# Introduction to developing a mentoring programme

It helps to have some understanding of good practice around mentoring programme design to be able to design, develop and implement a successful mentoring programme. This short step-by-step guide will provide everything you need to start your planning. It can be used whether you are in an HR/L&D role in your organisation, or an individual who is passionate about introducing mentoring internally.

## Why mentoring?

A mentoring programme provides a framework to encourage mentees to engage with a mentor who, acting independently of their line management chain, will provide the reflective space to support their mentee to improve the quality of their thinking. In addition, the mentor will provide support, advice and guidance in personal and professional development. Mentors will help and encourage their mentees to assess their own personal and professional needs, and to plan the development of skills, competences and behaviours that will support them in their career and personal life.

# Initial design groundwork

In advance of any design work, we recommend talking to some of the people who may become involved as prospective mentors and mentees and to some of the senior managers who may be expected to support and sponsor the programme’s implementation.

Some simple questions to ask are:

* How supportive, or not, do they feel the culture will be to embracing mentoring?
* What obstacles or challenges do they think any mentoring may face?

This feedback provides a useful guide as to the steps, which may need to be taken particularly around influencing stakeholders and the content of any communication or publicity materials you design before the programme commences.

## The Rationale for a Mentoring Programme

What is the requirement for mentoring and how is it going to add value or contribute strategically to your organisation? It is so important to identify what the objectives are for the mentoring programme and what outputs or success factors you are seeking to obtain.

### Make it Work

* Always start from the “mentee need”, which will be informed by your organisation’s strategic learning objectives
* Identify clear objectives, outputs and success factors for the programme before it starts.

### Fatal Flaws

* Identifying individuals’ you think will make good mentors before considering who needs mentoring.
* Not identifying the programme outputs/success factors until you come to evaluate it a year later!

## b) Influencing Stakeholders

Setting up and running any mentoring programme begins by influencing and gaining key stakeholder buy-in to the programme. Senior management support is vital. By exhibiting their commitment and enthusiasm to the initiative, it will influence other members of the organisation to accept and support the programme in the future. Will you be identifying one particular mentoring champion to lead the programme? Who is going to have ownership of the programme within the organisation - will this be with HR/L&D or managers?

### Make it Work

* Agree who the key stakeholders are right at the beginning.
* Get these individuals to both sign up to and actively support the programme within the organisation.

### Fatal Flaws

* Not identifying who is responsible for the programme at the beginning, and the programme falling down between the senior line management champion and the HR/L&D function.
* Finding out too late that senior management are not really supportive of the programme.

## c) The Role of the Mentoring Coordinator

Every mentoring programme needs a key individual to take responsibility for the day-to-day running and operation, whether or not they were responsible for its initial design and implementation. The role of the mentoring coordinator or manager is to:

* Support the mentoring relationships once they are established.
* Handle difficulties between pairs should they arise.
* Rematch and refocus relationships when required.
* Ensure appropriate evaluation is completed at the appropriate phase of the relationships.
* Communicate and publicise results and feedback.

The coordinator may also be involved in the initial setting up of the programme, matching and briefing participants.

# Recruitment, communication and publicity

Identifying the mentee target group and needs first and then inviting mentees to participate before recruiting appropriate mentors is key. All participants in the programme should be sought on a voluntary basis. How the programme is being communicated to the rest of the organisation is important and should be given due consideration. Don’t forget to communicate to third parties who may be impacted by your programme. This might include the line managers of the mentees and they will need to be aware of what the programme aims are, how it will support the mentee in their job role, and what the line manager might need to give input in.

Keeping in touch with participants throughout the programme by email newsletter or online forums also helps maintain the programme’s momentum whilst also keeping participants updated of future sessions and where they might be in the life cycle of their relationship.

### Make it Work

* Make mentoring voluntary for the most successful results.
* Ensure individuals understand what is expected of them within a formal programme. Are there events they need to commit to? Do they realise how much time approximately that participation in a mentoring relationship will take?
* Communicate a clear programme outline to anyone you are interested in recruiting, to include the benefits of their involvement, but also communicating with line managers and other stakeholders so there is complete transparency.

