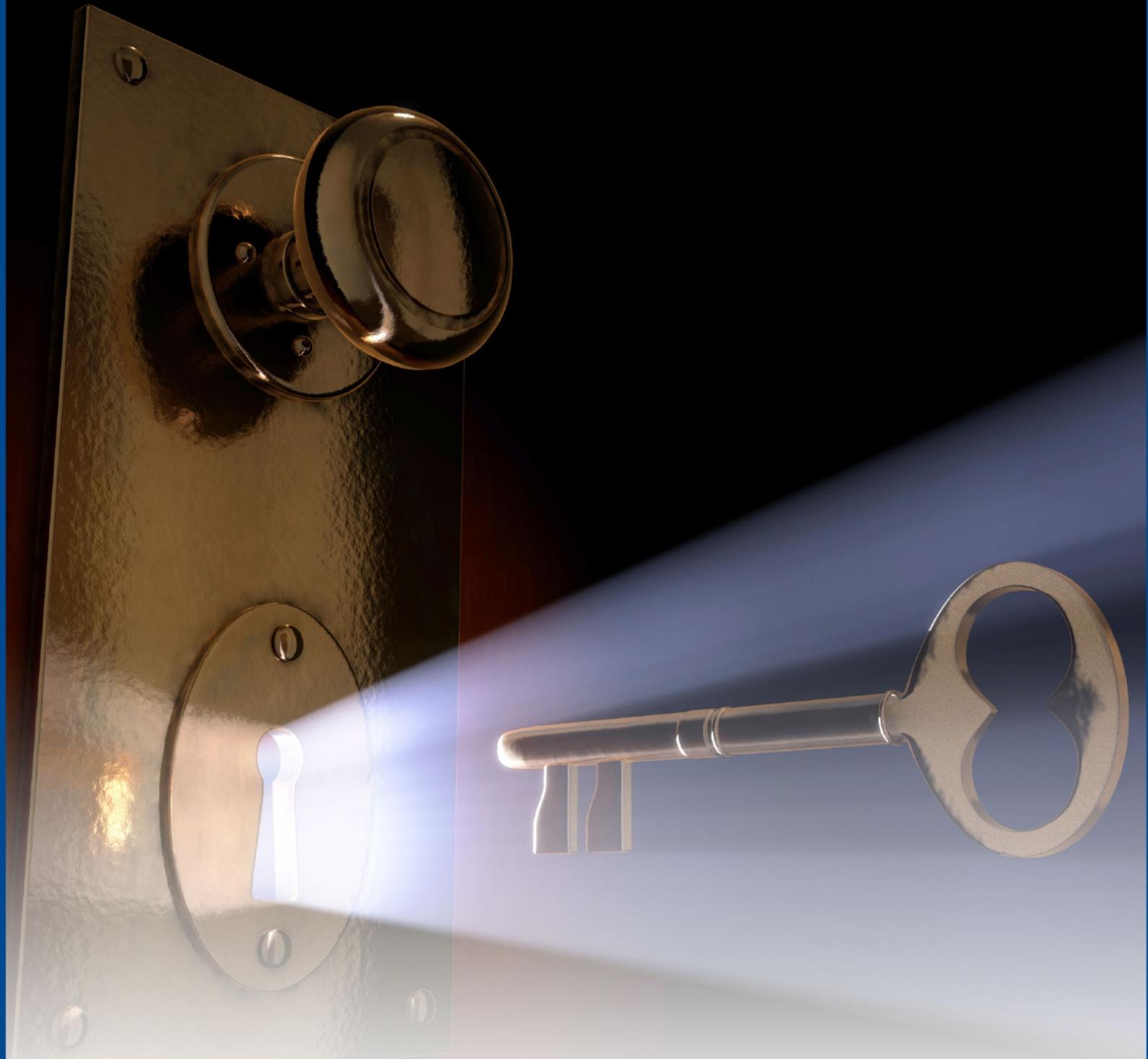


A Useful Guide to Mentoring



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Part One

Being a Mentor

If you would like to work on the exercises in the Useful Guide you can download the MS Word toolkit from [here](#).

Introduction

So you want to be a mentor

Many of us have had mentors throughout our careers and maybe our lives, though those relationships may not always have been formalised. I have enjoyed the support and challenge of working with a number of mentors during my business career. Many of the relationships were informal though occasionally I have been lucky to have a mentor sponsored by an employer.

Hopefully you are reading this because you too have experienced the support of a talented, generous man or woman of wisdom or an 'old hand' and know how beneficial it was for you and now you want to help someone else achieve success at work. After all if you have gained so much expertise and knowledge during your working life it is a shame to let it go to waste when it could be shared with others.

Part one of this guide is for you if you are considering taking on the role of a mentor within a business context. It will also be useful for you if you are currently engaged in a mentoring relationship and you would like to brush up your skills. It is designed to stimulate and challenge and to provide an opportunity for you to reflect on the skills and qualities required to make the relationship effective for both your mentee and for **you** the mentor.

The Story of Mentor

'Mentor' first appeared in Homer's Odyssey. He was a trusted elder, teacher and friend of Odysseus. Before going off to fight the Trojan wars Odysseus asked Mentor to look after his household and continue as his son Telemachus' teacher. Odysseus spent ten years away from home during which time his son grew up in Mentor's care.

Eventually the word 'mentor' came to have its current meaning: experienced and trusted adviser, friend and counsellor.

Or if you are looking for a mentor?

If you are seeking a mentor you will find that Part Two of this guide will help to identify what kind of support or mentoring you would like and which you feel will work for you. It may also be useful in helping you recognise what you want to achieve from a mentoring relationship. Part Two will help you if you want ideas and thoughts on how to select and work with a mentor.

For me mentoring is best done not in any official capacity, but when someone asks you for 'help' on a project, something that runs over a period of time, not a one off intervention.

I recall a few years ago being approached by a young trainer for some assistance in moving from IT training to the world of "soft skills". I was head of a training function at the time and she was employed by an IT firm. We spoke a few times and eventually when she said she lacked experience, I offered her the opportunity of co-training in the business I worked in. First she shadowed, then asked lots of questions and sometime later she ran a session with me supporting her.

At the time I did not recognise this as mentoring, but as helping a newbie gain access to knowledge and experience that she did not have access to herself. Over several months "Sue" used me as a sounding board while she developed and ran her own courses, eventually going freelance.

Suffice to say what made the relationship work was the win/ win nature. I learnt as much from her as she from me – but to this day she does not realise how much I gained from her learning and experiences too.

Mike Morrison CF CIPD

I am grateful to all those who shared their experiences as mentors and as mentees, both the successful and the not so successful, whose stories are told throughout the guide.

Charlotte Mannion
October 2010

What is Mentoring?

Mentoring is often seen as an alternative to coaching, though the relationship between the mentor and mentee is not expected to be a formal line management arrangement. A major difference between coaching and mentoring is that coaching focuses on the job and the skills needed today whereas mentoring focuses on the person and their career path and future development.

Originally, in the USA, younger or less experienced people in an organisation who were identified as having potential were allotted to senior managers. Their role was to guide the new mentee's career through the organisation. However in the UK mentoring is more often seen as a developmental and learning opportunity which in itself may identify potential high flyers.

Mentoring has many benefits. Whilst the mentee gets personal support, encouragement and opportunities, the mentor gets job enrichment and the satisfaction of role modelling and sharing experiences.

A few years ago, I recruited a new training manager for my team. She had a number of years' experience within training and development, but not within our industry, professional services.

During her first few months, she was immersed in "induction" including getting to know the firm and the four different departments she would be working with. She needed to build relationships with a number of key people, with their own agendas, styles, preferences and issues. During this time, I helped her by encouraging her to identify her key relationships, how she could find out more about them before meeting them, as well as the nuts and bolts of the internal diary system and finding out locations and PAs. She built her own network, with such success she was able to apply for a new role 3 years later, which hinged on her relationship skills. At times, I needed to coach her eg, when preparing for a particular meeting with a "difficult person" or when unreasonable demands had been placed on her to get to meetings when she had other things booked.

As her line manager, I felt it was really valuable that she was happy to get my advice and experience on many aspects and feel this is an ideal situation for both coaching and mentoring. However there are times when it is wholly appropriate for an individual to work with an independent mentor of their choosing and this should not be discounted.

Sue Cohen – freelance Learning and Development professional

A definition of mentoring

The European Mentoring Centre defines mentoring as ...

“Mentoring is offline help given by one person to another to make significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking”

On the other hand I rather like this definition from David Clutterbuck who wrote [Everyone Needs a Mentor](#).

“A mentor is a more experienced individual willing to share knowledge with someone who is less experienced in a relationship of mutual trust”.

It is sometimes difficult to identify the differences between coaching and mentoring and this definition comes close to the accepted view. Mentoring is more about helping someone to develop over a longer period of time and addresses different issues which impact on career progression as they arise.

Coaching can therefore be described as helping someone to gain a new skill. Usually the relationship is more short term.

