



How to have an effective mentoring relationship

A toolkit for mentees

1. What is Developmental Mentoring?

Mentoring is a developmental dialogue between two people. It is a process of ongoing support and development, which can tackle issues and problems identified by the mentee. Having a mentor or mentors can be one of the most powerful developmental relationships a person will ever experience. Anybody at any stage of their life or career can benefit from having a mentor, whether it is deep personalised learning with someone with substantially more experience or having a sounding board with a peer, or working with a younger or more junior person in a reverse mentoring situation to support in finding out a different perspective on life. Often individuals can benefit from having more than one mentor in their life if they are going through a period of intense change. Mentoring taps into a basic instinct most people share – the desire to pass on their learning or to support development and help another person fulfil their potential.

Most people from all walks of life and at all stages of their careers are able to identify deep, personalised learning they have obtained from a developmental relationship with someone with greater experience, who has taken a direct interest in them. Effective mentoring is a two-way learning relationship, which can develop the mentor as much as the mentee. It involves the creation of reflective space for the mentee, helping them to improve the quality of their thinking. The mentor will also provide professional friendship, role modelling, advice and guidance and be that sounding board and challenger that will really stretch the mentee in their learning zone.

Mentoring is a confidential, offline (not with your line manager) partnership between two people based on understanding and trust. Its chief aim is to build on self-reliance and self-confidence in the mentee. It is a positive, developmental relationship, which is driven primarily by the mentee.

Developmental mentoring is characterised by

- A need by the mentee to achieve some form of change for example, in their ability, their understanding or their circumstances.
- It involves a high level of trust and openness, which allows the mentor and mentee to address difficult, sometimes uncomfortable issues.

- Being out of the line of authority. Mentoring relationships do not develop easily between line manager and the direct report due to the power dimension present.
- Recognition of the value of learning together, even though mentor and mentee may have very different levels of experience.

What is my role as a Mentee?

- Have clarity as to what both your **expectations of the relationship** are from the beginning.
- Identify and initiate the learning goals. The mentee is in the driving seat in the relationship and **identifies the direction and focus** in the relationship.
- **Arrange the mentoring sessions** and keep your mentor informed if you want a longer time period between sessions, so they are not wondering what has happened to you. Show respect to them about postponing or cancelling sessions.
- **Be open to feedback** from your mentor and their ideas/suggestions and provide feedback to them on the mentoring relationship process and how you find it.
- **Reflect on your mentoring** and record key lessons learned and how to apply your learning.

What is the role of my Mentor?

- Helping to identify and address my development needs.
- Supporting me to achieve my goals or relationship direction.
- Developing my capability, potential and the quality of my thinking.
- Listening deeply, asking questions and giving advice and feedback when it is appropriate.
- Empowering me to take ownership of my own development.
- Being responsible for the process in our mentoring sessions.

2. Starting your Mentoring Relationship

The first meeting and establishing the relationship

This first meeting is all about establishing your rapport, getting to know each other and becoming relaxed and responsive with each other. To help to build rapport with your mentor you may want to:

- Share information on your job.
- The current climate in your team, department or overall organisation.
- Your career plans and ambition.

A mentoring agreement

It is also important to establish an agreement for how you want to work together in the relationship and any boundaries you wish to respect. Quite simply this is an understanding of what you can expect from each other:

We recommend that you agree:

- The frequency and length of mentoring meetings and try to book into your diaries in advance.
- That you, as a mentee, are responsible for booking meetings and agendas.
- That you both will keep to arranged mentoring sessions and only cancel if unavoidable.
- To review your relationship regularly and provide each other with honest and open feedback about your mentoring relationship.
- That what is discussed in the sessions remains confidential and neither of you will disclose any of the information discussed without the permission of the other person.

Consider if there are any boundaries or topics that you would prefer to be off limits in the mentoring relationship and agree them up front. You can always review these at a later date if one of you changes your mind.

Start to develop your direction

We would recommend that you prepare for the first meeting by thinking about what you would like to discuss with your mentor:

- What are the main transitions facing you, or you would like to work on over the period of the mentoring relationship?
- What challenges are facing you in your work and life?
- What are you currently avoiding in your life?

3. Maintaining the mentoring relationship

It is suggested that you have mentoring conversations every 4-6 weeks. Having a process to your meeting will also support your focus and learning.

