

MENTORING AT SUSSEX

Guidance for mentors

US
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What is mentoring?

Mentoring is the process by which one person (the mentor) supports another individual (the mentee) to manage their own development so that the mentee becomes self-reliant in the acquisition of new knowledge, skills and abilities, and develops a continuous motivation to do so.

Mentoring relationships are most commonly between a more experienced person (mentor) and a less experienced person (mentee), although mentoring can also be a developmental relationship between peers.

Why mentor?

Mentoring offers many benefits to both mentor and mentee. Mentors report a sense of satisfaction in supporting other colleagues or 'giving back' to their working environment and colleagues. Other benefits include:

New ideas or perspectives

Resources or insights useful for main role

Extended network of contacts

Sense of recognition

Opportunities to develop and refine mentoring, listening and supporting skills

What do mentors say about their role?

“I have increased my confidence in being able to mentor junior colleagues and provide support and guidance to the younger generations.”

“You learn as much as you advise.”

“I’ve become more aware of encouraging my staff to think about their career planning.”

“It has been good to get to know a colleague and feel that one is supporting them.”

What is your role as a mentor?

What does it mean to be a mentor?
What are the key considerations you should take into account and what skills will you need to use in a mentoring role?

This guide provides an explanation of the key expectations of mentors along with an introduction to the core skills you will need to effectively support your mentees.

WHAT IS YOUR ROLE AS A MENTOR?

ESTABLISHING THE EXPECTATIONS OF THE MENTORING ARRANGEMENT

It's really important at the beginning of any mentoring relationship that all parties are clear about what to expect and how the mentoring will work. Taking time to consider boundaries and expectations with your mentee will help to avoid any misunderstandings and frustrations further down the line and gives the mentoring arrangement the best chance of success.

Some questions to reflect upon before meeting a prospective mentee for the first time are:

- What is my purpose for mentoring this person?
- What do I need to know about my mentee?
- What does my mentee need to know about me?
- Are there any barriers to me being an effective mentor? If so, what can I do to overcome these?

MAINTAINING CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality is of utmost importance in mentoring relationships and is essential for building trust and rapport. If there are situations in which you would not be able to maintain confidentiality you must make these clear in the first discussion with your mentee. Ensure that any records, notes and correspondence relating to your mentees are stored and disposed of securely.

In your first meeting, key things you should consider and agree on with your mentee are:

- **Mutually establish some ground rules** for your discussions, particularly around confidentiality. What are the boundaries for the discussion? Are there things you will/will not discuss?
- **Decide on the duration of the arrangement.** This might already be specified by the mentoring scheme, but if not it is important to agree an initial duration (which could always be extended if all parties agree). This might be a set number of meetings or a time period over which you will meet.
- **Decide on logistics** – when, where and how often will you meet and for how long?
- **What is success?** How will you know that the mentoring arrangement is working, what will be happening? How will you monitor progress? Agree what you will do if one or more parties feel that it is not working.
- **Identify any conflicts of interest** and manage them appropriately. Consider the impact of a mentoring arrangement on other working practices, processes and relationships. If a conflict of interest exists, you may need to set boundaries around what you can/cannot discuss, seek advice from a mentoring scheme coordinator or advise your mentee to seek an alternative mentor.
- **Know when to refer.** As a mentor, you are not required to have all the answers, in fact often it needs to be the mentee that finds the solution themselves. If it becomes clear that the mentee needs additional information or support from other sources, bring this to their attention and assist them in finding the appropriate support mechanisms.

MENTORING AT SUSSEX

Core mentoring skills

CORE MENTORING SKILLS

ESTABLISHING SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT AND BUILDING RAPPORT

A key responsibility of the mentor is to set up an environment in which the mentee feels able to speak freely, without fear of judgement or repercussions. This in part relates to establishing ground rules, but also relates to a number of other factors in building rapport with your mentee such as:

