

FINDING AND USING A MENTOR (OR MAKING YOUR OWN LUCK)

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Mentors are important for two reasons: they help set a career course and they also encourage areas of personal development. Many people who are not necessarily blessed with mentors are reluctant to seek them out. Many people do have mentors although they may not always recognize them. The mentoring relationship also does not have to be a formal one. Sometimes the best assistance can come from a slight acquaintance or an informal relationship. The important thing is to realize that those who have succeeded have not done so alone. Somewhere in the background has been the assistance and guidance of another person who has had the person's best interests at heart.¹

Introduction

I have been working in the area of personal development for a number of years – individual and group employment counselling, organizing and presenting in personal and leadership development courses. I have noticed that success in achieving their goals is easier for people who have support around them. I developed this workshop to help people identify what support they might benefit from and where they might find it for themselves.

Language

Mentoring has a long history in human affairs – the words mentor and protégé first appeared in use in English in the late 1700s. The idea that ‘it’s not what you know but who you know’ has always played an important part in how things get done in most cultures. In our culture, favouritism – a boss promoting only favourites – is seen as ‘unfair’. However, management theory and writing is increasingly noticing the importance that having a mentor can make to a person’s career. New terms to describe this process are job coach or life coach.

Have you had mentors in your life?

Most of you will have experienced mentoring in some form – a parent, a particularly good teacher, “someone down the road” who took the time to explain something that confused you, a spouse or partner who you always talk things through with... but there’s a feeling that it is cheating to try to force or organise this relationship. With your special knowledge and skills, you may be able to

¹ From the forward by Leonie Still, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Edith Cowan University, to [Friends in high places, the executive woman's guide](#), by Bonnie McKenzie, 1995, Business & Professional Publishing, ISBN 1 875680 13 6

take on your goals with confidence and stamina. But research has found that you can save a lot of time and energy by forming alliances with individuals who can help you achieve career success.

What do we mean by mentoring?

A fairly traditional definition of a formal mentoring experience is: When a more experienced person in any organisation in a higher position takes on a more junior employee as a mentoree, and assists them in advancing their career.

See Worksheet 1: “Have you been mentored?”.

What can a mentor do for you?

See Worksheet 2: “Using a mentor to achieve my goals”

Discussion questions:

What sorts of things might you talk to a mentor about?

What are the stages in a mentoring relationship?

What sorts of mentoring are there?

What can go wrong?

How do you avoid the pitfalls?

How do you find a mentor?

See Worksheet 3: “My ideal mentor(s)”

Mentoring is a two-way process

See Worksheet 4: “How could I be a mentor?”

Summary

See Worksheet 5: “Selecting a mentor - Checklist”

Worksheet 1: Have you been mentored?

Think about important changes in your life to date – the developments or changes within yourself rather than the event themselves.

- 1 **Have you had an ‘aha!’ experience that allowed you to suddenly understand something, someone, yourself or what was happening around you?**

What were the circumstances? _____

Who helped you have the ‘aha! moment? _____

Do you think it was intentional on their part? Yes / No

Did they help or oversee your implementation of this insight? Yes / No

- 2 **Has someone explained something to you in a way that suddenly makes sense?**

What were the circumstances? _____

Who had this discussion with you? _____

Do you think it was intentional on their part? Yes / No

Did they help or oversee you talking about this with others? Yes / No

- 3 **Have you had help uncovering an ability or talent of yours that had been dormant or unrecognised by you or by others?**

What were the circumstances? _____

Who helped you uncover this ability? _____

Do you think it was intentional on their part? Yes / No

Did they help or oversee your implementation of this ability? Yes / No

- 4 **Has someone given you a book, article or saying that has changed your life?**

What were the circumstances? _____

Who gave it to you? _____

Do you think it was intentional on their part? Yes / No

Did they help or oversee your implementation of this information? Yes / No

Worksheet 2: Using a mentor to achieve my goals

Goal:

What do I need (information, skill, support) to achieve this goal?

Who could help me get this information, skill or support?

How?

When?

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Where?

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How will I know if a mentor has helped with this goal?

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Worksheet 3: My ideal mentor(s)

What sort of person would your ideal mentor(s) be? Write a description of the type of person you admire and would like to talk with about your goals – e.g. outspoken, high profile, quiet achiever, team player, independent, well-liked.

Your preferences about **where** (neutral territory, at the pub, office, home), **how often and how long** (weekly / monthly / three monthly, for 1 hour / morning / afternoon / day), **how** (telephone, email, face-to-face, one to one, group), **when** (on call, set time, evenings / mornings, after monthly accounts available), **cost** (free, reciprocating, professional)?

Where:

How often:

How long:

How:

When:

Cost:

How long a trial:

Other:

Do you have preferences for your mentor(s) to be of a particular age, gender, cultural background?

Do you have preferences for your mentor(s) to have particular values, skills or expertise?

Would you like a professional job coach/life coach/mentor?

Worksheet 4: How I could be a mentor?

What specialist knowledge or expertise do I have?

Can I help others through my current position?

Can I help others through resources for which I am responsible (e.g. equipment, schedules, information or money)?

Can I help others through people I know, my networks?

Can I help others through my interpersonal skills?



Worksheet 5: Selecting a mentor – Checklist

Are you ready to be a mentoree? If you are not leaving it to chance, there is preparation to do that will mean that you make efficient and effective use of your and your mentor's time.

Do you know what you want from a mentor? General ideas are O.K. at this stage. Have you worked out what would be most helpful to you right now?

Yes / No; I need to _____

Are you clear about what support you are getting from your current networks? e.g. professional group, growers group, the Feds, special interest group, Rural Women, church group – generally informal, and can be useful in sharing experiences and learning from each other

Yes / No; I need to _____

Do you have a written career plan to discuss with a mentor?

Yes / No; I need to _____

Can you identify what you have to offer a mentor?

Yes / No; I need to _____

Can you define the mentor/mentoree relationship to your satisfaction? How will mentoring help you? What are the benefits of mentoring to you? What might be in it for the mentor you have identified?

Yes / No; I need to _____

Can you identify (or start to identify) some groundrules for your mentoring relationship? – time involvement, confidentiality etc

Yes / No; I need to _____

Do you have a concrete plan for targeting and selecting a mentor/s - how you will go about it; what kind of mentor/s you want; what resources you have – time, money, travel etc?

Yes / No; I need to _____

How will you know if the mentor is right for you? What amount of time will you give to find out – 3 months, 6 months?

Yes / No; I need to _____

How will you know if being mentored has been successful for you? What are your expectations? They can be revised along the way if you are unsure, but are you clear in your own mind so you can monitor how it is working for you?

Yes / No; I need to _____

Are you aware of some of the pitfalls you should watch for – problems with conflicts between line manager goals and mentoring goals, clarifying mentoring role with other people in your life, transference?

Yes / No; I need to _____

Can you identify areas you might need to work on for the mentoring process to succeed - taking criticism, thinking outside the square?

Yes / No; I need to _____

Do you know where to go to get answers to the above points if you don't know?

Yes / No; I need to _____