

## Mentoring

### What is mentoring?

It is a relationship where the mentor passes on some of what they've learned to someone else who will benefit from their experience.

### The mentor has three roles:

- **Experienced Guide**  
The mentor can help the learner to reflect on their experience and draw out the key learnings. The mentor is operating at the level the mentee aspires to and can help share what it's really like and the challenges they have had to overcome.
- **Coach**  
This should be done as a coach not a teacher. Coaching requires a belief that the learner holds the key to their own problems, and a willingness to help them explore the issue including supporting thinking and experimenting with new ways of working. It is not about taking responsibility away from the mentee and managing their learning for them.
- **Critical Friend**  
The final role is to be a critical friend. This is one of the most important, though most difficult, mentoring roles to successfully undertake. It requires the mentor to listen, encourage, draw out, reflect back and challenge assumptions and if necessary, provide critical feedback on ideas or plans under discussion.

### Mentoring has benefits for both mentor and mentee

**For the mentor**, there is obviously the opportunity to explore their learning and benefit from someone else's focus, expertise and experience, since they have been through this career transition and have had time to reflect and apply the learning.

**For the mentee**, the benefits may be more subtle. It is always nice to feel that we are doing something valuable and supporting someone else. A mentoring relationship may also be a useful opportunity to work on a leadership style, particularly coaching, or other communication skills. It also helps us to reflect on what we have learnt. We would however ask the mentor to respect the nature of the programme and not poach the mentee!

### Roles and Responsibilities

It is the role of the mentee to drive the relationship and arrange meetings and phone calls. They must take into account the workload of the mentor and not overburden them. It is up to the mentee to make the approach to the mentor and agree what the relationship will mean in practice.

### How does mentoring work

Aldred<sup>1</sup> identified a simple three step process:

1. **Exploration** – to explore issues which are identified by the mentored individual
2. **New understanding** – to develop new ways of thinking about the issues
3. **Action planning** – to agree actions to address the issues

The tables below focus on the main strategies and methods required for the relationship to be a success.

**Exploration:**

Strategies	Methods
Pay attention to the relationship and develop it	Listen and ask open questions
Clarify the aims and objectives of mentoring	Negotiate an agenda
Support and counsel	

**New Understanding:**

Strategies	Methods
Support and counsel	Listen and challenge
Give constructive feedback	Ask open and closed questions
Coach and demonstrate skills	Recognise strengths and weaknesses
	Establish priorities
	Identify developmental needs
	Give information and advice
	Share experience and tell stories

**Action:**

Strategies	Methods
Examine options for action and their consequences	Encourage new and creative way of thinking
Attend to the mentoring process and the relationship	Help to make decisions and solve problems
Negotiate an action plan	Agree action plans
	Monitor progress and evaluate outcomes

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1. ALRED, G., GARVEY, B. and SMITH, R (1998) Mentoring pocketbook. Alresford: Management Pocketbooks.