Check-in at the start of each meeting

- Start by re-establishing your rapport and feeling comfortable together.
- Follow-up on commitments and actions from the last session.
- Mentee shares recent experiences (challenges, opportunities, and successes).

Checking in questions to use:

- How are you today?
- What are you feeling today?

- What's on your mind?
- Any reflections/follow up from last time?
- What has happened since our last conversation?
- What is the agenda today?

Main body of the conversation

Mentor and mentee explore the objective or direction for the meeting agenda. They will bring in the mentee's recent issues and challenges and discuss options and approaches. The mentor should feel free to share personal stories and anecdotes with the permission of the mentee.

The mentor will probably use a process model for this part of the conversation e.g. The Three Stage Process, GROW or just listen as a Thinking Partner. During this part of the conversation:

- Regularly review progress against the objectives.
- Assess the need to revise or update the objectives.
- Identify development opportunities and solutions.
- Encourage self-management – the mentor's role in the relationship is not to create dependencies by dictating problem-solving techniques and decisions to their mentee. Mentors should encourage mentees to manage the achievement of their objectives themselves and providing their experience as a source for ideas, letting the mentee choose and decide.

Mentors should support, listen, challenge and only guide and provide advice at the request of their mentee once they have gained some insight themselves into the issues being discussed.

Checking out and next steps:

Clarify any commitments made and anything that needs follow-up, and confirm next session date, time and agenda, but only if you are comfortable to do this. Ensure you review both the process and outcomes from the session:

Checking out ideas:

- Mutual feedback on how the session went.
- What do you and your mentor want more or less of for next time? (Feedback, listening, advice, challenge etc).
- Where are we in the life cycle?
 - Building rapport
 - Setting direction
 - Progression through their objectives
 - Winding up the relationship.
- What are the main learning and action points from the meeting?
- Provide feedback to each other on what has been appreciated during the meeting.
- Do we want to organise the next session?

Have some personal reflection on your progress

It is important for you to reflect after each session as to how you think and feel the session went. Here are some questions to help you structure this reflection:

- My preparation for the session – was it adequate? Did I have a clear agenda and purpose?
- Did the session achieve my aim(s)? If not, why not?
- What actions, if any, do I need to follow up on?
- What have I learned? How am I going to apply this learning?
- Do I need support from anyone else to help me achieve the next steps?
- What will I do differently in the next session?
- Are there any outstanding questions or points I need to raise again?

4. How to get the most out of your relationship as a Mentee

What should a mentee do?

- Consider what you need a mentor for?
- Be prepared to be open.
- Expect and welcome challenge.
- Allocate sufficient time for preparation and the mentoring session.
- Use the mentor as a reality check if appropriate.
- Be realistic about the mentor as a role model.

How well have you set direction?

- Are you working with clear direction?
- Do you have specific goals?
- Or general themes?
- Who is in the driving seat in the relationship?

Techniques to get more out of your mentoring

- Manage the relationship generally.
- Achieve clear focus (what do I want to achieve?).
- Prepare for the mentoring sessions.
- Develop your learning network.
- Articulate issues clearly.
- Overcome “guru syndrome” (don’t be in awe of your mentor!).
- Integrate appraisal data, career management and other sources of achievement goals into the mentoring dialogue.

Review your relationship

- How have the mentoring sessions helped so far?

- Have we begun to make progress towards realising my learning goals?
- What is our greatest success so far? And our biggest frustration?
- Are you preparing adequately for meetings?
- Are you reflecting sufficiently after meetings?
- Do we have a clear plan for the future?

5. Winding up a Mentoring Relationship

By reviewing the relationship regularly, both mentor and mentee will be aware of when the relationship is maturing (rather than it just losing a little momentum from time to time). In this way, the 'maturity review' is less scary for both parties.

Reasons why it might end include:

- The mentoring programme is ending after an allocated time period or number of mentoring sessions.
- You have achieved the agreed goals and outcomes and are running out of things to discuss.
- You have gained confidence/improved your skills in connection with the learning goal, and now it is time for you to navigate alone.
- Your goals or direction have changed significantly or your specific needs developed and you need a different type of learning support to mentoring, or another mentor with a different expertise.
- Your conversations start to lack energy, you are finding it difficult to sustain momentum in your discussions and you both feel it is time to move on. This doesn't mean you haven't fulfilled your learning objectives, just that you have run out of things to talk about.