Role of the mentor

The mentor's role is to help the mentee find their own solutions rather than tell them how you, the mentor, would tackle the problem or issue. You need to commit to regular meetings and to encourage the mentee to drive the relationship by planning meeting dates and the topics to discuss. It's important that both of you have clear objectives for each time you meet so you can concentrate on the issue and not waste time or energy on areas where there is no benefit for either of you.

The mentor needs to provide support by listening well and sometimes by challenging assumptions. You need to be enthusiastic and yet patient to enable the mentee to understand and work with their learning. As a mentor you can provide the vision and help in handling short term problems and long term development.

I just wanted to benefit from my mentor's knowledge of the business, his experience of getting on in the company and to learn some of his skills - like the way he influences thinking in his team and getting everyone to work well together.

Newly appointed Project manager in an IT company

The mentor's role is to be a sounding board, someone to share ideas with and approach for help. However there are often other expectations. I regularly ask people who have put their name forward to be mentored or who are actively seeking a mentor what they are looking for in a mentor and these are some of the responses.

It seems there is an expectation that a mentor should be ...

- **experienced in business matters and with relevant business experience.**

This does not mean that the mentor needs to know everything in a specific industry sector or have worked in the same field as his or her mentee. It is more about understanding the part business influences the mentee's actions and having relevant experience or skills that the mentee needs.

"I found it very useful, at first, having a mentor. He really made me sit up and realise that what I had built up wasn't very good. But the problem was he wouldn't give me any advice so I was stuck". "He had a finance background and didn't understand the business I was in at all so he couldn't think of a better way of doing it or give me any ideas about how I might market my business."
Business entrepreneur

- **able to give quality time.**

This is a requirement whether you are a mentor or the mentee. In our increasingly busy lives having time to sit down and think is very precious. Being with someone with whom you can share ideas is a luxury and should be appreciated as such. Giving someone time is one of the greatest gifts we can give.

- **good listeners.**

Like time we do need to have someone who can listen to our ideas without making judgements, without jumping into the conversation to top your story and who is happy to just let you talk until every thought is out in the open.

- **able to motivate and inspire.**

One of the huge advantages of having a mentor is to be able to work with someone who is able to inspire you and who can motivate you enough to put ideas into action. If you as a mentor have experience of inspiring others in the past that experience is of great benefit to your mentee.

- **open minded and trustworthy.**

These two qualities are like two bookends. A mentor needs to be non-judgemental and willing to listen to the ideas of others however 'different' they may seem. And at the same time completely trustworthy by maintaining a confidential relationship with their mentee.

- and, it seems, they also need to have a **sense of humour!**

Benefits of mentoring

Take a moment to think about how mentoring can benefit all who are involved in the process. Jot your thoughts down and then compare your list with the one on the following page. You can download the MS Word toolkit from [here](#).

The Mentor

The Mentee

The Mentee's line manager

The Organisation that the Mentee belongs to

Here are some of the participants' suggestions from a **Becoming a Mentor** workshop ...

For Mentors ...

- Satisfaction at the success of mentees.
- Recognition of the mentor's development skills by higher management.
- Challenge, stimulation.
- Identify future potential.
- Development opportunities for the mentor: coaching, counselling and motivating skills.
- Future goodwill from the mentee who may well overtake the mentor career wise.

For Mentees ...

- Career enhancement in terms of: advice (both professional and also in the timing of job moves) and sponsorship (such as recognition by senior people, 'mentioning in dispatches').
- Speedier and easier induction into the formal and informal world of organisations.
- Ready access to senior managers can undoubtedly aid the mentees self confidence. Mentees who are used to speaking often informally with senior managers as their mentors will gain in confidence, helping them when dealing with all such managers.
- Training in organisation politics is offered by mentoring.
- Frequently, new managers learn about the politics of organisations through their mentors.
- A role model who can be observed closely as well as from a distance. In such ways, mentees can often develop the skills of managing very quickly and effectively.

For Line Managers ...

- A more effective member of staff.
- A second opinion of mentee's performance or potential.
- Information from the mentor via the mentee (about other people, other departments, other programmes or other ideas).
- Easing of workload in terms of developmental responsibilities.
- 'Bask in the reflected glory' of the mentee, who will probably impress the senior management.

For the Organisation ...

- More effective staff, line managers and mentors as well as mentees.
- Demonstrates a commitment to training and development.
- Tangible and measurable gains if work tasks or projects are used as developmental tools.
- Improved communication across the organisation, between mentor, mentee and line manager.
- Increased motivation of all parties involved.

What kind of mentor will you be?

A mentee may, during the lifetime of the mentoring relationship, look for the mentor to play a number of roles. If you are a mentor for more than one person you will probably find that each of your mentees may well want a different type of mentor depending on their own situation. To be an effective mentor you will need to be able to act in all of these different roles at some time or other. Roles such as critical friend or a role model, networker or a sounding board are all part of the mentor's toolkit.

However, at the beginning of a relationship, a mentee might seek you out because you have strong skills or knowledge in a particular area.

A manager in a company looking for a mentor may want to find someone who is a role model and then, as the relationship grows, look to the mentor to initiate some business introductions and help him or her build networks.

A business owner, who starts by wanting simply a sounding board, may grow to realise that he or she needs to be challenged and encouraged to think through all his or her decisions.

A young person working with a more knowledgeable and experienced mentor may need help in setting him or herself a route forward and help in clarifying his or her goals. This is before looking for development and help with specific projects.

By helping with goal setting you are making sure that your mentee has set viable but stretching goals which will help him or her achieve his or her ambitions. And of course this helps you, as their mentor, because you will know what he or she is trying to achieve and helps you to understand where to focus your sessions.

In addition your role is to be a 'critical' friend, being able to tell your mentee what other people maybe are too polite to mention. You need to be someone who is able to give impartial supportive or corrective feedback.

You can also be challenging, pushing your mentee to think more deeply about his or her ideas and how your mentee sees him or herself and his or her relationships with other people. 'Challenging by questions' is an effective way of getting your mentee to think through issues or situations in a different way.

If you work in a large company you can be an excellent mentor for a new person to the organisation. As the mentor you can guide your mentee, explain how the

organisation works, what the politics are, maybe helping him or her to become more worldly wise.

You can also be a role model and often that is the way most people start. You provide a good example for your mentees to follow; your style, your way of working with people. You can also be a Network person, someone who can make the right contacts for your mentees, introducing them and advise them how to meet people and what they need to do.

What kind of mentoring role are you most comfortable with and how can you develop yourself in order to provide other roles as and when required?

If you are looking for a mentor what role will most help you to achieve your ambitions and to develop your skills and learning?

There are three key audiences for mentor groups for whom mentoring will be helpful ...

- The first group are normally in companies or larger organisations that have recognised the help that can be given to new managers and aspiring managers from someone who has been there and done it.
- The second group are the self employed, new start business owners and CEOs of smaller businesses who have no one to talk to freely within the business.
- The third group are young people. There is evidence of benefits of mentoring for young people - those who do not look as if they are working to their full capacity and for those who through their behaviour are excluded from main stream education.

Steven Taylor worked for sometime as a mentor to severely challenging and excluded young people in a London borough. He had training from the Mentoring Consortium but he needed more than theory to help him build relationships with youngsters who felt he had no business in their world. "You need above all a basic understanding of how humans work" and the ability to build that relationship quickly in order to be taken seriously". The most important skill? "Empathy - if you cannot put yourself in their shoes, see their world through their eyes - you cannot begin to help them choose a better way."

What is your natural mentoring style?

Choose seven statements only, from across the following 4 groups, that best describe your style as a mentor. You can download the MS Word toolkit from [here](#).

Group A

1. a mentor that enables constructive feedback from peers
2. a mentor that helps the mentee form new useful working relationships
3. a mentor that makes introductions to useful contacts
4. a mentor that can represent a mentee outside their sphere of influence
5. a mentor that can help the mentee find where information is held

Group B

1. a mentor that helps the mentee to learn useful skills
2. a mentor that shows the mentee how to address technical issues
3. a mentor that provides the information mentee needs
4. a mentor that can explain models and techniques
5. a mentor that can answer direct questions

Group C

1. a mentor that helps the mentee manage time and resources
2. a mentor that suggests ways to exploit previous experiences
3. a mentor that shows the mentee how to formulate a career plan
4. a mentor that provides the mentee with a confidential environment
5. a mentor that listens without judgement

Group D

1. a mentor that provides the mentee with an alternative viewpoint
2. a mentor that helps the mentee to resolve conflicts
3. a mentor that offers creative ways to evaluate problems
4. a mentor that provides constructive feedback
5. a mentor that helps you identify useful skills

Analysis of your Responses

If you ticked mostly in group A an advocate mentor is your preferred style.

If you ticked mostly in group B a teacher mentor is your preferred style.

If you ticked mostly in group C a supporter mentor is your preferred style.

If you ticked mostly in group D a critical friend mentor is your preferred style.

The following gives descriptions of these types or styles of mentoring.

The Advocate mentor - is someone with the skills of networking and the enthusiasm to help the mentee to meet the 'right' people. You will have a lot of contacts and can refer the mentee to people who can impact on your their life and work. In this role you will probably relish making things happen for your mentee, and in making opportunities for the mentee to demonstrate their skills and qualities.

