

**Handout to Accompany the Webinar “Mentoring Others”
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October 2015**

1. What is mentoring?

A process in which a person offers help, guidance, advice, and support to enable the learning or development of another person. Can be informal and develop over time, or it can be part of a formal, organized program.

Quotes about mentoring:

“A mentor is an experienced and trusted advisor. Within the context of a career, a mentor is an experienced person who provides guidance and support to a developing professional.”—Minnesota Library Association

“A mentor is someone who can patiently assist with someone’s growth and development in a given area. This assistance can come in the form of guidance, teaching, imparting of wisdom and experience.”—Chicago Computer Society

“A mentor facilitates personal and professional growth in an individual by sharing the knowledge and insights that have been learned through the years. The desire to want to share these ‘life experiences’ is characteristic of a successful mentor.”—Arizona National Guard

2. Pathways to mentoring

There are many ways that mentoring takes place; are determined by circumstances and need.

Informal routes: Someone seeks you out for advice. This could be a new employee at your library, or someone who’s looking to gain experience or a skill in a new area and wants your guidance. Could be someone outside your place of work.

You may mentor someone at work (example: one of your employees, a new person in your library). May be a conscious decision or a natural outgrowth of your working relationship with that person.

Mentoring can be as part of a formal program. If your library has a formal program, you may be asked to serve as a mentor or you may volunteer. If you volunteer for a formal program, you may be assigned a mentee or you may be an available mentor from which mentees can choose.

3. Types of mentoring

Informal- Spontaneous and maintained informally by the involved parties. Typically short-term, and may be for the life of a project or other short-term situation (preparing a presentation, submitting a piece of writing, etc.).

Formal- Part of a structured program with guidelines and selection criteria for mentors, mentees, terms of service, program oversight, and a means to measure success. Usually long-term.

Situational- May also be part of a structured program; intended for a short-term and very specific situation. Typically for projects or activities, not long-term personal growth, continuing education, etc. Example: Conference mentors for first-time attendees.

Minute or flash- Very short-term relationship that allows mentees to get answers. May be facilitated by a professional organization, experts in the workplace, or a person who oversees a certain process.

Group- As the name implies, this type of mentoring is used for a group. Could be for a project team, a department, new employees, etc. There can be one mentor or multiple mentors. Examples include the Emerging Leaders (one mentor, multiple ELs) or new employee groups.

Co-mentoring- Formal; two mentors are assigned to a mentee or mentees. Mentors are chosen based on their expertise in a given area. Can be long or short-term.

Peer- Consists of a relationship between employees or colleagues who are basically at the same level or have similar levels of experience and/or expertise. This is a support relationship that produces shared experiences and learning.

Virtual- Conducted online; may be formal or informal, may be long or short-term.

4. Characteristics of an Effective Mentor

Excellent communication skills- Be an active listener. Be present and focus on your mentee. A mentor should be an excellent communicator in a variety of settings using different modes of communication (phone, email, videoconferencing). Ask your mentee thoughtful questions to prompt him/her to discuss his/her needs and what's important to him/her.

Patience- Take the relationship seriously; understand that it will take time and commitment. Be involved long enough to make a difference. Be aware that you need to give your mentee time and space to process information, heed your advice, and to make decisions.

Flexible- Be aware of your mentee's needs in a given situation and be able to switch gears. Being flexible also means being open to new ideas and ways of doing things.

Respectful- Respect points of view that differ from your own and suspend judgment. Respect a mentee's ability to make choices and avoid imposing your values on your mentee.

Punctual- Be reliable and consistent. Lead by example! Your mentee may have deadlines if he/she asks you to read something for him/her (example: an application for a program, a submission for a conference paper). If you've agreed to meet with your mentee, don't cancel unless absolutely necessary and don't be late to meetings. Those last two items will undermine the quality of your relationship and trust if you don't adhere to them.

Confidential- Provide an accepting and supportive atmosphere.