### Fatal Flaws

* Identifying the mentors first and then hunting around for suitable mentees for them!
* Making participation compulsory or “politically correct” for ambitious individuals.
* Not communicating the programme to the outside world effectively and making mentoring appear to be only for the “elite”.

# The Matching Process

This can involve identifying selection criteria and assigning pairs or allowing self-selection for the mentoring pair. Some choice should be allowed if at all possible as the most successful matching occurs in relationships where both parties felt they had some choice in their partner. It is very important that if either party in a mentoring relationship is uncomfortable with the way it is going, that support is available and a ‘no fault’ separation clause can be invoked. Matching can involve using matching software or a specially designed database.

### Make it Work

* Allow some choice to both parties.

### Fatal Flaws

* “Arranged pairings” with no get out clause!

# Preparing the participants

Research has demonstrated that mentoring relationships are three times more likely to succeed if formal training of mentors and mentees has taken place. As well as mentoring skills development, training provides the opportunity to raise concerns and questions prior to the relationship commencing. As a minimum, this preparation should encompass:

* The purpose of the programme
* Relationship process
* Roles and responsibilities of mentor and mentee
* Contracting, agreeing expectations and boundaries
* Skills and techniques (with an opportunity to practice in a safe environment)
* The understanding of the life cycle of a relationship.

### Make it Work

* Ensure there is some preparation, even if it is a short briefing, as it will make a huge difference to the programme success.

### Fatal Flaws

* Not preparing mentors or mentees in any way and letting them “make it up” as they go along.
* Not educating mentors and mentees how to develop a mentoring agreement in their relationship, so they do not have a safety net if they run into difficulties.
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# Support and Supervision

Allowing mentors and mentees to meet in support groups on a regular basis is one way of providing ongoing support to a mentoring programme and supervision to the mentors. An opportunity to discuss concerns, perhaps gain some further knowledge or skills training and to network generally with other participants of the programme is very beneficial.

### Make it Work

* Ensure all participants know whom to contact if they have problems in their relationship.

### Fatal Flaws

* Just leaving a programme on its own once it has been set up. Without a regular injection of energy and support, most programmes will disintegrate.

# Evaluation

Mentoring programmes should be continually assessed to provide formative evaluation, which can be used to review the design and future implementation of the programme. In addition, summative evaluation should be completed at the end of each cycle of the programme. Evaluation should be conducted at programme and relationship level and focus on both process and outputs.

Some of the aspects to evaluate include:

* Programme and relationship processes
* Selection criteria
* Proportion of successes/failures
* Training
* Programme support
* Meeting frequency/relevancy/value
* and the learning acquired.

In addition, how the programme impacts on the retention, promotion, and performance of individuals and some of the less tangible aspects such as self-confidence and self-belief can all be measured.

### Make it Work

* Plan your evaluation as part of the initial programme design before it is set up.

### Fatal Flaws

* Not assessing mentoring on an ongoing formative basis.
* Not agreeing success factors right at the beginning of the programme design.
* Not using the evaluation to build a case to develop mentoring further within the organisation.

# Mentoring principles

We recommend the following principles when designing a mentoring programme;

* Mentors and mentees meet each other every 4 to 6 weeks and the relationship typically runs for 12 months or, as long as is beneficial to both parties.
* Both mentors and mentees demonstrate a duty of care towards each other, respecting confidentiality and respecting the time commitment that each is making to this process.
* Mentor and mentee should respect the position of third parties, including line managers, and keeping them informed of important progress where appropriate.
* Both mentor and mentee must enter into the programme voluntarily.
* The mentee is responsible for the agenda in the relationship, the mentor is responsible for the meeting process.
* Whilst the mentee is not obligated to follow the mentor’s guidance and advice, they have a responsibility to consider this in an open manner.
* Mentor and mentee share responsibility for the smooth winding up of the relationship. Both parties may choose to end the relationship at any point but should discuss the matter together as part of their mutual learning.

# Need more help?

For further guidance and templates/resources to help you set up your programme, then please contact aomp@coachmentoring.co.uk