The Teacher Mentor – This is someone who has the knowledge of the mentee's sector and skills required to succeed. In this role you will have ability to put ideas across to the mentee in a way that helps the mentee understand and learn from your knowledge and experience.

The Supporter mentor – Is someone who enjoys nurturing their mentee. You will delight in helping your mentee to explore their thoughts and feelings and to assist them in finding their own solutions.

The Critical Friend mentor –a role ideal for someone who works best in a challenging environment. You will love playing devil's advocate and challenging the mentee's thinking. This type of mentor uses great questions and may push their mentee to really examine their motives for growing their career.

However you choose, to be a successful mentoring relationship the chemistry between you must be right. This grows from building trust.

A mentor should be all of these at some time or other ...

- A sounding board and listener
- A giver of encouragement
- A critical friend
- A source of emotional support
- A confidant
- A source of knowledge

What are the key qualities and skills needed in a mentor?

To be a good mentor you need both emotional and social competencies. Daniel Goleman outlines these in his book [Working with Emotional Intelligence](#). They are ...

Self awareness This is about knowing how you feel 'in the moment'. It is about using your preferences to guide your decision making. It is about having a realistic assessment of your own abilities and well grounded self confidence.

Self regulation This is handling our own emotions so they facilitate rather interfere with the task in hand. It's about being conscientious and delaying gratification to pursue goals and recovering well from emotional distress.

Motivation This is about using our deepest preferences to move and guide us towards our goals, to help us take initiative and to strive to improve and persevere in the face of setbacks.

Empathy This is about sensing what others are feeling. Being able to take in their perspective, cultivating rapport and atonement with a broad diversity of people

Social skills This is about handling emotions in relationships well and accurately reading social situations and networks. It's about interacting smoothly and using these skills to persuade and lead, negotiate and settle disputes for co-operation and teamwork

Being aware of these emotional and social competencies allows you to function well in the mentoring role and in particular demonstrate your communication skills. You will also find having an analytical ability and political nous useful. Mentors will sometimes find they need to be able to determine their mentees' motivation triggers and work with people who are outside their comfort zone.

The most important skills you need are advanced communication skills. By that I mean ...

- **Questioning.** The ability to ask useful questions. That is asking questions which reflect what the mentee is talking about not what is in your own head.

- **Listening.** The ability to listen to the answers without allowing yourself to interrupt by trying to think of what to say next.
- **Feedback.** The ability to give unbiased yet corrective feedback in a way that is acceptable to the mentee.

If you are to help the mentee at all you need first to understand his or her situation and their feelings and thoughts around the matter. This may take time particularly in the early stages of the relationship as trust is built and the mentee feels safe enough to open up and share all.

Investment of time in questioning the mentee will pay dividends for when you and your mentee starts to seek solutions.

Questioning

Asking open ended questions keeps you in control of the conversation and you can guide the direction and indeed pace through the use of thoughtful and insightful questions. We are programmed to answer questions. Life experiences at home and in school have taught us that when we are asked a question we should answer it. Natural curiosity helps you to direct questions to what is happening for them rather than what you think is happening for them.

The best questions start with What or How and occasionally with Why

Asking the right questions and listening to the answers helps your mentee to feel comfortable with both the process and the outcome of the conversation with you.

Generally, most human beings prefer talking to listening to such an extent that, given the choice that is what we do. We love the idea of being listened to because it's a positive and satisfying experience. It helps to build trust and the belief that by being listened to one is also understood.

So, when you recommend a way forward to your mentor, your mentee may feel sufficiently understood to make it a preferred recommendation.

Closed questions typically invite a simple answer. "Do you worry about how the project will turn out?" This checks what's in *your* mind. When we are asked a series of closed questions we can feel we are on the 'receiving end' - as if the other person is not really interested in us and may even create the feeling of being manipulated.

Open ended questions typically invite a more elaborate answer. E.g. 'What typically concerns you about the project outcome? This explores what is in *their* mind. When we are asked a series of open questions, we feel as if the other

person is much more interested in us and our issues. Any recommendations they make as a result of the conversation will have much more credibility. We also feel much more comfortable with the process. When you're asked mostly open questions it enables you to explore issues out loud and if you are not interrupted probably find acceptable solutions.

Questioning and listening as skills do not always come naturally to us. Because we think much faster than we talk, it is too easy for our thinking to get ahead of what our mentees are saying and, consequently, we ask questions to *check* what they are thinking rather than to *explore* what they are thinking. This causes this us to ask more closed questions than open ended questions.

Let's try this out

Imagine your mentee has a difficult team member on his or her team and is struggling to deal with this person. What questions could you ask to get a complete understanding of the situation?

Take a moment to jot down some good open ended questions to help you get an understanding of someone's situation using What, How or Tell me. You can download the MS Word toolkit from [here](#).

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Using questions appropriately

Having established the benefits to you as a mentor in understanding your mentees situation we can decide which types of questions we can use and when is the most appropriate place for those questions. There are a number of different labelled questions and when to use them is often demonstrated in a funnel to show how much they can be used.

The key types for you as a mentor are ...

- Open ended questions
- Closed questions
- Reflective questions
- Probing questions

Open ended and Exploring Questions

Open ended questions typically start with "What", "How" and "Why" to encourage your mentee to talk about his or her situation or project. "Tell me ..." is another useful way to start a conversation.

When using 'exploring' questions use your active listening skills to give you further information and then ...

- If the mentee talks about facts, ask about how they feel/felt
- If the mentee talks about feelings, ask about the facts
- Ask for specifics when the mentee uses generalities

You can start off each meeting with questions such as, "What has occurred since we last spoke?", "What would you like to talk about?", "What's the news/the latest/the update?", "How was your week?" and "How's life?" This will break the ice and start the process of identifying and outlining goals or objectives for the meeting.

Using Closed Questions

Closed questions normally lead to a YES or NO answer where the questions require agreement or disagreement. The questions often start with "Did" or "Can" for example "Can I meet you today?" "Did you have a nice day?" and so on.

They are useful when you want the mentee to summarise or clarify what has already been said. They can also help the mentee to finish on a positive note.

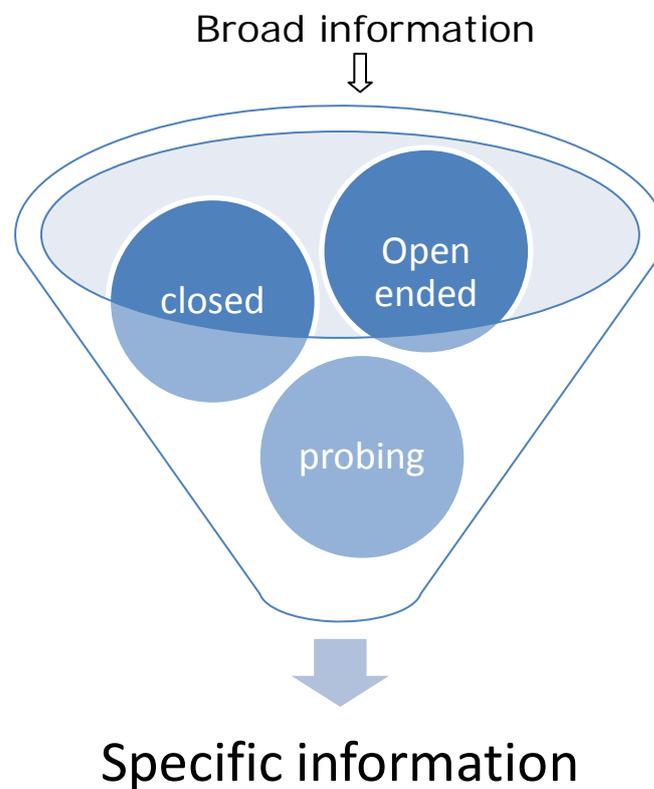
Reflective Questions

Reflective questions allow you to reflect back what you think you heard. This is a useful checking process for you. If the mentee had meant something else the mentee can quickly correct you.

Reflective questions, which are not really questions at all, should be used regularly and are there to help with understanding and sometimes to demonstrate listening. An example might be, "So what you are saying is ..."

Probing Questions

To help you get to the heart of the matter probing questions can be used to get more information or to challenge ideas and stimulate thinking. Use sparingly though or they will lose their power. Questions beginning with "Why" are often used but can be counter-productive since "Why?" tends to encourage an examination of the past rather helping your mentee to concentrate on how to improve in order to benefit in the future. Some examples of probing questions can be found on the next page.



Using probing questions

When mentoring you may need to get deeper into the situation your mentee is experiencing and, to do that, you can use probing questions. These questions explore what the mentee has said in more detail, giving both you and your mentee the opportunity to examine things more closely. As you probe you can explore your mentee's needs, feelings, ideas and assumptions.

Questions to help the mentee to explore *needs* ...

- What do you want to happen?
- If everything went well, what would it be like?
- Imagine the problem has been solved, what is different?
- What is the worst that could happen?
- What is the best possible outcome?
- What would you do?

Questions to help the mentee to explore *feelings* ...

- How do you feel about that?
- What makes you say that?
- What happened to make you feel that way?
- You look when you say that, how are you feeling?

