

The Mentoring Relationship

This article, written by Alison Rundell for the DfES National Training Programme for Learning Mentors, outlines the key principles of establishing and successfully concluding a mentoring relationship, whether with students or professionals in training.

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Mentoring is becoming one of the fastest ways of developing the skills and talents of individuals in many different organisations. It is one of the most intimate of learning approaches, working one to one is an intensive process and requires self awareness and self honesty. Mentoring helps individuals identify and focus on the positive changes they want to make for themselves and the path by which they will achieve these changes.

Research into mentoring programmes shows that they are normally

- Relatively formal in organisation and timetabling, but with flexibility and informality within the mentoring relationship
- Focused on clear learning objectives and targets
- Supported by training of the mentor
- Seen to benefit the mentee, mentor and the organisation as a whole
- Introduced in a structured, planned manner

Mentors do not impose learning but respond positively to a range of situations, listening to students and creating opportunities to allow students to reflect and understand experiences and use these to learn about themselves and others. They also encourage students to experience new things and try new skills to further their learning. They engage in informal education as well as supporting formal education.

Smith & Jeffs (1996) outlined key elements of informal education as

- Respect for people
- Right to self determination
- Commitment to fairness and equality
- Shared action

“What is it to be an informal educator?” – the answer is that it means, first and foremost, being an educator. This involves seeking where we work. It entails cultivating environments so that people are able to remember significant experiences, and to work at understanding them, it also means creating situations where people can experience new things”

Smith and Jeffs (1996)

Research shows that positive outcomes of mentoring include *for the individual*:

- Reinforcement of other learning
- Increased effectiveness of formal learning
- Confidence building
- Motivation for positive change
- Enhanced experiential learning-linking learning and experience
- Offer of effective role models

¹ This article has been adapted from materials prepared by Alison Rundell for the National Learning Mentor Training programme (DfES 2002)

- Assistance in planning for the future

for the organisation/ school:

- Improved attainment in formal learning
- Promotion of cultural change within the organisation
- Improvement of communication and networking

In her book 'Transformational Mentoring', Hay (1995) calls this a Developmental Alliance in which ideally all parties to the mentoring contract are enabled to learn and grow. The organisation recognises that the students referred to the mentoring programme need to change in order to learn, grow and develop. Mentors support students to do this using a wide variety of strategies. Ideally the mentor is free to explore a range of options in order to achieve this.

Crucial to successful mentoring is the building of a good personal and professional relationship.

Mentors need to have a range of skills and competencies in order to be effective on their role:

- Self awareness
- Understanding of others
- Commitment to their own learning
- Interest in developing others
- Understanding of the situation and environment that the mentee is in
- Sense of humour
- Skills in communicating

The mentoring relationship does not stay the same throughout the process, it changes and progresses over time. The Mentor needs to be aware of the stages of the developing relationship. They need to be able to recognise that the mentee will have different needs and knowledge and require varying levels of support according to the stage they have reached. A range of mentoring styles and approaches will be needed as the mentee gains in experience and the relationship enters each new phase.

Stages of Mentoring Relationship

1. Initiation Stage

- Establish and build an open and honest relationship with the mentee
- Clarify and agree roles and responsibilities of the mentor and mentee
- Assess skills and abilities and determine skills needed for the successful achievement of goals
- Agree the purpose of the mentoring relationship (with a mutually agreed time scale), discuss goals and the success criteria
- Begin to break down barriers to learning by identifying areas for development and change, considering with the mentee what they know about the problems that they are experiencing and exploring possible solutions.
- Identify support systems that may be available for mentee e.g. other students and staff
- Explore mentees own strengths and weaknesses and aim to develop positive self-talk to raise self-esteem.

It is vital at this stage to establish a **baseline assessment** of where the mentee is at the start of the process in order to be able monitor and record progress towards agreed targets and final goal.

2. Goal Setting Stage

Goal: Short or long term aim or objective

Target: Is the means that will enable the mentee to achieve that goal

For a mentoring relationship to be effective and for the mentee to achieve something positive from the programme realistic, attainable and challenging targets must be set. Achieving these targets will increase the mentee's motivation to continue with the changes being made, it also provide a direction for the relationship. Targets set should match the mentee's level and stage of motivation and also their confidence in their ability to change. It is important to be realistic about what can be achieved as regular achievement can build confidence. Mentors need to give appropriate support, positive feedback and guidance to take the process forward.

