



ACEAS

Australian Centre for Excellence in Antarctic Science
A Special Research Initiative of the Australian Research Council

Mentoring

A guide for mentors and mentees



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Mentoring is the practice of supporting an individual through the process of achieving a specific personal or professional result. The research community is a long-term active user of mentoring as a key means to learning, networking and sharing of information between colleagues both within organisations and internationally. Mentoring can assist in supporting and encouraging learning, knowledge transfer and succession planning.

Mentoring pairs individuals who have development aspirations with those who have the desire and ability to transfer knowledge and skills in a professional setting. The specific goals of mentoring partnerships will vary based on individual needs and skills, but mentoring should be a positive experience that ultimately enhances both individual and organisational effectiveness.

The aim is to develop the individual not only for their current role, but also for the future. The long-term impact of mentoring can be life and career changing.

Roles of Mentors and Mentees

In general, a mentor is more experienced, and willing to assist others more junior in developing their careers. A mentee is usually less experienced. The mentor's role is that of a trusted adviser and supportive guide, encouraging the mentee in effective strategies for accomplishing career objectives. The mentee seeks from the mentor guidance in career development and advice on how to approach problems.

At times, the mentor may also perform the role of supporter, providing insights from experience to help the mentee manage difficult situations. An effective mentor keeps in touch with the mentee, suggests appropriate resources and encourages the mentee to establish or seek out professional or supportive networks. A mentee must also feel free to approach the mentor for advice on specific problems and to speak openly about the work situation.

Both mentor and mentee must trust and respect each other. The relationship must be based on clear principles and shared values.

Principles and values of Mentoring

- Mentoring relationships are ongoing relationships, not a one-off meeting
- It is voluntarily entered into by both parties
- The Mentor/Mentee duo is free to negotiate the details of the relationship to suit them
- A mentoring relationship is based on an agreement of confidentiality by both parties. There should be no formal reporting about the processes or outcomes of the mentoring relationship other than a notification that it is ongoing/has occurred
- The focus or purpose of the mentoring should be explicit. Is it for general career development of the Mentee? Is it to help the Mentee in their teaching or research?

What can a Mentor provide?

- Sponsorship
- Exposure and visibility within the organisation
- Coaching
- Guidance
- Challenging assignments

In psychosocial terms a mentor provides:

- Role modelling
- Acceptance and confirmation
- Advice and friendship

Qualities of a Mentor

- Good listener
- Discreet
- Willing to share
- Flexible
- Tolerates difference
- Sets challenges clearly
- Encourages risk
- Accepts failure
- Has a sense of humour

What managerial skills does a Mentor require?

- Coaching— building confidence
- Communication—free and open atmosphere, exchange of ideas
- Listening—offers advice not decisions
- Planning—understanding the importance of setting goals and establishing timeframes
- Negotiating—establishing the ground rules for working with someone in a mentoring relationship
- Problem-solving—development of goals, opportunities
- Decision-making—getting agreement on a course of action and following through

Benefits for Mentors

Professional

- Satisfaction of being able to transfer skills and knowledge accumulated through extensive professional practice
- Opportunity to re-examine own practices, attitudes and values
- Refinement and development of skills of observation, listening and questioning
- Opportunity to discuss professional issues
- Opportunity to extend professional experience and hear alternative views
- Fulfillment of own development needs

Personal

- Feeling of a sense of purpose and shared value
- Pleasure in seeing the mentee grow

Benefits for Mentees

Professional

- Access to mentor's accumulated knowledge and expertise
- Practical insights into the 'real' world
- Acquisition of skills and knowledge
- New insights into own behaviour and practices
- Recognition of potential and opportunity to achieve it
- Increased creativity
- Clarification of role
- Opportunities to try out new ideas or plans on a trusted colleague/share concerns or problems
- Achievement of scholarly and teaching goals, eg. journal publication, successful grant application, improved teaching effectiveness, new teaching materials
- Access to mentor's professional networks

Personal

- Increased self-confidence
- Increased self-awareness
- Reduced feelings of isolation
- Support and reassurance

What can a Mentee do with their Mentor?