Questions to help the mentee to explore *ideas* ...

- What are the possibilities?
- What options are available to you?
- What may happen if you do this?
- What are all the relevant facts?
- What are the other things dependent on this/these?

Questions to help the mentee to explore *assumptions* ...

- Why do you say that?
- What happened to make you say that?
- What happened to make you feel that way?
- What are the facts involved?
- Is this the only possible conclusion?

With acknowledgement to Fiona Sands of Roffey Park Management College

Active Listening

One of the most important skills for a mentor is the ability to really listen to what the mentee is saying and to ask questions which help the mentee to draw conclusions from their ideas and thoughts.

Much has been written about how to learn listening skills but active listening is

“Instead of listening to what is being said to them many people are already listening to what they are going to say”

more about learning how to subdue your own needs to enable you to concentrate on listening to what is being said to you. Listening well can reveal what is important to your mentee, what their concerns are and even what terminology will make them feel comfortable with you. It simply means that you participate fully in the communication process instead of remaining passive in it.

Ways of active listening are by asking relevant and open questions, checking understanding at appropriate times in the conversation and by summarising key points and agreements. It goes without saying that successful listeners also look interested and give helpful eye contact, make encouraging sounds and gestures, use silence judiciously and when appropriate make relevant comments.

A good mentor aims to talk for only for 20% of the time leaving the 80% of the talking to the mentee.

Listening is not always easy. Sometimes you may disagree with what is being said. If you just state that or try to explain why, you are more likely to trigger off a defensive reaction. Instead of finding out why you disagree, or even listening to you explaining why you disagree, your mentee will be trying to work out why you are disagreeing. Your mentee will be considering what your disagreement means or what else he or she can say to persuade you. Put bluntly your disagreement stops your mentee listening. Your question should be framed to enable your mentee to think through their options rather than engage in challenging you.

Finally remember that there is nothing wrong with a short silence after the mentee has finished speaking. Listening until the mentee finishes speaking gives you time to think.

On this page you will find a listening skills self-assessment audit. Try to answer with Yes or No as honestly as you can.

You should choose an answer based on what you usually do, not on what you think you should do. Be honest with your answers! You can download the MS Word toolkit from [here](#).

Are you paying attention?

		Yes/No
1	Do you think you listen well all the time?	
2	Do you ask questions if you don't understand something?	
3	Is it important to listen rather than speak at a meeting?	
4	When in conversation do you wait for your turn to speak?	
5	Do you interrupt the speaker if you don't understand something?	
6	Are other people's views sometimes more important than yours?	
7	Do you often change the subject in a conversation?	
8	Do colleagues' stories or briefings sometimes bore you?	
9	Do you sometimes daydream in meetings?	
10	Do you get frustrated when people talk too much?	
11	Do you get frustrated when you don't get a chance to speak?	
12	Is it important to let people finish what they have to say?	
13	Is it important to understand what people say?	
14	Is it polite to wait for your turn in conversation?	
15	Before someone finishes speaking do you often know what you are going to say next?	

Scoring sheet

Award your points according to whether you answered Yes or No to the questions.

For Read Out and Readers: The following table has 2 columns and 15 rows.

Question	Yes	No
1	0	0
2	1	-1
3	-1	0
4	-1	1
5	1	-1
6	1	-1
7	-1	0
8	1	0
9	-1	1
10	1	0
11	0	0
12	1	-1
13	1	-1
14	0	0
15	-1	1

For Read Out and Readers: The table has 15 rows.

Analysis of your Results

9 to 10 You are an excellent listener, you strike a balance between listening and asking the right questions, Understanding others is important to you.

1 to 8 You are a good listener, especially if the subject interests, or directly affects you. However you may react too quickly in conversation and may not always let people finish.

0 You know how to listen but you don't always do it. You may spend time during a conversation waiting impatiently for your turn.

-1 to -8 You don't listen well you may prefer the sound of your own voice, or you might be easily distracted.

-9 to -10 Sorry what was your name again? I couldn't remember what you asked me to get you. It's always annoying when other people talk and don't give you a turn.

You can find an online version of this questionnaire [here](#).

Giving Corrective Feedback

Giving corrective feedback to your mentee is a vital skill. As a trusted mentor you are in an invaluable position of being able to hold a mirror up to your mentee to help them see how they can improve and develop their skills. Giving feedback is the process for relaying the effects of behaviour for your mentee's benefit and learning. In all types of business past behaviour is a good indicator of future behaviour. This means that unless someone intervenes to alter our approach to say problem solving we will continue to go on the way we always have.

Feedback often gets a bad press. People are afraid to give clear feedback for fear of giving offence. However your feedback needs to be delivered when there is success as well as when you could usefully point out other ways of tackling a problem or issue.

Supportive and corrective feedback should never be delivered at the same time. It simply confuses the message and no learning will take place. Beware too of certain language restrictions. Words like TRY, IF and BUT can often irritate and block the mentee's listening. For example "TRY to do this in a different way"; "IF you can please arrange a staff meeting next week"; or "I like your idea BUT I think my suggestion is better".

Good feedback creates trust and cooperation. It focuses on improvement possible or achieved. It helps to increase knowledge and skills. It improves your mentee's confidence in their ability and potential.

Some guidelines ...

- create a contract with your mentee to agree to have open discussions about issues which will acknowledge feelings as well.
- focus on the behaviour not the person
- always check understanding so no one is left confused or angry.

The First Meeting

The first meeting between the mentor and mentee can often feel strange to most people. Ideally the mentee has invited the mentor to be their mentor but this is not always possible. Some organisations prefer to do the matching themselves which puts more pressure on the participants.

So how will you start? Preparing in advance helps to give you a framework. You will need an agenda and many mentoring relationships do continue in that way by agreeing the agenda for the next meeting at the current one.

It is a good idea to agree some ground rules at this meeting ...

- Will there be a formal contract?
- Will either of you be taking notes or recording decisions?
- Where will you meet?
- And how often?
- And for how long?
- How will you change meeting times if necessary?
- When are telephone calls acceptable?
- When are emails acceptable?
- How do you prefer to be contacted?
- What will you do if there are difficulties?
- How can you address concerns safely?
- What will be the level of confidentiality?
- What will you do if meetings are regularly missed?
- How will you recognise when it's time to terminate the relationship?

I believe having a formal written contract is useful because if anything goes wrong or either feel the other is not sufficiently committed it gives you a basis to sort things out. A sample mentoring contract in MS Word format can be found [here](#). However the answers to the questions above will give you a good place to start to create your own.

The issue of confidentiality is important. There are very many interpretations and you and your mentee must be clear about sharing the same view point. If you are mentoring in a corporate environment with a supervisor or adviser then one should assume that the supervisor will know the details of the mentee and that you will be discussing issues with them. This will be the same if you are undergoing training in mentoring where you may be supervised or expected to keep a diary and learning journal which may identify the mentee.

If you are offering mentoring outside a formal structure it will be up to you to agree what you can and cannot say to others.

I believe that even describing issues affecting your mentee without naming them can still break confidentiality.

If you are asked to speak on the subject of mentoring you should ensure your mentee gives permission for any anecdotes to illustrate you talk are approved in advance.

Finally you need to be clear about your values and beliefs and the actions you may have to take if you learn about potentially criminal activities. What should you do if you discover or realise that your mentee is for example trading whilst insolvent? There may be a times when you realise you need outside help and the best way to tackle that is to warn your mentee you need to go outside the confidentiality agreement though you can then continue to offer your support as required.

A rapidly growing IT consultancy introduced a mentoring scheme to keep their highly professional and expensive consultants in touch with the company whilst working on client sites for an extended period. It did not work as well as hoped because the mentors were also time chargeable and therefore meeting with mentees came a very poor second priority every time. After a mentor had cancelled or postponed a mentoring meeting two or three times (usually a meeting that took place in a pub after working hours so as to not interfere with chargeable time) the mentor was dubbed a Muppet by the hapless mentee.

*Rus Slater
People and Process Performance Improvement
www.coach-and-courses.com*

There are tests and models which can help you get to know your mentee quickly. Personality profiling assessment will help you to understand your mentee's values and beliefs by learning how they respond to others.

There are a number of personality profiling tools on the market. The most well known are the DISC inventory and Myers Briggs.

DISC is marketed by a number of companies under the banner of Insights and offers an insight into how people behave in differing circumstances. This is self assessed test where the recipient chooses to put a series of statements in order which they believe describes their personality. It measures behaviours covering temperament, values, character and the level of rapport exhibited.

Myers Briggs personality profile identifies a 16 personality types and measures people's primary source of energy, how they prefer to take in information, how they prefer to make decisions and how they prefer to organise their life.

