can't because they lack confidence to do it. Are they afraid of failure? These areas need careful questioning it is an important fact to remember that the person who asks the questions controls the conversation.

## ***Light relief***

*I noticed a friend having an animated conversation with a person whom I knew to be very shy because of his heavy accent. At parties or social gatherings this person would be left on their own because, 'no-one knew whether they were speaking English or not'. I went up to this friend and said, 'I saw you talking to Gunther. How did you get on?' 'Oh it was all right'. He replied, 'I kept on asking questions then I knew roughly what the answer was going to be and I could listen for the right words.'*

## **The legal context**

It is essential to prevent discrimination and to show that you do not practice any anti-discrimination. Knowledge of what the law upholds and how your own values and beliefs affect the way you work needs to be acknowledged. The law offers protection against discrimination on the grounds of sex, marriage, race, disability, ethnic or national origin, (this includes religion). Your organisation however could extend this to age.

You and your Learners need to operate within the law. Knowledge of the law and your organisation's code of practice together with a statement of how you feel you operate within the law is necessary in this context.

### **Anti-discriminatory practice**

Inequality is when a person or group is treated in an unjustifiably or less favourable way than another. It is essential that every effort is made to prevent discrimination. The implication for the mentor is to ensure they act within the law, good practice = equality. You need to be able to identify discriminatory practice to treat all people equally. Be aware of any possible discriminatory practice and eliminate them. You will need to know what constitutes direct and indirect discrimination and practice, and how they affect the decision making process. You will need to be able to demonstrate that all reasonable practical steps have been taken to avoid discrimination. You will need to demonstrate knowledge of the law that relates to provision and access to opportunities for training. Information about training, education and development opportunities must be available to all and they must not be given to others in a way that could exclude people from race, sex or minorities.

### **Exercise**

How do you ensure equality of opportunity with your Learners? This question needs to take into account all your activities in your teaching and mentoring role.

What is your organisations' policy on discrimination?

How would you deal with anti-discriminatory behaviour with one of your learners?

What is the support procedure for people who think that they have been discriminated against?

Describe the difference between direct and indirect discrimination.

## **Positive action in training**

Many people think that positive action is a form of discrimination in reverse, this is not always true it is possible to assist certain groups of people who are at a disadvantage in certain fields. For instance, if you were setting up a training programme for women seeking management opportunities. You can arrange training to fit in with work or home responsibilities. You can design schemes specifically for minority groups or special needs. You need to be aware that communication and understanding can cause discriminatory attitudes and behaviour at work.

Records must be kept of all training programmes, advice and procedures to monitor and show anti discriminatory practices.