- Exchange ideas on research, teaching practice, current issues
- Ask for help in working out how to do particular things (eg. manage time, prioritise, handle difficult work situations, apply for research funding, manage studies, balance home and career)
- Invite them to give you feedback/observe you in action (giving a presentation, teaching)
- Seek their help with career strategies (updating resume, job application, promotion application, exploring career options)

Tips for Mentors on how to initiate and maintain a quality mentoring relationship

- Make a list

Preparing for your first meeting: Make a list of things that you would have wanted to know when you were in the position of the person who you will be meeting with. The list might include information about yourself (as the mentor), about the organisation or position, about what it was like to be starting out, about what it was like in a new organisation, or about expectations concerning the relationship.

- Take the initiative

Take the initiative to make the first call, although it is good when the other person calls to arrange a meeting. Hold the meeting time as essential; try not to shift it around.

- Be clear about purpose and boundaries

Acting as an advocate for career advancement or becoming involved in dispute resolution are all out-of-bounds in mentoring relationships. You may feel comfortable talking about ethical or moral issues, however, but be clear about ground rules.

- Create an agenda

List two or three and then ask the other person if they have any items they would like to add. Some items could include: (1) getting to know each other, (2) logistics, (3) goals and expectations, (4) concerns that might interfere with your meeting together, (5) initial impressions, (6) questions you have about the other person.

- Listen and ask questions

The two skills that are essential for successful mentoring are: (1) in depth listening, that is, suspending judgment, listening for understanding and providing an accepting and supportive atmosphere; and (2) asking powerful questions, that is, questions that are challenging in a friendly way and questions that help the other person talk about what is important to them.

- Plan for the next meeting

Review your mutually developed agenda to determine your progress. Solicit any ideas about what you both might want to discuss at your next meeting.

- Experiment with process

Over a period of several meetings, you might use coaching, role plays, simulations, role rehearsals, experiential learning activities, brainstorming, mind-mapping and other techniques. You might also just go for a walk together; sit on a bench sharing lunch, or in some cases, attend a special event. All have meaning for relationship building.

- Focus on wisdom

See yourself as a resource, catalyst, facilitator, idea generator, networker, and problem-solver, but do not see yourself as a person with all the answers. You do have experience and you have learned from those experiences, but you should not see your mentor role as one in which you 'tell' another person what to do or how to do it. Share what you have done (or have learned), not as a prescription, but more as an example of something from which wisdom was gained.

- Maintain and respect privacy, honesty, and integrity

Setting The Ground Rules

Once the mentoring relationship has been established, the Mentor and Mentee should set some ground rules for how the relationship will work. Some issues to consider include:

- How often should you meet (monthly, six weekly etc)
- Who will take responsibility for making the arrangements about meeting
- Where/when will you meet (time, location (zoom/in an office/over coffee))
- What will the meetings be concerned with. What will be the topics for discussion
- Do both parties agree to abide by the rules of confidentiality
- How long will the mentoring relationship last
- What are the opt-out procedures either party can use if they do not wish to continue
- What does each person hope to get from the relationship

Pitfalls for Mentors

- Pressure to take on and then continue in a mentoring role that may affect other aspects of work
- Lack of time to nurture a relationship and achieve targets
- Lack of perceived reward
- Unable to accept mentee not taking advice

Pitfalls for Mentees

- Difficulty in finding sufficient time for mentoring
- Neglect of other work in favour of tasks related to the mentoring program
- Unrealistic expectations about the relationship and the outcomes
- Lack of assertiveness in the relationship so that the relationship becomes mentor directed
- Problems with a mentor who doesn't keep his/her commitments

Who to contact if the mentoring relationship isn't working out?

If either a Mentor or a Mentee consider that the relationship is not working out as expected the ACEAS graduate training coordinator (Patti Virtue) can be called upon for assistance if required.

See '**Mentoring Agreement and Mentee questionnaire**' for additional assistance.

Information in this document was sourced from:

CSIRO's National Collections & Marine Infrastructure- Mentoring Handbook- Feb 2020
IMAS General Information on Mentoring (Julia Jabour/Wenneke ten Hout- 2017/2019)