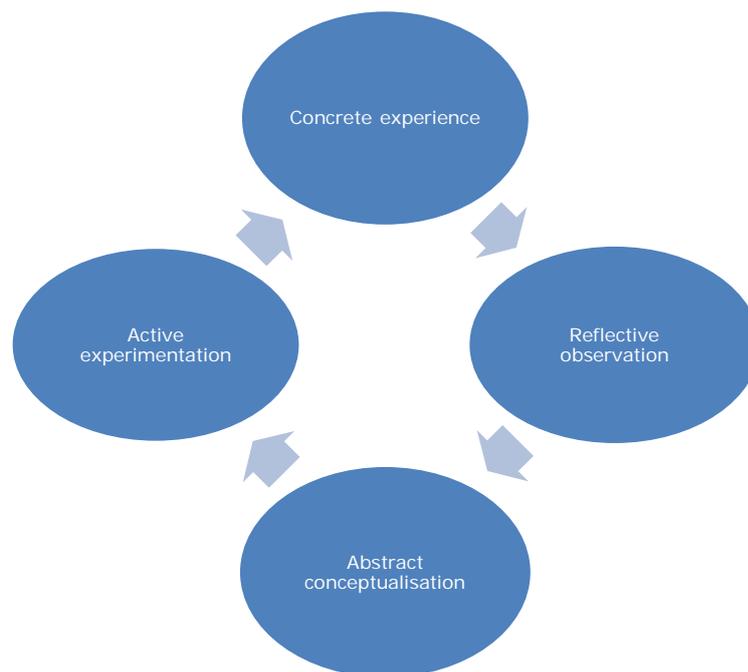
You can undertake training and qualification to administer these tools or ask someone qualified to do it for you. An internet search will identify a number of providers.

There is a version of Myers Briggs online called the Keirsey Sorter which is also free but you then you will need to pay to get your report. More details at <http://www.keirsey.com/>

Two other tools which you may find useful are described on the following pages. The first is the **Learning Styles Inventory** and the second the well used coaching model **GROW** which can be highly useful in helping to plan the first stages of the relationship.

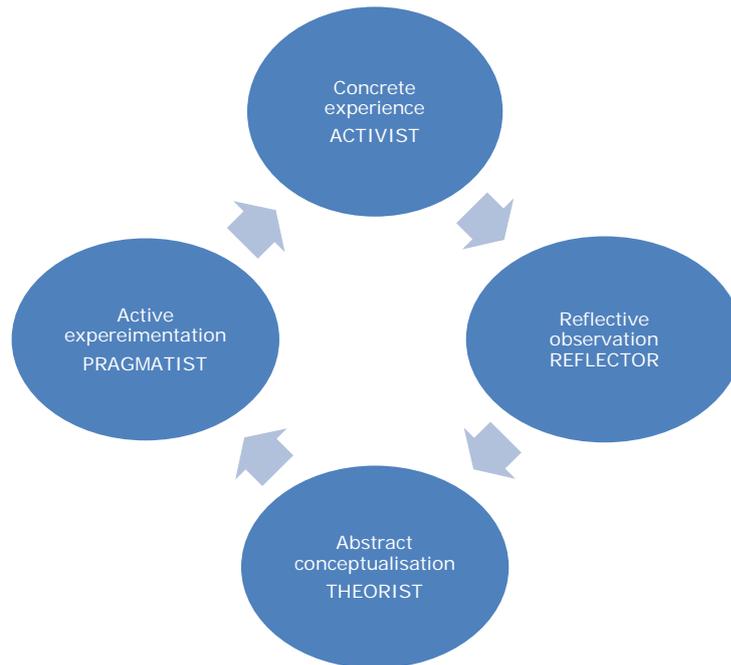
Learning Styles

As part of the first meeting in the 'getting to know each other' stage you may find it useful to identify how best your mentee learns. There are a number of learning theories but the simplest and probably the most helpful in this situation is learning styles specifically dealing with the characteristic of styles of learning. **Kolb** (1984) proposed a theory of experiential learning that involves four principal stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.



The theory is that we follow the cycle of learning in that we may have an experience, reflect on it, draw some conclusions and then plan how to have the experience again more effectively.

Honey and Mumford took this process and developed their Learning Style Questionnaire to help people determine their preferred learning style. These they labelled **activist**, **reflector**, **theorist** and **pragmatist**. Certainly there is much evidence which demonstrates that we tend to favour one or two of the learning styles rather than all of them. Those who prefer to have an experience by say 'having a go' (stage one) are more likely to move quickly round the cycle and will learn more from (stage four) - planning their next approach. These we can nickname 'Doers'. Others, meanwhile, learn best from having time to really reflect on the experience (stage two) and then draw their conclusions and research more background (stage three). These we can nickname 'Thinkers'. Knowing your mentee's learning style can help you to engage more quickly with your mentee.



As a mentor it is helpful if you are aware that your mentee may prefer to learn differently from you and that suggestions from you, in your style, can fall on stony ground. However, as part of your mentoring role, you may wish to encourage your mentee to experiment with other learning styles in order to widen his or her learning experience.

To get a feel of the tool you will find a 'lite' version of the questionnaire on the next page created by **Mike Morrison of Rapidbi**. It is too small to be scientific but never the less will give you a feel for the instrument. If you find it interesting and want to go further you can find the full version of the Learning Styles Questionnaire at <http://www.peterhoney.com>. The questionnaire is copyrighted to Peter Honey.

You can download the MS Word toolkit from [here](#).

If you agree with the statement tick the appropriate white box.

Statement	A	P	T	R
I find it easy to meet new people and make new friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am cautious and thoughtful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I get bored easily	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am a practical, "hands on" kind of person	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like to try things out for myself	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My friends consider me to be a good listener	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have clear ideas about the best way to do things	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I enjoy being the centre of attention	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am a bit of a daydreamer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I keep a list of things to do	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like to experiment to find the best way to do things	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I prefer to think things out logically	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Activist style	Pragmatist Style	Theorist style	Reflector style
subtotal your ticks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

I like to concentrate on one thing at a time				
People sometimes think of me as shy and quiet				
I am a bit of a perfectionist				
I am enthusiastic about life				
I would rather "get on with the job" than keep talking about it				
I often notice things that other people miss				
I act first then think about the consequences later				
I like to have everything in its "proper place"				
I ask lots of questions				
I like to think things through before getting involved				
I enjoy trying out new things				
I like the challenge of having a problem to solve				
	Activist style	Pragmatist Style	Theorist style	Reflector style
Total number of 'ticks'				

Here are brief descriptors of the Honey and Mumford learning styles which may help you to identify your preferred learning styles

Activists

Activists involve themselves fully and without bias in new experiences. They enjoy the here and now and are happy to be dominated by immediate experiences. They are open-minded, not sceptical, and this tends to make them enthusiastic about anything new. Their philosophy is 'I'll try anything once'. They tend to act first and consider the consequences afterwards. Their days are filled with activity. They tackle problems by brainstorming. As soon as the excitement from one activity has died down they are busy looking for the next. They tend to thrive on the challenge of new experiences but are bored with implementation and longer-term consolidation. They are gregarious people constantly involving themselves with others but in doing so they seek to centre all activities around themselves.

Reflectors

Reflectors like to stand back to ponder experiences and observe them from many different perspectives. They collect data, both first hand and from others, and prefer to think about it thoroughly before coming to any conclusion. The thorough collection and analysis of data about experiences and events is what counts so they tend to postpone reaching definitive conclusions for as long as possible. Their philosophy is to be cautious. They are thoughtful people who like to consider all possible angles and implications before making a move. They prefer to take a back seat in meetings and discussions. They enjoy observing other people in action. They listen to others and get the drift of the discussion before making their own points. They tend to adopt a low profile and have a slightly distant, tolerant unruffled air about them. When they act it is part of a wide picture which includes the past as well as the present and others' observations as well as their own.

Theorists

Theorists adapt and integrate observations into complex but logically sound theories. They think problems through in a vertical, step-by-step logical way. They assimilate disparate facts into coherent theories. They tend to be perfectionists who won't rest easy until things are tidy and fit into a rational scheme. They like to analyse and synthesise. They are keen on basic assumptions, principles, theories models and systems thinking. Their philosophy prizes rationality and logic. 'If it's logical it's good'. Questions they frequently ask are: 'Does it make sense?' 'How does this fit with that?' 'What are the basic assumptions?' They tend to be detached, analytical and dedicated to rational objectivity rather than anything that doesn't fit with it. They prefer to

maximise certainty and feel uncomfortable with subjective judgements, lateral thinking and anything flippant.

Pragmatists

Pragmatists are keen on trying out ideas, theories and techniques to see if they work in practice. They positively search out new ideas and take the first opportunity to experiment with applications. They are the sort of people who return from management courses brimming with new ideas that they want to try out in practice. They like to get on with things and act quickly and confidently on ideas that attract them. They tend to be impatient with ruminating and open-ended discussions. They are essentially practical, down-to-earth people who like making practical decisions and solving problems. They respond to problems and opportunities "as a challenge". Their philosophy is: "there is always a better way" and 'if it works it's good'.

Clearly knowing your own and your mentee's learning styles ensure you do not make any learning suggestions which might prove difficult for your mentee. Similarly the mentee by understanding your style will be able to recognise their own need to find appropriate learning techniques.

For example if I had an opportunity of giving a presentation to the senior board I might ask my mentor for some advice on how to prepare for such an occasion. If your learning style tended to reflector/theorist you might recommend some reading on the topic. However if I learn best as an activist from 'having a go' I might learn better from practising smaller presentations on my team and learning from the feedback. By understanding the learning style you can recommend the best learning environment.

