



Mentoring

Many successful business people offer their services as Mentors as a way of supplementing their Retirement income. This section looks at the skills needed to be an effective Mentor and a receptive Mentee.

Good mentoring programs prepare mentors and mentees by clarifying their roles and defining their time and energy commitments. Mentees have to feel comfortable in sharing their weaknesses with the mentors, and mentors have to be willing to bow out of a relationship that they can't give sufficient time to or aren't able to assist the mentee in the areas he or she needs help with.

Formal mentoring has a structure. It involves an agreement to mentor and to be mentored, a clear framework for mentoring and perhaps a program of support. In a formal mentoring relationship, there is discussion of expectations, goals and the process to be used. The frequency and duration of contact is agreed and ground-rules are established.

The mentoring conversation aims at facilitating self-development and is based on classic problem solving, strategic planning and decision making processes. It answers four questions:

1. Where am I now?
2. Where do I want to be?
3. How do I get there?
4. How am I doing?

The mentor firstly facilitates reflection and the exploration of options. Next, the mentor assists the mentee to make informed decisions, set goals and formulate practical strategies to achieve them. The mentor then encourages and supports the mentee as they implement their plan. When a mentor models and leads the mentoring conversation as described, the mentee learns a valuable problem solving and decision-making process that can be applied in any situation. Thus, a mentor assists not only with immediate needs but also equips the mentee to deal with future issues. *Extract from Rolfe, A. **The Mentoring Conversation.***

What is a Mentor?

A mentor is an experienced adviser and supporter; somebody, usually older and more experienced, who advises and guides a younger, less experienced person.

In essence, mentoring is a developmental partnership that offers the mentor an outlet to use some of the knowledge he/she has gathered throughout the years to benefit the growth of a younger person.



Mentoring Paradigms

Traditional Paradigm	Contemporary Thinking
The mentor picks a protégé	You look for mentors
A mentor is someone more senior	A mentor is someone you can learn from regardless of age or position
You should have a lot in common with your mentor	Difference provides potential for greater discovery, challenge and growth
Mentoring is for young people	Mentoring is for anyone at any stage of life or career
You have one mentor	You may have mentors for different aspects of life and career
Mentoring is one-to-one	Many ways to mentor - individual, group and mentoring circles
Mentors tell you what to do	A mentor is a sounding board
Mentors gives advice	Mentors assist your decision-making and problem-solving
You are a mentor or a mentee	You are both mentor and mentee
You need a mentor	A mentoring mindset enables you to gain insight by interacting with others with or without formal relationships

Mentoring vs Coaching

There are many similarities and differences between mentoring and coaching. However the most important distinction is:

Coaching

- Is used when there is a well-defined goal that is based on improving skills and performance.
- Is about performance

Mentoring

- Is valuable for career development, providing general guidance, setting and achieving goals, making decisions or facilitating problem solving.
- Is personal.



Questions every Mentor should ask of a Mentee

1. **What are you trying to be or do?** This question will help your Mentor understand where you are coming from and what you are aspiring to do
2. **What are you struggling with?** What is frustrating you; what are you struggling with. This will give you an idea of the obstacles you are facing that may prevent you from succeeding.
3. **What do you think you are good at? What are you doing well that is helping you reach your goals?** These questions help you understand what you think your strengths are, what comes naturally and what you may do better than others.
4. **What will you do differently tomorrow to meet these challenges?** This will help you see if you are willing to spend time on your developmental areas and not just what you are already excelling at. Ask yourself, "What are the priorities?", "What areas am I focusing on?", "Are they the right ones?","How open am I to refocusing on other tasks towards progress if I seem stuck?"
5. **How can I help you?** The answers to above questions should help you understand how the Mentor can help you.

What Makes a Good Mentor?

Many people feel that being a good mentor requires special skills, but this is not the whole truth! Good mentors are also people who have the qualities of good role models; they demonstrate model codes of behaviour through their own actions and words.

- **Interested in helping others succeed.** They have a genuine interest in other people's lives and experience pleasure when helping others reach their goals.
- **Caring.** They are empathetic, open, reliable and honest with others.
- **Willing to spend time.** They reach out and share their life experiences to help others with their life journey.
- **Open to educate.** They are able to pass on their knowledge, insights and expertise clearly and helpfully.
- **Patient.** They offer help in finding life direction, never pushing.
- **Trustworthy.** They are dependable people who understand the importance of keeping information shared strictly confidential.
- **Practical.** They assist in setting goals, objectives and timeframes.
- **An active listener.** They are listeners who are able to reflect back the relevant issues while minimizing their own personal assumptions and prejudices.
- **Inspirational.** They aspire to excellence and encourage personal excellence in others.
- **Able to give advice.** Mentors advise without explicitly dictating actions, allowing mentee to find his/her way.
- **Sensitive to people's feelings.** They are able to provide constructive criticism as well as compliments.
- **Successful and admired.** They are well respected in their organizations and in the community.



Skills for Successful Mentees

Ask Questions

The basis of a mentoring relationship is imparting information from one person to another. Left to chance, a mentee will get the information, advice, or guidance that the mentor wants to give, or thinks is helpful, which may be enough in many cases. However, since the relationship is primarily for the mentee's benefit, being able to ask for what you want, need, and are curious about is an important skill for mentees. High quality questions can help you get what you really want from your mentor and make the best use of the time you spend with him or her.

