



## 4.2.1 Overview of Mentoring

by Cy Leise (Psychology & Human Services, Bellevue University)

Mentoring involves a trusting but clearly bounded relationship entered into by a mentor and a mentee for the purpose of the personal or career change and growth of the mentee. In effective mentoring relationships, the mentee’s purpose and goals are clearly defined, and the mentee is willing to challenge himself or herself in an area of performance that will produce future benefits. Mentors use challenging strategies that facilitate learning, decision-making, and growth in real-time contexts. Key skill areas include communication, information processing, problem solving, and servant leadership. The mentor-mentee relationship is meaningful and valuable to both parties for attaining immediate goals and for deepening insights about performance and growth processes.

### Why Mentoring is Important

Any person who is motivated and concerned about achieving personal or professional growth faces the challenge of articulating a substantive direction or change in an area which they do not completely understand. In addition, the person must plan and implement specific action steps that have the potential to lead to the desired growth. Effective mentoring facilitates the movement of a mentee from unclear development goals to independence in self-growth; a practical goal should be the mentee’s future success (4.2.2 *Becoming a Self-Grower*, 4.2.3 *Personal Development Methodology*, and 1.4.5 *Performance Levels for Learners and Self-Growers*).

Relationships between more experienced or expert individuals and those near the beginning of the growth process are always unequal in terms of status and power, so mentoring relationships must be carefully planned to involve openness and trust that can “sideline” these differences for a time. The relationship must be a “hands-on” one that is focused on the mentor staying “alongside” the mentee. Mentors must avoid influencing the mentee on the basis of authority or power, and mentees must take risks by engaging in real performance learning that is improved by assessment from the mentor and others. It is not the mentor’s job to remediate the mentee’s problems. The mentor’s role is to be an honest and open sounding board and a source of wisdom for assessing and planning.

### Principles of Effective Mentoring

The ten principles provided in Table 1 define effective mentoring and provide a framework for all the modules related to mentoring.

### Main Issues Related to Mentoring

For the mentoring process to be maximally effective, certain issues and barriers must be predicted and handled with forethought.

Table 1 **Ten Principles of Effective Mentoring**

- |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mentoring requires a trusting, confidential relationship based on mutual respect.</li> <li>2. Mentoring involves a clearly bounded relationship that is close and uncoerced (unlike friendship or parenting).</li> <li>3. Mentoring involves a definite time commitment.</li> <li>4. A mentoring relationship is planned for enhancing specific growth goals of a mentee; not for organizational requirements such as employee evaluation.</li> <li>5. The purpose of mentoring must be mutually established by the mentor and mentee with clearly defined goals/outcomes.</li> <li>6. Mentors should model performances for mentees thereby providing them with opportunities to observe and develop insights.</li> <li>7. Mentors provide quality performance assessments, especially of a mentee’s self-assessment.</li> <li>8. Mentees must show progress by “raising the bar” for themselves as their insights and skills increase.</li> <li>9. The mentoring relationship ends when the mentee is able to operate independently.</li> <li>10. Mentors follow a servant leadership model by providing much value to another without receiving extrinsic rewards.</li> </ol> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

First, both parties must be willing to enter the relationship with an agreement that coercion will never be used. To avoid coercion, it is essential to consider the differences between assessment and evaluation (4.1.2 *Distinctions Between Assessment and Evaluation*).

Mentors and mentees vary widely in personality styles, purposes, and assumptions about how to achieve improvements in performance and growth. The relationship between the individuals must have clear boundaries that are identified through careful discussion between the parties.

In many cases, mentees have significant life barriers that influence the success of the mentoring process and relationship. The module **4.2.2 *Becoming a Self-Grower*** provides assessment suggestions and resources (such as work on a life vision portfolio or referral to a mental health professional) for working with preliminary barriers to growth.

Because it is not possible to predict how a mentor-mentee relationship will evolve, mentors must facilitate an appropriate level of challenge and mentees must accept the challenge with honesty and openness, especially when things are not going as well as hoped.

Because mentors have already experienced the type of growth that their mentees need to attain, it is important to consider how mentors benefit from the relationship. The results for the mentor must be motivating both intrinsically, e.g., be experienced as “servant leadership,” and extrinsically, e.g., be recognized as an effective mentor. Similarly, mentees must experience intrinsically motivating results such as enhanced self-esteem and extrinsically motivating results such as improved performance.

### Key Skills of Mentors

The following list describes essential skills that mentors must have in order to be effective with mentees and with the process itself. Additional skills that may be important for certain circumstances can be identified in the *Classification of Learning Skills (2.3.3)*, especially in the *Social Domain (2.3.5)* and the *Affective Domain (2.3.6)*. This set of performance skills, in combination with other tools such as those found in *Performance Levels for Learners and Self-Growers (1.4.5)*, will be valuable for mentors’ self-assessments.

1. Listening
2. Being positive
3. Identifying assumptions
4. Taking the other’s perspective
5. Appreciating the other’s values
6. Reasoning ethically
7. Identifying and accessing resources
8. Setting criteria
9. Challenging
10. Assessing against criteria
11. Respecting diverse talents and interests
12. Being emotionally available
13. Possessing servant leadership values

### Mentoring Contexts

The purpose of mentoring is to facilitate growth in individuals who already function well. Many authors address the various forms of mentoring (e.g., Holliday 2001; Fritts, 1998) and discriminate between mentoring and other forms of learning or growth facilitation. The phrases “life coaching” and “learning leader” appear to have a meaning more similar to mentoring than to learning assessment, peer coaching, or training. In higher education contexts, the major opportunities for mentoring students occur in advising, and in assisting students with independent projects.

Faculty growth can be facilitated by mentoring from more experienced colleagues who have “servant leadership” attitudes and who are themselves open to change and growth. Part-time faculty have substantial professional experience but need mentoring in order to become effective educators. New faculty often need mentors in order to quickly gain expertise as teachers, and to establish research programs that result in publications and grants. All faculty experience new challenges when their roles change, e.g., due to external influences such as reduced funding and new accreditation requirements.

### Concluding Thoughts

Mentoring is an important strategy for enhancing specific areas of growth that are not yet required but that are likely to support future success in a mentee’s career or personal life. In this overview module the basic principles, issues, processes, skills, and contexts of mentoring have been identified and described. It is clear that the metacognitive insights, gained during mentoring, and by using many processes and tools, will substantially improve transfer of learning both for the mentor and the mentee. Mentors benefit from servant-leadership experiences that can add meaning and purpose to their lives as experienced professionals. For mentees, the process opens a window on their futures and on themselves, by making it possible to experience growth that may not have happened had they been left to their own devices. Mentoring is an essential process, especially in the fast-changing world of higher education.

### References

- Fritts, P. J. (1998). *The new managerial mentor: Becoming a learning leader to build communities of purpose*. Palo Alto, CA: Davies-Black.
- Holliday, M. (2001). *Coaching, mentoring, & managing* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Franklin Lakes, NJ: Career Press.