The most appropriate targets are SMART:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Realistic

- Time limited

Questioning can be used to assess the mentee's stage of motivation for change, e.g.:

- Is change worthwhile?
- Will it make a difference?
- How will I benefit?
- At what cost?
- Do I really want to?
- What change?
- Can I?
- How will I do it?
- How will I cope?
- Will I succeed?
- What support will I need, and who can give me this support?
- Should I do it now?
- What are my priorities?

The Mentor must make sure that the mentee has ownership of the decision to change and not impose their own priorities and avoid dependency on the mentoring relationship.

Parsloe and Allen (1999) link personal empowerment to the level of success that someone is likely to achieve, using equations to show the relationships:

“Level of responsibility = level of control felt
 Level of control = level of personal freedom to choose
 Level of personal freedom to choose = degree of happiness enjoyed”

3 Progress Making Stage

At this stage the Mentor needs to:

- Continue to provide constructive feedback to the mentee, recognise and praise progress
- Allow time for the mentee to review, reflect and recognise what and how they are learning
- Give opportunities to explore problems and feelings
- Use incidental learning opportunities to progress towards the goal
- Promote self confidence and independence
- Monitor progress, record and reinforce positive change to increase and maintain motivation
- Communicate progress to significant others e.g., staff and others
- Discuss the mentoring relationship, look at the progress made, what has been enjoyed and what has been difficult.
- Challenge and support the mentee,
- Encourage the mentee to develop the skills that are particularly significant for effective learning to take place, e.g.
 - Questioning

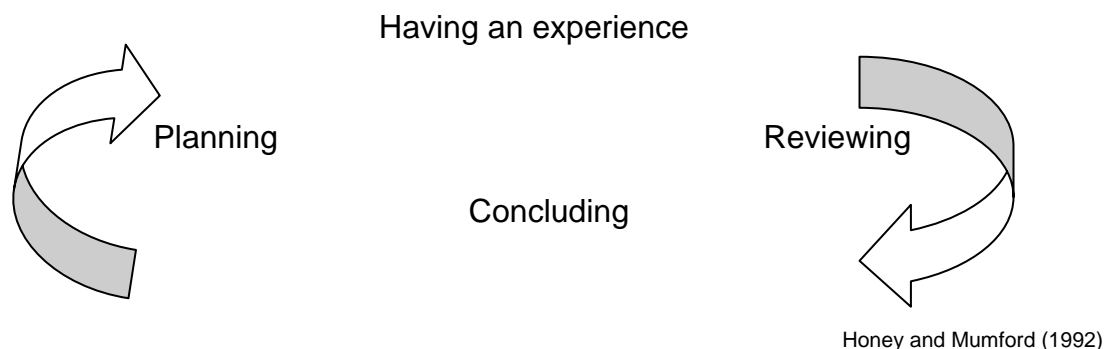
- Listening
- Reviewing
- Sharing
- Observing
- Relating a to b (conceptualising)
- Accepting help
- Monitoring

Mumford (1999)

In order to learn anything successfully (to change patterns of behaviour, learn new skills etc) most people need to have:

- Motivation – a reason for learning, changing behaviour and attitudes
- Practice – plenty of opportunities to try out new behaviour, skills and attitudes
- Feedback – positive and constructive comments on progress and strategies to try in the future. This becomes part of the learning process, helping with competence and confidence
- Opportunities for reflection – time to think about what has been learned and how it was learned it so that new knowledge can be incorporated into existing experiences

This enables mentees to learn from experience and complete the learning cycle



It is important that mentors recognise that learning needs may change over time and that they respond positively to the mentee's development and provide appropriate support and learning opportunities.

Assessment is important for both mentor and mentee in order to know where they are in the process of overcoming their barrier to learning, what progress they have made and what still needs to be done.

