

#### **A positive influence for you**

A mentor is someone who acts as a trusted advisor, support, teacher and wise counsel to another person (often called the mentee). A mentor provides support by offering information, advice and assistance in a way that empowers the person they are mentoring.

A mentor may adopt a varied approach to how they mentor someone else. For example, sometimes they might be a 'wise guide' and draw upon their own experiences to offer insight gained from their own journey. Alternatively, a mentor might adopt a more detached posture to act as a facilitator to help someone to think and decide for themselves. Occasionally they may be willing to provide practical assistance, such as offering to share contacts or make an introduction of some kind. You're probably familiar with the mentor role and the nature of a mentor relationship already. Most of us can recall someone who we might now recognise was a mentor for us in the past.

For example:

- In your youth, was there a particular teacher, family relation or friend who you would credit with having taught you lessons in life you are grateful for?
- During your career, who has had a positive influence on how you operate professionally?
- What relationships do you have right now that appear to fit the criteria of mentorship, e.g. someone you respect, someone you learn from, a relationship that feels both influential and 'personal' in a positive way?

#### **An intention to empower you**

An effective mentor is committed to your success and yet not attached or invested in it. That means that whilst they hope that you gain a lot from your conversations and involvement with them, that what you do as a result of mentoring sessions is essentially your choice.

A mentor does not 'own' your circumstances or control your decisions. An effective mentor wants to empower you to be effective and create the results you want. That means that ultimately the responsibility for the outcomes of mentoring is yours. That's a good thing, as it means that you stay in charge, e.g. of your own decisions and actions.

#### **Mentoring is defined by relationship more than behaviour**

Mentoring can be confused with other relationships, perhaps because of the many different guises/approaches a mentor can have. For example, some mentors will be more outspoken about their opinions and advice, whilst others will encourage you to decide for yourself.

All mentors draw on their individual experience, skills, wisdom and worldview, in order to support you with your situations and objectives. It is the intention and the nature of a mentoring relationship that defines it, rather than a fixed list of behaviours and skills.

### An overview for mentees

So, while a mentor is not a manager or a coach, there may be some similarities in your experience of these roles, for example:

- A manager will focus on what you are doing to be effective at what you do
- A coach might listen and ask open questions to facilitate your thinking, learning and decision making
- A manager might genuinely care about you and your well-being
- A coach may focus on your goals, career plan, or sense of purpose
- Both a manager and coach may encourage and challenge you, e.g. to tackle issues or strive for more success or fulfilment

The common attributes of a mentor relationship, which help to distinguish it, include:

- That a mentor's involvement is likely include a sense of benevolence towards you, e.g. that they would like to support you to be successful. However, you decide what constitutes success – for you.
- That you are influenced by your mentor from a sense of commitment to the relationship and also your respect for them as a person, e.g. what they have achieved, or their world view / outlook.
- That there is a natural emphasis upon the experience, opinions, knowledge and resources of the mentor, and those are used to inform or support the mentee. For example, you might be interested in how to approach your career/life decisions and be informed by how their attitude/approach to theirs.

### Principles your mentor is likely to operate from\*

Your mentor is likely to operate from some / all of the following:

1. Your relationship is one of equality and yet has a natural bias/emphasis (on the experience, knowledge and wisdom of the mentor).
2. The responsibility for learning, progress and results, ultimately rests with the mentee.
3. Mentoring is collaboration between the mentor, the mentee and 'everyday life'.
4. Ultimately, what the mentee chooses to do, learn or ignore from the mentoring, is not the mentor's business.
5. Some results of mentoring can be identified or measured, whilst some results cannot. (This does not mean they are insignificant or less important, it simply means that the mentor is less aware of them.)

\*For a fuller explanation of mentor principles, see The Mentoring Manual, by Julie Starr (Pearson Education).

#### How to get the most from mentoring

To maximise the benefits of mentoring requires both commitment and involvement from you. For example, much of the success that arises from the relationship will be gained from your actions between the conversations/sessions with your mentor. Here are some ways you might increase the success of your involvement with your mentor:

- ✓ Prepare for sessions/conversation in advance, e.g. write a few notes as to what has happened since last the last session and what you'd like to focus on in this one.
- ✓ Get to know your mentor properly, e.g. their strengths, experiences, skills and their worldview. Look for potential wisdom or learning in that for you, e.g. how is that relevant to your own situation and circumstances?
- ✓ Be willing to accommodate differences in opinion or mind-set as a natural part of any relationship. For example, if you disagree with their approach to a situation, remain objective about that (as something that is valid and yet less relevant for you).
- ✓ Work to promote openness and trust in the relationship, e.g. by being open and trustworthy yourself.
- ✓ Stay flexible as to 'how' the mentoring relationship develops, e.g. avoid being attached as to how a mentor 'should' be or how they actually provide support. Make efforts to remain constructive as to how you regard your mentor's involvement and support.

As in life, the efforts you put into your mentor relationship are likely to be rewarded in direct proportion to the benefits you experience from that. By preparing a little in advance, by staying open and flexible and maintaining a sense of personal responsibility for your results you will increase the probability of an enjoyable and rewarding relationship.

#### Additional support & reading

- The Mentoring Manual, by Julie Starr (Pearson Education)
- Prepare for mentoring: A checklist for mentees\*
- Following a session: Reflection note for mentees\*

\* Find these items free to download from the on-line toolbox area of [www.starrcoaching.co.uk](http://www.starrcoaching.co.uk)