Whatever the reason, do talk about it first in a meeting/conversation, and ensure wherever possible that it is a joint decision. This discussion should be honest, respectful and provide constructive feedback to the other, giving both of you time to prepare for the actual final winding up meeting. Don't just send an e-mail to close a relationship down.

In the final meeting discuss the following:

- Recognise that the formal relationship must come to an end.
- Discuss at least one meeting ahead how the ending will be managed.
- Create an agenda for the final formal mentoring session:
 - Review/re-define outstanding objectives
 - Finish within a mentoring session
 - Allow time for moving on.
- Review the relationship outcomes and any outstanding objectives. You may be required by the programme to provide a written reflection on this.
- Share what you have learned with each other - reviewing both the mentee's and the mentor's learning is key.
- Celebrate your successes! And exchange thoughts about your frustrations as well from both sides.

- Thank each other for the time and commitment that has been put into the relationship.
- What comes next? Don't forget to discuss the future: Will you continue to meet or speak occasionally – either formally or informally? This is called 'keeping the door open' and is important when you have had a good relationship. Or it may mean winding the relationship up more gradually over a period of months with longer periods between conversations.
- You may want to ask your mentor to help you scope out your future direction or action plan together.
- What or who will replace your mentor? Allow time to plan what comes next, maybe you need signposting to other types of support or to find a new mentor or coach.

Questions which might be asked include:

- What have we achieved together?
- What would we like to thank each other for?
- Do we want to continue in a more ad hoc, informal relationship and, if so, what will the intent of this be?
- When we look back on this relationship, what have we learned that we can apply to our future mentoring relationships?
- What or who will take the place of the mentor?

6. Mentee Self-Assessment to help you gain clarity

Here are some ideas about mentoring to support and challenge you as you begin your mentee journey. **You may want to consider these points before you apply to the AOMP.**

What do I want to achieve from a mentoring relationship as a mentee?

- I want to progress my career, but I'm not sure how?
- How can I be more effective in my role?
- How can I work through the challenges faced in my role?
- How can I develop into a leadership role?
- How can I develop my skills in for example, developing others, thinking more creatively, making decisions?
- How can I be more influential?
- How can I develop my confidence/self-belief?

Are any of these questions applicable to you? You may want to mention them on your **mentee application form** to help with the matching process.

What am I looking for in a mentor?

Depending on your questions you may be looking for a person who:

- Has specific experience or knowledge
- Understands your world

- Offers a different perspective
- Is a trusted role model
- Offers an independent sounding board
- Is geographically close
- Is able to challenge your thinking.

Which of these points are most appropriate? Again, it may be useful to raise these answers on your **mentee application form**, or in discussion with your mentor once matched.

What should you expect of your mentor?

In effective developmental mentoring relationships, the mentee should expect:

- **Empathy** – whilst the mentor may not have experienced exactly the issues that you face, they should demonstrate an interest in you and your development and a willingness to understand things from your point of view.
- **Constructive challenge/ stretching** – your mentor will, when appropriate, push you to think deeper, address uncomfortable issues and challenge yourself.
- **Sharing experience** – your mentor should use their own experience to provide guidance and advice; equally, however, they will be conscious that what was right for them, may not be the best solution for you. Holding back on talking about their experience is something many mentors find difficult, but they should be aware that the important outcome is that you should find a route forward that you feel comfortable with.
- **Confidentiality** – what is said between mentor and mentee is fully confidential.
- **Professional Friendship** – your mentor doesn't have to be your greatest friend ever. But they do need to offer you respect, trust and a degree of liking. It's hard to be fully open with someone you don't feel comfortable with
- **Help in understanding how the organisation works** – your mentor's greater experience and knowledge of people in the organisation can be critical in helping you achieve your personal goals
- **Sounding board** – whenever you need to make a difficult decision, or rehearse a difficult conversation, your mentor can help you think it through
- **Listening** – sometimes mentors help just by being there, when you need someone to talk to, who isn't directly involved in the issue.

Use these points to reflect on what you want to get out of your mentoring relationship and ensure you include any relevant points on your **mentee application form**.

If you have any questions about how to have an effective mentoring relationship, please contact aomp@coachmentoring.co.uk.