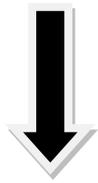
You will find the GROW model on the next page. It is used extensively in coaching and mentoring environments. Its origin seems lost in the mists of time and I have been unable to find who first developed it as a concept. It is very easy to use and provides an effective framework for your mentoring session. This model was developed by Sir John Whitmore, Alan Fine and Graham Alexander and is used extensively in coaching and mentoring relationships.

G. R. O. W. coaching model

Used extensively for executive coaching, as its name suggests, this model provides an excellent framework which can be understood by both the mentor and the mentee. It is helpful when drawing up a contract between the two parties as it gives an overview of what is wanted. This may and probably will change over time and again using this model the updates can be agreed.

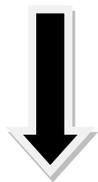
Goal

What do you want to achieve?



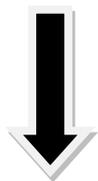
Reality

What is the current situation? What is happening, why is that, how does it impact on others/resources.



Obstacles/Options

What are your options available to you? This is the creative session. Brainstorm lots of ideas even those that seem unfeasible.



Will/Way forward

Rate the ideas 1 -10 where 1 is absolutely will do and 10 is no chance I'll do it in practice.

What will you actually do? Encourage your mentee to choose one or two from the options that will meet his or her goal and to which they will commit.

G. R. O. W. Questions to try

As a mentor your role is to encourage the mentee to become more aware of themselves and their situation and to take responsibility for implementing their own solutions. This model and questions like the ones suggested here can provide an excellent framework for the first meeting.

Goal

- What do you want to achieve long-term?
- What does success look like?
- How much personal control do you have over your goal?
- What is a short-term goal on the way?
- Is that positive ... or Challenging or Attainable?
- How will you measure it?

Reality

- What is happening now?
- Who is involved (directly? Indirectly?)
- When things are going badly on this issue, what happens to you?
- What happens to others directly involved?
- What is the effect on others?
- What have you done about this so far?
- What results did that produce?
- What's missing in the situation?
- What do you have that you are not using?
- What is holding you back?
- What is really going on? What is your intuition telling you?
- What do you feel?

Obstacles and Options

- What have you thought of so far?
- What other options do you have?
- What else could you do?
- If you had more time what else could you try?
- What if you had total autonomy?
- What if you had all the resources you needed?
- What would a really wise friend suggest you try? What advice would they be giving you?

Will/Way forward

- What are you going to do?
- When are you going to do this?
- How will you ensure that it happens?
- What could stop you taking this step?
- How might you sabotage your own success?
- Rate, on a scale of 1-10, your willingness to take this agreed action.
- What would turn a low scoring option into a higher scoring one?

Using your knowledge in mentoring

A key to successful mentoring is in your knowledge, knowledge often gained over many years in different work situations. You may have been involved in developing a new department, setting up a new project, or masterminding a new contract for your organisation. Sometimes these situations may not have gone to plan, or developed unexpected hiccups all of which were learning situations for you. That expertise, however hard won, is of so much value to someone still at an early stage in their career or to a new business owner about to prepare his or her first major tender.

Trust can be built swiftly knowing that you have experienced these types of situations and have either learned from it and/or gained new clients.

However whereas your experience is unique to you the same can be said of the mentee's opportunity too. They will not benefit or learn from being told what to do. So the mentor needs to walk a fine line between sharing knowledge and being a know it all! When I first became self employed I jumped at the chance of working with a mentor. However the first mentor sent by Business Link in Wiltshire was a classic case of knowing everything. There wasn't anything he hadn't done or said. In the one hour we spent together he hardly asked me a single question or tried to find out about my business or indeed what I was feeling. At the end of this one way meeting he offered to look at my accounts. I resisted the invitation and cancelled any future visits.

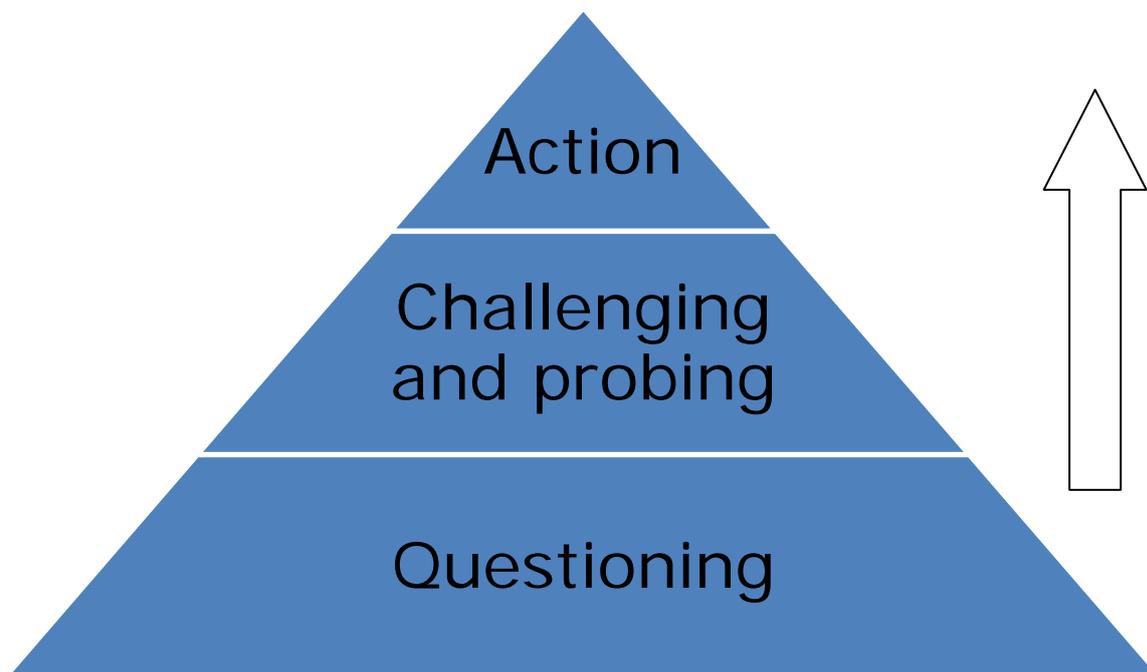
*"I wouldn't
allow
knowing to
get in the
way of
being"*

Grey Owl

If there is a considerable age gap between you and the mentee there is often the temptation to tell them how they should resolve a certain situation. However to interrupt or to tell them can break rapport and is never helpful. For someone to be successful they need to identify their own strategies for solving their issues. If they cannot see an answer you can offer advice from your own knowledge base or experience and guide them through a series of questions that can help them come to a solution for themselves.

Helping your mentee think through a problem

An approach used by business counsellors is to imagine a triangle with the base being the largest part. This is the first stage and it is used to explore the situation to ensure you as the mentor have a thorough understanding of the present position. It during this first stage that your questioning skills are used to enable you as mentor to gain a real understanding of a given situation and how your mentee plans to tackle it.



The second stage of the triangle or pyramid is about gaining a new understanding. Here the mentor challenges some of the ideas in order to be sure the mentee has explored all the opportunities and is ready to commit to action.

Action planning the final and smallest stage is for a shared or agreed solution with which the mentee identifies. This model demonstrates how important the questioning stage really is to get the full understanding of an issue or problem and to avoid you as mentor immediately offering your, possibly inappropriate, solution.

It is possible for this process to take place at one meeting but often with more complex topics or tasks it can take several sessions to reach a position when both of you agree to the chosen action.

Mentoring Competence Self Assessment

Tick the column that applies to you. You can download the MS Word toolkit from [here](#).

	Area of competence	Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Rarely/ Never
1	I listen to the whole issue before commenting				
2	I give advice but still expect the mentee to make their own decisions				
3	I can always find time to help				
4	I always question thoroughly to find the real issues				
5	I have a good range of networks and contacts that can be utilised appropriately				
6	I am not intimidating - I'm easy to approach at any time				
7	I know what I am talking about - I am good at my own job				
8	I look for the reality within which a mentee works				
9	I always focus on mentee needs during a mentoring session				
10	I don't get irritated by a mentee who doesn't get the point quickly				
11	I am an optimist				
12	I am encouraging				
13	I am always well prepared in advance				
14	I am a positive role model in terms of my own behaviour and achievements				
15	I can help a mentee believe in their potential				
16	I am open to new ideas				
17	I know when to introduce options that may not have been considered				
18	I can challenge assumptions skilfully				
19	I am a positive person				
20	I possess great patience				
21	I am interested in people				
22	I am an active listener				
23	I am non-judgemental				

	Area of competence	Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Rarely/ Never
24	I feel comfortable about having my views challenged				
25	I am enthusiastic about mentoring				
26	I am very knowledgeable about developmental issues				
27	I am tolerant				
28	I don't expect a mentee to be like me				
29	I am prepared to learn with the mentee				
30	I can give feedback skilfully				
31	I can allow a mentee the freedom and confidence to make mistakes				
32	I see my mentees as equals				
33	I have sound judgement				
34	I am able to distance myself, and maintain objectivity				
35	I am keen to allow mentees to make their own decisions				
36	I keep in regular contact with those I mentor				
37	I take an interest in the individual mentee - I value their views and what they say				
38	I am able to probe beyond the superficial				
39	I can provide the space for a mentee to express their feelings				
40	I can draw out a mentee's ideas and I'm willing to 'run with them'				
41	I have a true passion for developing others, and really believe in the value of personal development				
42	I am prepared to share my knowledge, and lessons learned from my experience, with a mentee				
43	I can avoid the temptation to direct conversation back to myself and my issues and experiences				
44	I can challenge correctively and directly to get to the heart of the matter				
45	I won't just tell a mentee what they want to hear				
46	I never appear keen to get a mentoring meeting over with and move on to the next thing				

	Area of competence	Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Rarely/ Never
47	I don't talk about my own achievements too much				
48	I have a genuine desire to empower				
49	I am responsive to my mentee: prepared to commit to active support				

Created by Barrie Smale & Andrew Gibbons of inspired2learn

Having completed the self assessment questionnaire you now need to ...