Listening Skills

All the best questions in the world are useless unless you can actively listen for the information that will be helpful to you. Here are 3 points to bear in mind to help you listen.

- **Listen for central ideas.** Listen for ideas that your mentor repeats and provides examples of.
- **Determine what is of personal value to you in your mentor's conversation.** Once you've identified the central idea, consider how it applies to you.
- **Learn to keep pace--speed of thought vs. speed of speech.** Most people can think five to six times faster than another person can talk. This difference in pace of thought and speech often results in daydreaming or mind-wandering on the part of the listener.

Build Trust.

A mentoring relationship is based on trust. As a mentee, you are placing a great deal of trust in your mentor to provide you with helpful guidance. At the same time, mentors are trusting that mentees will not take advantage of the relationship (e.g., wasting your mentor's time, repeating information not intended for others, asking for favours, inappropriately using the relationship).

Find Your Comfort Zone

Many mentoring relationships will pair a mentee with a high-level or prominent leader. Research has shown that these relationships are sometimes slow to develop because the mentee is often uncomfortable with their mentor. Mentees reported that they were afraid to make mistakes or appear vulnerable in front of their mentors; they had trouble viewing their mentors as partners and they considered their own problems and needs as insignificant.

A reluctant or hesitant mentee can be frustrating to a mentor, so it's important that you develop techniques to become comfortable early on in your mentoring relationship.

- Have a written list of questions before each meeting.
- Prepare a concrete set of goals and objectives for your mentoring relationship.
- Visualize conversations between your mentor and you as if you've known him for a long time.
- Research your mentor's background.
- Prepare conversation points.



Getting advice or guidance that you don't agree with.

Instead of arguing with your mentor or just ignoring the advice, approach the situation with a sense of curiosity.

It feels like your mentor is telling you what you should do, rather than letting you rely on them for a sounding board and then solve your own problems.

Often, mentors feel that giving advice is what they're supposed to do and is what is expected of them. At the beginning of your relationship, let your mentor know up front that you don't expect them to know all the answers, but are looking forward to having someone you can bounce ideas off of and who will help you solve your own problems.

Resolve Differences.

In any relationship, at times there are disagreements or misunderstandings, and a mentoring relationship is no different. Keeping in mind that mentoring relationships are partnerships, it's important to accept that you have a right to express yourself when you want to make adjustments to the mentoring relationship. However, it's just as important to make sure that you resolve differences appropriately, professionally, and respectfully.

Make the Moment(s) Count

Unless you reflect upon your experiences, you can often miss out on the gems in moments you spend with your mentor. Keep a mentoring journal. After each meeting, summarise what you learned and how you can apply the learning. Share what you have written with your mentor to get feedback.

Keys to Successful Mentoring

Key #1: Develop a Relationship of Trust

Develop a relationship of trust. Relationships need to be built before any effective mentoring can take place. An environment of trust and mutuality must be established.

- Begin each relationship with a getting-to-know-you session.
- The mentor should greet the mentee warmly and help the mentee identify his or her professional needs and goals.
- The mentor should learn about the mentee's educational background and experience, and share information about his or her own background and experience.
- The mentor can then continue to build upon the mentees strengths, needs, and goals throughout the mentoring period.



Key #2: Define Roles and Responsibilities

Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of both the mentor and the mentee. Typically, a mentee is more receptive to feedback if he or she feels like an active participant in the relationship.

- What will the role of the mentor be?
- What types of mentoring will be most effective?
- What are the responsibilities of the mentee and mentor? For example, the mentee may be required to attend specific training given by the mentor or complete a certain number of mutually determined goals during the mentoring period.

Key #3: Establish Short and Long Term Goals

Establish short- and long-term goals. Mentors and mentees should work together to develop mutually agreed upon goals. These goals become the basis for the mentoring activities.

- Mentors need to provide constructive feedback to mentees on goal progression.
- Mentees should have an opportunity to be reflective on their actions.
- The mentor can note their observations in a positive, constructive manner and describe any actions taken by the mentee in connection to the established goals.
- The mentor and mentee can review the observations and determine the next steps. Open, respectful, and supportive communication is essential to this process and should include :-
 - Active listening. Mentors must be skilled at actively listening to concerns and must be sensitive to the timing of feedback and the way it is received.
 - Value each other's feedback. Even experienced teachers can learn new ways of thinking and doing things.

Key #4: Collaborate to Solve Problems

Be collaborative in solving problems. Mentors need to allow mentees the opportunity to identify concerns and potential solutions. Mentors should encourage mentees to take risks and do things differently by implementing creative solutions

- Identify the specific concern.
- Brainstorm possible solutions. The mentor can offer ideas, but the mentee should choose which plan to put into action.
- Select a plan and discuss desired outcomes.
- Implement the plan. The mentor should be supportive and encouraging, and reinforce successful completion of the plan.
- Assess the outcome together. The mentor and mentee should be reflective and discuss the effectiveness of the activity and make adjustments as needed.
- Try another solution, if needed - there are many different ways to address an issue.

Key #5: End the Relationship

Celebrate accomplishments, establish plans for the future, close the relationship (rather than let it fizzle out).



Useful Tools

The SME Toolkit (South Africa) www.southafrica.smetoolkit.org is very useful. It provides templates for all sorts of business activities – admin, finance, marketing, HR .

<http://www.mentoring-works.com> is a well structured site that provides useful guidelines for Mentors.