4 Mature wind up stage

Preparation for exiting the mentoring relationship is important. The ending of the relationship should be a clear positive strategy. Both mentor and mentee should recognise that the relationship is coming to an end and find a way of

marking it. The fact that the mentoring programme is time limited should be discussed at the start of the relationship e.g. 'start with the end in mind' Questions about what things will be like when mentoring is no longer needed can be asked from early on in the relationship since it helps to focus on a successful not-too-distant finish rather than a lengthy indeterminate process. Mentor and mentee share responsibility for the smooth winding down of the mentoring relationship

This is the time

- to review and evaluate process and acknowledge the completion of the work.
- Recognise that targets have been met and that you have achieved what you set out to do
- Praise and acknowledge positive changes
- Organise a celebration or reward

Also, review the mentoring relationship itself, look at the progress made, what had been enjoyed and what had been difficult, this reflecting back is important for both mentor and mentee.

5 Distance Stage

Arrangements for informal contact need to be made and options for this discussed.

Options could include:

- Drop in opportunities,
- Mentee attending focussed group work activities
- Accessing other support structures perhaps with other school staff
- Referral to peer support or volunteer mentor

At this time evaluations need to be completed to measure impact of mentoring using questionnaires, etc.

The Mentor should complete a follow-up to see if positive changes made and the benefits of the mentoring programme are being maintained .

Mentoring focuses on the future, looks at what could be achieved and gives individuals the confidence and commitment to make changes happen. The process also gives individuals the opportunity to develop key skills for social learning which have been identified as:

- Empathy
- Assertiveness
- Impulse control
- Management of feelings
- Decision making skills
- Self understanding
- Sense of belonging/connection to community.

Research shows that other common benefits of mentoring are:

- Opportunity to create quite reflective time (personal reflective space)
- Greater self awareness and understanding of behaviour and motivation,
- Learning how to learn
- Ability to look at new ways of doing things and influence positive outcomes
- Permission to 'discuss the undiscussable' thus gaining a different perspective
- Help in planning how to change personal outcomes
- Developing personal strategies to manage change using personal strengths and avoiding weaknesses

Structuring mentoring sessions

Prior to sessions

Agree meeting time and location that both parties are happy with, regarding safety, security and mutual well being. This usually should be private or semi private and neutral.

The Mentor and mentee should jointly agree on the recording process for the sessions.

A good starting place for each session is to review what has happened since the previous meeting, what the mentee has been doing in relation to the tasks and targets set at the last meeting, what went well and what went less well. It is important to talk about positive and negative aspects of recent experience.

The middle part of the session involves the mentee reflecting in more detail about particular incidents, saying what happened, what they did and didn't do and how they felt about it.

The Mentor's role is to listen and encourage any clarification or exploration e.g. "Why did you do that?" or "What if you had done this.....?" and "What were you hoping would happen"?

It is also important to explore their feelings "What were you feeling?" and "How did you feel then...?"

The mentee should be encouraged to assess their responses to the situation/incidents and the mentor should provide constructive feedback. The Mentor should encourage the mentee to learn from issues and experiences that happen day to day to move towards the final goal.

Together they may look at alternative views and strategies that may be useful for the future.

The situation should be summarised, lessons learned stated, plans made for action and targets set. These targets should be SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time related)

Both mentor and mentee must have a clear idea of what they need to do before next meeting.

Finally review the session itself. Has everything been achieved that needed to be achieved? If not, why not and what needs to be done? Has the session been useful to mentee, if not why not?

It is important to make time for this review and make any necessary changes.

Make arrangements for the next meeting

Hay, (1999) suggests a useful on going appraisal checklist for the Mentor for use in mentoring sessions and after each one

- Was there rapport between us?
- Did we feel able to challenge each other if appropriate?
- Was the content of our discussions relevant to our contract?
- Was I genuinely pleased when the mentee made his own decisions?
- How well was I using the skills of listening, questioning, reflecting, feedback and review etc?
- Was I avoiding the mentee becoming dependant?
- Did the mentee have ownership of his/her decisions? Was he/she the decision maker?
- Have we identified alternative options?
- Is she/he accepting responsibility?
- Have we celebrated achievements?
- Do we need to plan for an ending yet?

References and Further Reading

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Web sites

www.clutterbuckassociates.com/mentoring

useful for mentoring research and current practice in personnel management

www.iee.org/mentor

provides guidelines for mentoring relationships , (Institute of Electrical Engineers)

www.alia.org

information on mentoring relationships, mentor qualities, success factors etc.