

INTRODUCTION

The text below helps to clarify, investigate and reflect on what mentoring entails and to support a better basis and a skill based approach to developing vocational mentoring skills, discussing issues central to mentoring, and enabling mentors to develop good practice.

By working through this material you can:

- Develop an open mind about your own practice and theories.
- Understand your own role and approach to mentoring.
- Know what you want to get from being a mentor.
- Enable learners' or candidates to develop themselves through a learning environment.

It concerns interaction with learners by:

- supporting learners
- verbal and non-verbal communication
- promoting access to learning based on learners needs
- skills associated with counselling
- referral
- non-judgmental acceptance
- minimising barriers to access.

A mentor is someone who supports someone to gain their full potential, someone who advises, discusses, evaluates and helps facilitate the learners to gain confidence in developing their lives. Becoming a mentor is not as straightforward as learning a lesson and it is not a case of addressing basic skills and competences.

Key characteristics of the mentoring role

Mentors need to think of the skills and strategies that they need to learn to enable them to develop their role. The mentoring role has been described as a nurturing role, passing on wisdom in a secure environment. Anderson & Shannon in their essay, 'Toward a conceptualisation of Mentoring, (*Issues of Mentoring*' Kenny and Mayes, 1995), describe the five essential components of mentoring as:

- nurturing
- role modeling
- functioning
- focusing on the professional development of learner
- sustaining a caring relationship over time.

Supporting candidates to achieve their goals

As a mentor it is your responsibility to support learners in planning to achieve their goals. You will assist the learner to establish realistic goals. Challenge learners to face up to opportunities, problems, personal strengths and weaknesses. Act as a gateway to other people and sources of knowledge. Seek opportunities to help learners to practice and develop their skills.

You will need to:

- be very clear about what needs to be done, and why
- be able to identify potential difficulties
- be able to offer support and guidance in overcoming them
- agree goals and targets and record them

- help to identify resources to achieve these
- set realistic time scales
- arrange regular review meetings
- offer positive reinforcement of gains and encourage further achievement by agreeing targets.

Exercise

What sort of strategies do you develop to support your learners'?

You should be aware of the changing needs of your learners'. Effective mentoring is a demanding task to enable a learner to reach their goal. This role can be very difficult in certain circumstances you may be involved in enabling your learner problem solve and this may bring you into a closer involvement. This has its problems - it is not your brief to solve the problems of your learner but to enable them to solve them. You can guide your learners and be on hand should they need help but your main function is to help the learners develop their own skills. It can often be difficult to cope with the close nature of the relationship with a learner. It can be a demanding role.

The original mentor was a substitute father figure to Ulysses' son.

Mentoring is a 'process in which one person (mentor) is responsible for overseeing the career and development of another person (portage) outside the normal manager/subordinate relationship'. Alternatively mentoring is a

'protected relationship' in which learning and experimentation can occur, potential skills can be developed, and in which results can be measured in terms of competence's gained rather than curricular territory covered.

David Clutterbuck (1991) Everyone needs a Mentor - fostering talent at work, IPM pp 2 - 3

Mentors will fill many roles in their relationship with their Learners' they will need to teach, counsel, guide, develop, impart information, knowledge, help career moves, nurture, develop trust and promote the interests of the learner.

The development of a mentor is a positive challenge, practice can develop, ideas can change through the process of study, discussion and demonstration.

It is often difficult not to let your personal preferences, opinions, or beliefs interfere with the needs of the learner. It is important to recognise the way you feel about this when you are developing your role as a mentor.

Exercise

Define your role as a mentor. Keep a copy of your definition and refer back to it as you work through the material

It is worthwhile to review your own development and practice in the role as a mentor. This will help you widen your skills and by example stimulate growth and development in the learners'.

Mentoring can vary in scope and influence. It is difficult to define we mentioned nurturing and perhaps this will provide a better focus. Nurturing means an ongoing caring ideal. A mentor being someone who is concerned about the welfare as well the development of the learner.

Mentoring includes listening, probing, clarifying and advising. It needs an open relationship where reasons and purpose are stated behind the decision and performance.

Mentoring thrives best in situations where there is:

- a focus on quality,
- effective support of the mentor
- reflection and review of the mentoring process
- an atmosphere of support.

What is involved in mentoring?

The mentoring role is quite different from that of being a counsellor. You will need to bring the skills of a counsellor and a coach together in your role as a mentor. As a mentor you approach the learning cycle progress together with the learner so that they are in charge of the learning process. As a counsellor you empathise with the learner. And as a coach you are teaching the learner.