- **Location of discussions:** Ideally a private, neutral space away from distractions of phone, email and other colleagues.
- **Time:** Enable sufficient time for the discussion to avoid the mentee feeling rushed or burdensome. Ensure you will not be interrupted during a mentoring session.
- **Approach of mentor:** Ideally an excellent listener, empathetic, demonstrates interest in the individual, reserves judgement, positive body language, open and honest, avoids being directive but is willing to share own experiences.
- **Agenda and goals for discussions:** In mentoring arrangements, the agenda/goals should be driven by the mentee. The mentor supports the mentee in exploring their ideas and approaches to their discussion topics and should avoid being directive or leading the mentee to a particular conclusion or solution. This is often easier if the mentor is not the line-manager or close colleague of the mentee.
- **Separation from other work processes:** To enable the mentee to feel confident in speaking freely, it is strongly advisable that mentoring arrangements are kept distinct and separate from other departmental processes (probation, performance management,

appraisal, progression, reward etc). Information learned in mentoring discussions should not be used to inform other work situations and processes.

ACTIVE LISTENING

As a mentor, in any mentoring discussion you should listen significantly more than you talk. You are ideally aiming for a state of 'active listening'.

Listen not only to the words, but also pay close attention to the delivery in order to gain deeper insight (e.g. tone of voice, non-verbal signals and body language etc). Demonstrate that you are listening through your body language, asking questions and by reflecting back what you've heard to the mentee in order to check your understanding.

Consider what environment you require to maximise your ability to listen attentively to your mentee – this will likely require a quiet private space away from other distractions. Give consideration to your own frame of mind – what time of the day are you realistically able to give your mentee your full attention? Also be aware of how your own thoughts/emotions might affect your ability to listen objectively.

FIND OUT MORE

For more information about 'active listening', see:
<https://www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/ActiveListening.htm>

CORE MENTORING SKILLS

EFFECTIVE QUESTIONING

Being able to formulate and ask effective questions is a key skill for an effective mentor. An appropriately phrased question has the ability to unlock new ideas, challenge limiting assumptions and bring about new insights.

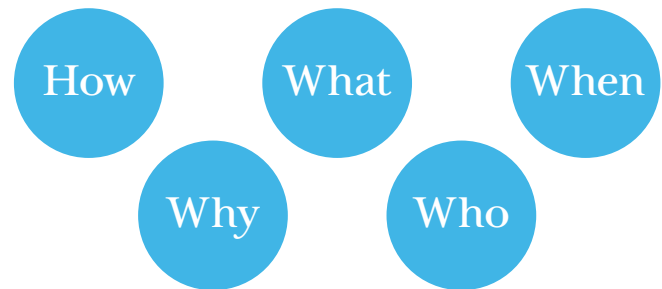
Good questions in mentoring are simple and generally require open ended responses. Questions can be used to:

- Gather information
- Deepen understanding
- Clarify facts
- Explore different perspectives
- Highlight/Reflect on important points
- Demonstrate interest
- Move discussion forward
- Identify ideas or solutions
- Build commitment and motivation

As a mentor you should ask questions from a place of curiosity and avoid leading questions. The best ideas and solutions will come from the mentee themselves, therefore your questioning should not lead them to a pre-determined conclusion.



Open ended questions often start with these words:



There are various questioning frameworks that mentors can draw upon (see below). However, be guided by your mentee and trust your intuition when it comes to questioning. If you are genuinely interested in your mentee and their development, then your questions will inevitably be useful to the individual.

FIND OUT MORE

For more information about the common questioning framework, GROW, see:

https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newLDR_89.htm

CORE MENTORING SKILLS

OFFERING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

As a mentor you might be involved in providing feedback to your mentee for example if:

- a) your mentee asks you directly for feedback on their work or professional activities
- b) during mentoring discussions you might spot an opportunity to give your mentee some feedback.

In the case of (b) be careful to first ask the mentee if they would like some feedback, rather than assume feedback will be automatically welcomed. In most instances, the mentee will welcome your feedback, but providing unsolicited feedback during a discussion can break the mentee's concentration or complicate the matter under discussion.



When providing feedback remember the mnemonic **BOOST** to ensure your feedback is constructive for your mentee:



Balanced

Focus not only on areas for development, but also on strengths.



Observed

Provide feedback based only upon behaviours that you have observed.



Objective

Avoid judgements and relate your feedback to the observed behaviours, not personality.



Specific

Back up your comments with specific examples of the observed behaviour.