Positive role model- Don't complain about your job or place of work. Don't tell your mentee anecdotal stories or brag of your success. Share advice based on your experience and advice.

Values continuing education and professional development- Recognize the importance of continuous learning. Be open to new ideas and avoid getting stuck in a rut.

5. Identifying potential mentees

May be new employees or those who are new to another part of the library, people who are new to the profession, people who are new to a professional organization, people who want to acquire a new skill, people whose managers want them to acquire new skills or expertise, or people who have been identified for a given activity (such as management training or a promotion). They might be part of your department, might be a colleague, or might report to you. You may encounter them as part of your regular work or professional activities.

6. Benefits of mentoring

Mentees, mentors, and the organization all benefit. Benefits include promoting diversity, cultivating future leaders, orienting new professionals, employee satisfaction and retention, knowledge transfer, and succession planning. Mentoring provides opportunities, develops contacts, enables providing and receiving feedback, and can improve job performance. Benefits to the organization include a positive environment, it reduces attrition, and it produces a culture of cooperation.

7. Is being a mentor appropriate for you?

Consider what's involved, particularly for a formal mentoring program. Are you prepared to invest the time and effort required? Is it commitment you can realistically make? Does your workload permit it?

What skills, knowledge and experience you can provide? What skills/talents do you possess that are lacking in your library or professional organization?

What type of person do you want to mentor? What do you want to get from the relationship?

Be realistic about what you can/can't do for a mentee.

Would you repeat the experience?

8. Interacting with your mentee

How: In person, at conferences or organized events, by videoconference, by phone or email.

Consider regular meetings. Set time limits.

If you're participating in a formal mentoring program, your first order of business should be to contact your mentee and introduce yourself.

9. Setting goals

What does the mentee want to achieve? How can it be accomplished?

Develop mutually agreed upon goals.

Provide constructive feedback as your mentee reaches his/her goals. Review the goals as the relationship proceeds.

Goals can be long or short-term and are driven by the mentee's specific needs (short-term- Paper or a conference proposal; long-term- a job promotion, a degree).

10. Developing an effective mentoring relationship

Have empathy for your mentee's challenges.

Develop a rapport and take the time to get to know your mentee.

Mentoring relationships are dynamic and reciprocal. They change over time and are shaped by needs and circumstances. As your mentee gains skills and confidence, his/her needs will change.

Commitment is essential. If you don't have the time or interest, or you're participating for the wrong reasons, the relationship is doomed to fail.

Shared values establish a common bond and lead to a more effective relationship.

Trust is also critical and necessary from both sides.

Respect is also critical and necessary.

11. Barriers to effective mentoring

Unclear understanding of the mentor's role and responsibilities, both on the part of the mentor and mentee.

There are limits to what a mentor can do for a mentee. A mentor can't guarantee a better performance review or a raise or promotion, or that a proposal will be accepted. A mentor's role is to provide guidance and advice.

Lack of commitment to the relationship will lead to failure. Both parties need to be interested, engaged, and willing participants.

A poor match can happen. Recognize that it's not working. Some formal programs have a no fault bail out clause for either party.

Misunderstanding the mentee's needs can be a barrier. Be an active listener, familiarize yourself with your mentee's skills, experience and needs.

Miscommunication can result from over reliance on technology. It can also be chalked up to different communication styles.

Other barriers are using the relationship for personal gain and recognition at the mentee's expense.

12. Is it the end, or just the beginning?

Recognize when to bring the relationship to a conclusion or if it needs to conclude.

If either party makes a request to end the relationship, it can possibly mean that:

The relationship wasn't productive. Either party should be honest about why they want to end the relationship. Mentoring programs often address how to handle such issues.

The mentee has reached his/her goal and feels his/her needs have been fulfilled. This is personal growth and is a good thing.

The mentor has provided all the expertise he/she possesses and the mentee is ready to proceed on his/her own.

Discuss next steps. Next steps can include continuing the relationship in another form. The relationship can continue if both parties feel comfortable.

Mentees who have had a positive experience may consider serving as mentors themselves