It is a responsible role that involves and needs the support of others in the organisation. In aiming for quality mentoring - need a coherent base to operate from - mentors need to have:

- training theory and practices
- the ability to communicate
- knowledge of appraisal systems
- the ability to respond and give feedback
- knowledge of competency
- ability to address competency and draw up training plans to address needs
- knowledge of course design
- knowledge relating to the organisation as a whole
- the ability to evaluate how the mentoring process has gone
- support, role model, sounding board.

Approaches to mentoring

As a mentor, you will develop a personal relationship with a learner.

An associate of mine recently announced that she had taken on the role of mentor to someone in her organisation. "What will you do?" I asked. "Well, I'm told that I will need to see my learner once or twice a year." "What else will you do?" I asked. "I don't know, but she's a sensible girl, much in the same position as I was when I started. I suppose that's why we were matched." "Does she need any help?" "I don't suppose so." "But why were you appointed as her mentor?" "New procedures - it's not paid!"

My friend had accepted the role of being a mentor without thinking what it entailed, how she would approach the role, and what the learner would expect from this role. The organisation had put into place an innovation again without thinking much about the process - or giving good guidelines about the approach to mentoring.

Change

Jobs change, roles change, people change, organisations change - as a mentor, my friend is in a position to assist and advise in the development of the learners career. This person may be an articulate, career minded individual, but even then a 'sounding board' is a good thing. The better trained, the more aware the individual in an organisation is, the more able they are to develop, and the better off the company is, provided they keep up! By evaluating the learning opportunities of the learner, by evaluating changes in the economic cycle of an organisation, and by looking at training opportunities for and with a learner - everyone should benefit.

Mentoring can seem to be for the disadvantaged, indeed it is important to change attitudes, many successful people owe their success to mentors in their lives. The 'Old boy' network is a good example of this.

Understanding yourself

As you work through the exercises in this workbook you will develop an understanding of how you fit into the mentoring role. Everybody is different and every mentoring encounter will be different. You may be part of a

management team looking to develop your staff. You may use these workbooks towards an NVQ or just want to understand the role of a mentor.

Exercise

Before we start write in the space below what is your aim from using these workbooks.

Mentors need to know their own strengths and recognise their own weaknesses, yet at the same time look for new ways forward with an open mind. What strengths and weaknesses do you bring to your role as a mentor?

Fill in the SWOT analysis below:

Strengths	Weaknesses
Opportunities	Threats

Throughout your development review your answers to the question and the SWOT analysis and evaluate your own development. These can be recorded in your diary and used as evidence.

What role has mentoring played in your life?

Exercise

Have you had a mentor in your life? Describe what they did to help you.

Exercise

Have you played the role of a mentor in your life? Think of someone that you have helped develop their skills, or promoted their cause, or suggested to someone that they would be good for a job, or even suggested that they do some extra training to help them develop. Describe in the space below the reasons for doing this; was it because you thought that they would do well, or were you interested in helping them get on. How would you describe your role was it that of a Sponsor or something else. Did you feel that you were counselling them? Advising them? Or, Just doing someone a good turn?

Assessing your mentoring skills

Mentoring occurs naturally to some people. You may have met someone who thought you were worth promoting and they have said maybe casually. "I'm sure so and so would be interested in you, I'll put a word in." Or you may have met someone and said. "Why don't you try this, I'm sure you'd be able; good at..." etc. or, "I'll get in touch with this person I know, they could use someone with your skills."

This is all part of the casual role of mentoring - it more often happens when people are not threatened by the other, and where they admire, or like the learner enough to help them progress. This is a natural part of human life, doing someone 'a good turn', giving someone 'a leg up'. Helping someone do better, understanding their problems and helping them progress. It could even be helping them out of a mess. The difference in being a trained mentor is that you can do so much more.

Exercise

Answer the following questions carefully. How much do you know about?

Yourself?

What skills do you need to develop and practice within your role as a mentor?

What is your role in your organisation?

What do they expect of you - your learner?

Do you have an open mind about own practice and theories?

Do you reflect on your own practice?

Do you investigate and refine the above?

What are the benefits to the organisation and the learner?

Do you evaluate - your active listening skills, questioning skills, and understanding of body language?

Do you know how to structure your sessions?

How good are your summarising techniques?

How do you develop your own values?

How do you measure success?

Do you discuss with others' mentoring techniques?