Timely

Give feedback soon after the activity to allow the learner the opportunity to reflect on the learning.

CORE MENTORING SKILLS

SHARING EXPERIENCES AND PROVIDING ADVICE – RULES OF THUMB

When you have experience of dealing with particular challenges/scenarios that your mentee is facing, it can be tempting to direct the mentee towards solutions that worked for you. However, the ideas and solutions that will be most appropriate to the mentee, will be those that they generate for themselves.

This is not to say that your experience is not valid and should not be shared; in many cases, your mentee will be interested in your own perspective. So when is it appropriate to give advice/share your experience? Some general rules of thumb are:

1. **Listen without judgement first** – give your mentee space to outline the whole issue. However tempted you are to jump in with a solution, hold back; jumping in too early might mean you miss some vital information. Often, just the act of articulating an issue aloud is enough to provide clarity for the mentee.
2. **Ask questions** – try to draw ideas out of your mentee using insightful questions rather than immediately offering lots of solutions. Use brainstorming techniques to get mentees to generate a range of options that they can select from.
3. **Explore a range of perspectives** – get your mentee to imagine themselves from the perspective of others (e.g. what would your best friend/colleague/manager say to you?) and to consider scenarios from the perspective of the others involved.
4. Once you're confident that you have been through steps 1–3 above, it may be appropriate to offer insight into your own experience. **Avoid being directive** – 'what I think you should do is....'. Instead ask the mentee if they would like to hear what you have done previously to overcome a similar situation. In most cases they will say yes, but if they say no, respect that decision and support them in coming up with their own ideas. Going through the other steps might already have generated a solution for the mentee.
5. If asked directly for your advice, give it with the caveat that what worked for you might not be the right course of action for your mentee. Only provide advice on issues you are confident of; if it is beyond your experience/knowledge support the mentee in finding other sources of advice. As a mentor you are not expected to have all the answers.



As a mentor you are not expected to have all the answers.

CORE MENTORING SKILLS

WHAT IF IT'S NOT WORKING?

Hopefully you will find yourself in a productive mentoring relationship that is rewarding for both mentee and mentor. However, mentoring arrangements can and do break down for a variety of reasons.

Signs that a mentoring relationship is not working might be:

- Mentee/mentor cancels appointments, fails to turn up or regularly rearranges last minute
- Mentee/mentor consistently fails to make progress on actions identified in meetings
- Mentee/mentor appears distracted in sessions or cuts sessions short



So what should you do if you find yourself in a mentoring relationship that is not working? Some ideas are presented below:

- **Ask the other person for feedback** on how they are finding the mentoring arrangement – it might be that they think everything is going well or have similar concerns to you. Either way, you have more information to help you decide how to proceed.
- **Acknowledge the issue openly.** The next time you meet, be honest and tell the other person that you feel that something isn't working with the mentoring arrangement, giving factual examples of why you think this (e.g. you've cancelled a number of appointments). Jointly explore whether there are things you could both do to get the relationship working more effectively.
- **End mentoring relationships constructively.** Not all mentoring relationships work out, and it is not useful to prolong the arrangement if it is clear that it is not working. Don't leave your mentee hanging. Instead, have a constructive discussion about how the mentee can progress beyond this mentoring arrangement; support them in finding a new mentor, or point them in the direction of other help/information that might be useful to them.

Further information

Find out more about mentoring at Sussex

Our mentoring web pages provide practical information and resources for anyone engaged in mentoring activities, whether you are (or would like to be) a mentee or mentor; or if you are involved in developing a mentoring scheme for your department or area of work.

www.sussex.ac.uk/organisational-development/mentoring

For mentoring related training and development within the University, visit:

www.sussex.ac.uk/organisational-development

For mentoring information and support for researchers visit:

www.sussex.ac.uk/staff/research/rs

External mentoring skills courses are available through providers such as:

ILM

<https://www.i-l-m.com>

Chartered Management Institute (CMI)

www.managers.org.uk

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)

<https://www.cipd.co.uk>

The OCM

www.theocm.co.uk/products-and-services/courses

More information is also available via mentoring professional bodies such as the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC)

<https://emccuk.org>

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