- list your key areas for personal development to improve your mentoring competence (Select no more three areas to work on at any one time)
- decide what you will do to develop your competence in those areas?
- set clear goals/targets
- select who or what can help you to achieve your goals
- identify what might stop you achieving your goals
- describe how you will overcome those obstacles
- set milestones and monitor progress.

Ending the Mentoring relationship

All mentoring relationships must eventually end. Your mentee should reach a stage where he or she needs to move on. Your mentee may now be ready to become a mentor to someone else or you may feel that you have given everything you can to the relationship. Sometimes this takes place gradually but it does need to be discussed openly. If you have been careful to outline your approach to finishing the relationship in your initial mentoring contract it will be easier to handle when the time comes.

As a relationship like this has taken time to grow so it needs time to end. An important step is to look back over the intervening months/years and review the relationship.

What were the initial goals? How have they changed and why? What problems or issues have been tackled and how has that impacted on your mentee's growth and current position.

What was valuable about the relationship? What processes worked and from that learning what could be taken into another mentoring relationship for either party.

There should be a celebration and recognition of possible feelings of loss. An agreement made on the way forward helps with closure. I know of a number of mentors who have remained in contact with their mentee socially and others who have simply called a halt to the arrangement. The choice will be up to the two of you to decide how you will manage it.

Premature Endings

Sometimes, however well planned, a mentoring arrangement doesn't work out. And in this situation honesty is always the best policy. There may be hidden agendas, or a personality clash. Or it is simply that the mentee is just not ready to be mentored.

And when it doesn't work out

Sometimes tough decisions have to be made. I was a mentor to a potential business start up client who had been attending a 'Women into Enterprise' course run by the local university. She was a lovely person with a great personality, a single mum who had worked hard in an administration role to keep her home and children. She had plenty of ideas of how her business would grow and run and give her the freedom to be her own boss. She was also enjoyable company and I looked forward to our meetings. However over the weeks (we met fortnightly) I slowly realised she wasn't able or willing to move out of the ideas stage and actually do more than plan her business. We agreed goals and plans, people to meet and tasks such as market research to complete. Yet when we met there had never been enough time. She just had another batch of interesting ideas for her business. After a while I realised it wasn't going to work. With guidance and support from my supervisor I gave up the mentor role. It was difficult though because we had become close and it was fairly obvious she needed an older friend in whom to confide and her business idea was simply a ploy to keep having mentoring meetings.

*Val a trainee mentor
Wiltshire*

In official company or an organisation scheme the mentor may have a supervisor or know another mentor with whom they can talk. However for many mentors this may not be possible so it's important for both parties to discuss openly how they feel and why it is not working. There is no benefit to either of you if you decide just to carry on regardless.

Having an official review after say three meetings can allow for this separation to happen without blame on either side. It then becomes a chance for both to start again. If such possibilities are addressed when setting up the arrangement the ground rules will already be in place and make the closure easier.

Part Two

Becoming a Mentee

If you would like to work on the exercises in the Useful Guide you can download the MS Word toolkit from [here](#).

Why have a mentor?

Being mentored can help with career planning and progression either in a company or in your own business.

If you work on your own it can help to reduce isolation by having regular meetings to look forward to. It is great feeling knowing you are not alone when struggling with decisions or choices in your business or career.

If you have had a career break or you need to ensure a healthy work/life balance a mentor can be exactly the right person to explore your choices and help your confidence levels. You may also need to cope with disability or child care responsibilities so sharing problems may help you to find answers.

A mentor can help with networking and with developing new skills for example public speaking or leadership skills. Most importantly a mentor can provide guidance, support and space for you to think.

Working with a Mentor

You may of course be reading this guide because you want to find a mentor for yourself. You are looking for someone who will give their time and energy to help you to develop your business, or improve your opportunities in your chosen career path. One of the more exciting ways to ensure you move forward in your work/career environment is to find and work with a mentor. As we described earlier mentoring comes originally from the idea of having an experienced and trusted adviser, friend and counsellor.

Of course, nowadays, mentoring need not always be sitting at the feet of the teacher. With modern communications, mentoring, if required, can take place in phone calls and online. It is also often successful when meetings take place informally over say lunch, afternoon tea or early evening in a quiet pub.

The mentor's role can be a sounding board, someone to share ideas with or someone who has good contacts. A mentor will establish their own relationship with you to allow you to set your own agenda and ground rules. This includes agreeing the frequency and method of contact.

When Business Link Wiltshire set up a mentoring scheme for business owners of very small businesses they asked potential mentees what they would expect from their mentor. The most important characteristics they wanted were that Mentors would be ...

- experienced in business matters and with relevant business experience.
- able to give quality time
- be a good listener
- able to motivate and inspire
- open minded
- trustworthy

- professional
- possessing a sense of humour.

This was not because they wanted to be told how to run their business but rather the mentor would understand where they were coming from and empathise with the issues they faced. The need for a sense of humour ensures that the mentor is to be a really good and trustworthy friend and not a distant 'difficult to get close to' individual.

So what sort of mentor would you want?

The important thing is you should choose a mentor who best fits your needs rather than have 'whoever' foisted on you. We are all different and have different needs when it comes to working with a mentor. I for one know how important it is for me to have someone challenge my ideas so I can re-examine them in the cold light of day and decide if they are worth arguing for or not.

I was happy with a mentor who was a critical friend and not afraid to coach when he saw a need. Others might like someone who can make the right contacts for them, who has access to people who can help your business grow and can help you form useful alliances. Yet another may seek a natural problem solver who can offer creative ways to generate and evaluate options. There is also the mentor who can be the skilled helper, listening not judging or criticising but able help you to explore and clarify things that matter to you and to your business.

What are the benefits of being mentored?

The British Computer Society (BCS) when introducing their first Mentoring Scheme asked their potential mentees what they thought might be the benefits for them of being mentored.

The responses included ...

- speedier and easier induction into the formal and informal world of the organisation
- career enhancement in terms of advice (both professional and also in the timing of job moves) and sponsorship (such as recognition by senior people, 'mentioning in dispatches').
- gaining a greater understanding of the organisation's politics
- providing a role model who can be observed closely
- opportunity to meet the 'right' people
- someone to informally share ideas with before 'going live'.

Make a list of what you are looking for from a mentor and this should help you to choose the right mentor for your specific needs. You can download the MS Word toolkit from [here](#).

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What kind of Mentor would suit you?

Choosing a mentor to suit you is really important if the relationship is going to benefit you and your mentor. No one can be all things to all people well certainly not in work context so it pays to think about your requirements. Firstly you need to be clear about your objectives what to you want to be able to do as a result of working with a mentor. It may not be that clear at the beginning and your mentor will probably help to shape your objectives as part of the process. However knowing who you would most like to work with and the characteristics is crucial in getting off to a good start.

Four styles are identified here to give you some ideas for what might suit you.

The Advocate mentor - someone with the skills of networking, of helping you meet the people who with contacts and can refer you to others. This kind of mentor tends to know all the 'right' people and can find ways of introducing you or making opportunities for you to demonstrate your skills and qualities.

The Teacher Mentor – This is someone who has the knowledge of your sector and skills required to succeed. This mentor has the ability to put ideas across to you in a way that helps you understand.

The Supporter mentor - someone who is able to help you to explore your thoughts and feelings and to assist you in finding your own solutions.

The Critical Friend mentor – who will play devil's advocate and challenge your thinking. This type of mentor uses great questions and may push you to really examine your own motives for moving on.

Four styles are identified here to give you some ideas for what might suit you.

What kind of mentor appeals to your needs?

Choose seven statements only, from the following 4 groups, that best describe your expectations from a mentor. You can download the MS Word toolkit from [here](#).