Identifying your role

A mentoring relationship needs to be built on trust and mutual respect. In an ideal world you should be able to choose whom you think is the ideal candidate, someone who you think is worth your time or someone with whom you can relate. The relationship between a mentor and a learner needs to be well nurtured. Setting the scene and establishing a rapport can take a lot of time and a considerable effort on your part.

The people assigned to you will need to feel that they are welcome, that you will give them the time and attention to work with them. They do not want to feel that they are being judged and found lacking. They need to feel that they are in a safe environment and that they can discuss anything with you. Time management plays an important part of this process you need to be aware of the need to negotiate with your Learner times when you will be available to them and how long you will allocate to sessions with them.

The activities of mentoring can be described as:

- Understanding learner's needs, help them discover, clarify, assess, discuss and explore ways of meeting them.
- Help learner understand their personal and educational development to enable them to make judgements on possible opportunities.
- Design learning experiences that learner's can develop skills and competencies in their work or career choices.

- Coach learner in areas where they may need additional support to gain experience.
- Support learner to deal with others to develop opportunities.
- Negotiate with others to promote learner.
- Give feedback to encourage self-development.

To do all these you will need to be able to manage both yourself and other resources to meet the needs of your learner. You are unlikely to be a good mentor without self-awareness of your own skills.

Creating a rapport

Rapport is the process of creating and maintaining a harmonious relationship. Having a good rapport means that there is trust and co-operation between you and your learner. You do not have to be an extrovert. What you need to be able to do is talk to people on a one to one basis. You need to be interested in people. You need to show that you value individuals and not to think of the Learners thoughts or ideas in terms of your own.

The relationship you develop with your learner is a vital part in the development of an outcome. If the relationship is not seen to be open and supportive it will break down. The ideal relationship is that of mutual respect and understanding enabling the development of the learner using action planning and diagnostic tools to assist in the Learners' development.

You need to show learners that you respect their beliefs and values even if you do not share them. You need to be positive about other peoples' values and show that you understand and respect them as human beings.

As a mentor you are creating an environment to provide help and support and an understanding listener for someone who is looking for direction. You are creating a climate so that the learner feels accepted, non-defensive and able to talk freely about themselves and their feelings, therefore building a trusting relationship. You are also helping the learner gain a clearer insight into themselves and their situation so that they are better able to help themselves and draw upon their resources.

What makes an effective mentor?

One of the principle skills of mentoring is the counselling role, helping learners to identify and clarify issues and then move on. This means that you will need to help your learner understand and clarify their goals. Respond to their questions. Provide information about courses and training that are available to them. Help learners identify appropriate career goals. Negotiate and agree action plans. Provide on-going support and feedback. Liaise with others. Provide guidance and support after the learners' training is complete. To do this you need to develop effective communication skills.

Exercise

What are your own values and priorities in your mentoring role?

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There are no simple answers to the above question. All responses are shaped by our values and understanding.

You will need to be able to adapt to your learners, to develop mutual respect, at the same time you need to be aware of how deep a rapport you are developing. If your relationship gets to be too deep this could blind you to deficiencies, and you may lose your objectivity.

People tend to associate better with people they identify with. We all have our own perceptions of the world and within a given set of circumstances we will all react in different ways, based on our perceptions and our background knowledge. No two people can be guaranteed to react in exactly the same way.

We use points of reference from our experiences in the world and then we act, it is how you react to your learner that is important. You need to be able to understand your learner's point of reference. You may feel that they are 'creating a mountain out of a molehill.' Using good questioning techniques should help you try to see the problem from the Learners point of view. You are not there to sort the other person's problem. You are there to help the other person become autonomous.

Empathy, objectivity and awareness

The three areas that you need to develop to enable you to gain the Learners' trust are Empathy, Objectivity, and an Awareness of your own limitations.

It is sometimes difficult to empathise with another person, to understand fully someone else's description of, or perceptions of events. We can never know exactly how someone else perceives something. Ask the person next to you to describe the colour of the paintwork. Is it white? Is it a pinky white? Does it have a grey tinge? In much the same way we will never fully understand the way people feel, or why they make the decisions that they do. It is important to acknowledge that you will always have difficulty in understanding completely the other person's point of view. Your understanding of how your perceptions of the world effect the way you understand others will help you relate to others better.

Misunderstandings can occur when we apply subjective viewpoint to others' problems and do not take into account the whole picture. Adopting another's viewpoint will help you to broaden your own understanding of their world.