Group A

- 1 a mentor that enables constructive feedback from peers
- 2 a mentor that helps you form new useful working relationships
- 3 a mentor that makes introductions to useful contacts
- 4 a mentor that can represent you outside your sphere of influence
- 5 a mentor that can help you find where information is held

Group B

- 1 a mentor that helps you learn useful skills
- 2 a mentor that shows you how to address technical issues
- 3 a mentor that provides the information you need
- 4 a mentor that can explain models and techniques
- 5 a mentor that can answer direct questions

Group C

- 1 a mentor that helps you manage time and resources
- 2 a mentor that suggests ways to exploit previous experiences
- 3 a mentor that shows you how to formulate a career plan
- 4 a mentor that provides you with a confidential environment
- 5 a mentor that listens without judgement

Group D

- 1 a mentor that provides you with an alternative viewpoint
- 2 a mentor that helps you resolve conflicts
- 3 a mentor that offers creative ways to evaluate problems
- 4 a mentor that provides constructive feedback
- 5 a mentor that helps you identify useful skills

Responses

If you ticked mostly in group A an advocate mentor is the best mentor type for you.

If you ticked mostly in group B a teacher mentor is the best type for you.

If you ticked mostly in group C a supporter mentor is the best mentor type for you.

If you ticked mostly in group D a critical friend mentor is the best kind for you.

However you choose to be a successful mentoring relationship the chemistry between you must be right. This grows from building trust. You need to avoid mentors who have 'big egos' that is those who believe they know it all. Watch out too especially in larger companies for those with issues of their own. You want to work with someone who has the experience and whether good or bad and has learned from it not just buried it. There may also cultural issues as well as those thrown up in 2nd/3rd generation family owned businesses.

A mentor should be all of these at some time or other a ...

- sounding board and listener
- giver of encouragement
- critical friend
- source of emotional support
- confidant
- source of knowledge

How to find the right mentor for you

Assuming you are not working for an organisation which provides a mentor through its mentoring scheme you can seek mentors from a range of places depending on your circumstances.

One approach is to contact Universities and colleges who offering mentoring/coaching training. All those attending these courses need to 'practice' as part of their training and need to find people willing to be mentored. Using a trainee mentor gives you the added benefit of knowing they are being supervised and supported and that therefore they can draw on others' experiences as well as their own. If you are in a small or medium sized business you could contact Business Link in your locality. Visit <http://www.businesslink.gov.uk> to find your local Business Link. They may run mentoring schemes themselves or know who does. These are usually free services for the self employed or small business owner.

There are also specialist mentors available for young people. If you use a search engine to 'find a mentor' you will be amazed by the number of organisations offering introductions or advice on finding your own mentor both in-company and freelance.

Finally it's worth remembering that if you had an urgent need to know how to 'give a presentation' for example you can hire someone to coach you in that specific skill. Use [LinkedIn](#) or other business directory sites to find appropriate people in your geographical area with the business knowledge you need.

How to start the relationship with your mentor

The first meeting is the most important. You will need to agree a 'contract', that is, the ground rules on how you proceed. These will include ...

- agreeing what you both mean by confidentiality and confirming your commitment to abide by it
- how often and where you meet
- contact details so you can keep in touch
- arrangement for changing meeting times, dates or location
- agreement on your expectations - what is possible and what is not
- when to review progress
- what you will do if either of you decide it's not working.

A sample mentoring contract in MS Word format can be downloaded from [here](#).

Finally, to help your mentor to understand your situation, plan how you will describe your business/career concisely and what you have achieved so far.

Before every meeting think about achievable targets you can discuss with your mentor. You need to make a list of the issues you are facing with possible solutions. Discussing individual problems with a mentor can help you to think more clearly and put them into perspective.

Your mentor can only help if you want to learn, be challenged, change and develop. Be realistic with your goals and expectations. These will probably evolve as you explore more possibilities with your mentor.

Asking for feedback

There are lots of articles and training materials written about how to give feedback but very little around about how to receive feedback. Yet in some ways this is the most important aspect of learning and for helping you to develop and grow. There are some interesting articles on asking for, giving and receiving feedback [here](#).

There are a few rules which may help you to receive feedback in a way that makes it comfortable and useful to you.

It's important to listen actively. That is, not thinking about what you think you are hearing, simply concentrating on the words and what they mean. In same way you must let the person giving feedback enough time to finish. Interrupting will definitely show you are not listening.

Prompt for specific details if you need to. Giving feedback is not always easy so you can help your mentor in this way. Paraphrase what you have heard in order to clarify and check out your understanding. Finally decide how you will use the information. What do you need to do in order to improve the way you work?

The best thing you can do to help your mentor is to ask for feedback rather than wait till it's offered. It can become a simple habit to ask how the mentor saw the situation and to check if there are any other thoughts on how you might tackle a task or activity.

I was very pleased with the way I helped and supported my team. I always tried to be open with them and was happy to roll up my sleeves and help out when it got very busy at year end time. It was a bit of a shock when my mentor told me I was making the team dependent on me and that my support could also be seen as a comfort blanket for me. After I had time to think through his feedback I realised it was true and the team did not respect my being keen to do everything with them. We have a much better working relationship now that I have learned to stand back a bit.

*Manager in large accountancy practice
Swindon, Wiltshire*

How to be a good mentee

1. Assess your need for a mentor

Do you really need a mentor? This is the first question you need to ask yourself. In doing so, you will identify if there is a real need for you to have a mentor. Think about what you would like to gain from the experience and if this will be fulfilled by having a mentor.

European guidelines on good mentoring state that mentoring without a real and meaningful purpose will not only be ineffective but could also cause a relationship to fail before it even gets started.

Ask yourself what you want to achieve and how you want to achieve it.

If you need to learn new skills or acquire more knowledge would you be better off on a training programme geared specifically to that learning outcome.

If you need to be able to present yourself or your business idea to others would you be better off with a coach to work on that skill set.

Mentoring tends to be far more encompassing than just learning new skills. It tends to be long term not quick fix.

2. Strive to be a good mentee

Sounds obvious right? But not everyone is a good mentee and therefore fails to use their mentor effectively. According to European Mentoring Centre, 'The more an individual believes in self-managed learning and being in control of their own life, the more progress they will make with a mentor'. The guidelines also state that a person taking this approach is more likely to benefit from mentoring than someone who believes that their fate rests in the hands of others.

3. Find a mentor who is right for you

Some companies have a mentoring scheme which will allow you to be matched with an appropriate mentor. Some mentors may prefer to be an Advocate, others a Critical Friend. A version of the questionnaire you completed on page 50 and 51 is also available for potential mentors to complete and can be found on page 15. Before making your choice, if there is more than one possible mentor, meet with each of them and discuss what you would like to gain from the experience. This will not only show whether or not you are on the same wavelength but it should also help tell you whether you could both get along with each other.

4. Meet on a regular basis

Ensure that you meet regularly. Compile a list of questions that you would like answered. This could range from queries about how they felt when they became a senior manager in a particular department to whether they could provide useful tips or pointers to remedy a particular problem.

5. Do not be afraid to open up

Chances are that some of your concerns and anxieties have been felt by your mentor. Use the time to discuss some of these issues and at least you will know that you are not alone. The meetings should be treated as confidential and so comments should remain between the two of you. Ask as many questions as you can, ensure that they are in the mentor's remit and answer any questions the mentor may ask you truthfully. Remember, they are there to help you.

6. Do not waste your mentor's time

Many people would love to have a mentor. So if you are lucky enough to have one do not waste the opportunity. If you find you cannot attend a meeting let the mentor know in advance and reschedule. Failing to do so could have serious repercussions: the mentor may decide it is just not worth doing it anymore and you and future employees would have just lost a valuable resource of knowledge.

One mentee's story

When I was first promoted to a supervisory role, I was paired with a more experienced colleague. She had previously managed my team, but was now in charge of a different team. For the first few months after my promotion, I sought her input on everything from personnel issues to procedures for printing out weekly time cards. However she responded with questions and not the answers I wanted from her. Slowly I grew more confident in my own leadership skills, until I found I could fully express my own voice and identity as a leader and describe what I wanted to do and how I was going to do it. I have absolutely seen the benefits of having a mentor. In addition to the problem solving skills I learned while working with a mentor, I also gained tremendous confidence. Knowing someone else was keen for me to succeed made it much easier to believe that I could.

*Monica Wiant MBA CLCP
Minnesota USA*

Feedback

As we are always trying to improve our Useful Guides we would appreciate any feedback you can give us on **A Useful Guide to Mentoring**. Please click on the link below to access our online feedback form ...

<http://www.pansophix.com/useful-guide-feedback.html>

If we use your feedback to improve **A Useful Guide to Mentoring** we will email you a copy of the updated version.

You can access lots of free tips and tools at 247freetips.com.

About the Author



Charlotte Mannion runs the communications consultancy Quicklearn. She is a practising mentor as well as an executive business coach and has recently published a workbook on how to give the perfect wedding speech.

Charlotte designs and delivers workshops with the emphasis on 'learning by doing' using accelerated learning techniques to ensure all her small group activities are memorable and fun. Charlotte enables organisations to meet their objectives quickly and effectively.

When not working or with clients Charlotte spends her time as a member of Rotary and enjoys working with others to raise money for charitable causes.

She is also the artistic director of the Ridgeway Theatre Company and keeps her hand in directing local productions of different and unusual plays. Charlotte loves walking in the country and food (if someone else is cooking!).