Home environment

Pressures from home can cause problems for a learner, understanding this will help you with a learner. They may need to learn how to cope with complex situations involving personal stress and responsibility they may need help in adjusting to changes which training may bring.

Robert Waterman in his book, 'In search of excellence' listed some attributes he ascribed to mentors; I have summarised them below:

Time	Mentors need to give up their time to speak to learner
High Expectation	Mentors need to see and articulate more of their portages' potential.
Genuine concern and interest	The Mentor needs to care about Learners progress
Approachability	Mentors should be easy to get close to.
Informality	Mentor process should take place outside of any formal hierarchy.
Competence	Learners view mentors as people worth listening to, because they are experts in their field
Protection	Mentors act as buffers between Learners and bureaucrats.

As well as the above, he thought that a sense of fun and humour an essential part of the mentoring process. Waterman went on to add to this list: Safe zones helping Learners learn by encouragement, assisting Learners to take risks and protecting them when they fail. Being supporting champions by assisting people to advance and develop their potential.

Active listening

Exercise

Think about the last conversation you had:

- Did you generalise certain points?
- Were you too subjective?
- Did you make any assumptions?
- Did you jump to any conclusions?
- How good do you think your understanding of the other person's point of view was?

When we listen to other people we tend to turn off. What the other person is saying can trigger off other things in our minds. We guess what people are going to say and sometimes jump in with an answer. We formulate questions that we want to ask. When these things happen we are no longer giving our full attention to the person speaking to us.

Case Study

Learner: "When I was at junior school I was an ace student. I don't know what went wrong when I got to secondary school, of course I never wanted to go there, but my mother thought the grammar school would be too expensive."

Mentor: "Yes the same thing happened to me. My father didn't want me to go because he never had the benefit of grammar school education."

The mentor in this case has empathised in a manner of speaking but if they had been actively listening there are several questions that they could ask. Think of some and discuss them with your tutor or other mentors.

We cannot be 'all things to all men', and most of us will not be choosing our learners. So careful planning as to how you will commence mentoring is a vital part of the development of your role.

Getting your own ideals, thoughts and actions into focus, is the first part of the process. Building up information sources and resources which will be useful when discussing opportunities is a second. Thinking and planning how you will conduct your first and subsequent meetings is a third.

Meeting places

What is the most suitable site for a mentoring meeting? The pub, dinner at your favourite restaurant, a club. Many casual mentoring meetings are made this way and can be quite effective. A long term and professional relationship can only be developed if meetings are conducted in privacy. You do not know what your learner is going to say to you, so an area where confidentiality can be maintained, and trust built up, are essential need. This is about creating a safe environment.

When I was visiting a busy FE college once, I was amazed to see people engaged in quiet conversations sitting in corridors outside of classrooms.

"What is going on?" I asked. "Oh, we've introduced a new mentoring process

for those who do not seem to be getting on, but there's so little room that tutors have no alternative but to use the corridors for interviews."

This can hardly be a comfortable situation, and to feel that the mentoring process is an 'interview', will not inspire confidence in the majority of people.

Exercise

How do you expect your learner to feel about you?

Positions of power

The way that the room is laid out is an important part of creating a rapport. Such details make all the difference to how quickly you are able to put people at ease and establish a rapport.

I was once asked to give a report to a new manager about my department, and although the new manager was very friendly and open, he needed to gain my support. He remained seated behind a large desk, whilst I sat behind the desk, hidden behind his computer tower. This could have been unintentional, but, it was difficult to conduct a conversation and eventually I had to stand up to feel comfortable enough to respond to him.

When mentoring, it is very important to look at the environment of your meeting places and the position of power that you place yourself. Think

carefully about the setting. Think about the seating arrangements. Think about the comfort level, privacy. Think about how you appear to others.

Exercise

Describe different seating arrangements and the 'power position' behind each one.

Many of you may have come across seating arrangements where you have felt uncomfortable. For instance no one really likes sitting with their back to a door especially if the door is constantly being opened without you seeing what is going on. Other seating arrangements which indicate a power position or could make someone feel uncomfortable are:

- Sitting behind a desk
- Seating arrangements where the person in power is higher than the other
- Standing whilst someone is seated, especially to the side or slightly behind the person (inquisition style).
- Sitting a long way away from a person

There are many more. It is a good idea for you to think about why you choose to sit where you do when you enter a room. Check out your interview room and sit where you want your learner to sit and feel how comfortable you feel in that place. Allowing your learner to choose where to place their chair once you have indicated where you will be sitting can all help to enhance the building of rapport with your learner.