

## Workplace Mentoring – what is it, and how can it help me?

### What is mentoring?

The Concise Oxford Dictionary definition of a mentor is ‘an experienced and trusted adviser’.

The term ‘mentoring’ is often used to describe a relationship in which a more, or differently, experienced person works with another to support their personal and professional development.

Mentoring is a process whereby two individuals, a mentor and a mentee, agree to work together to develop the knowledge, skills and insights of the mentee.

Mentoring is successfully used in a number of contexts, ranging from mentoring of chief executives and senior managers in business, through to mentoring of individual school children by an adult.

### What are the outcomes and benefits of mentoring?

- **Accelerated learning** - mentoring enables learning needs to be more rapidly identified and mentees supported in acquiring new skills
- **More effective integration** - mentoring helps new employees and those who have changed roles or organisations, to more rapidly adapt to and develop in their new positions
- **Better relationships** - mentoring can help improve relationships at work, by supporting the mentee in understanding different perspectives and needs
- **Increased commitment** - mentoring can increase commitment to the organisation because it demonstrates the organisation’s own commitment to developing its staff
- **Increased self-confidence:** mentoring can help staff gain in confidence by enabling them to talk through issues about which they are uncertain, and support them to acquire the skills they need.

### What does workplace mentoring involve?

The mentor and mentee agree at the outset the frequency of meeting (normally anything from fortnightly to every three months), the location of meetings (whether off-site or in a bookable meeting space) and whether telephone or email contact will be used. The kinds of issues the mentee wishes to discuss, and those they may not wish to cover, should also be agreed at the outset.

The purpose of workplace mentoring is to support and guide mentees in:-

- identifying their learning needs
- handling difficult or unfamiliar situations and learning from them
- making good decisions at work
- improving their skills, knowledge and understanding
- developing their career

The partnership between the mentor and mentee is both supportive and challenging, thereby engaging the mentee in fully developing their potential and extending their experience.

A mentor will not tell you what to do, but will support you in finding your own answers and direction, whilst providing the benefits of their own knowledge and experience.

## **Further Information on Workplace Mentoring?**

Workplace mentoring is a term used to describe mentoring and mentoring schemes within organisations. It is often used as a way of supporting new members of staff in integrating into an organisation.

By pairing a new member of staff with a more senior and experienced person, the new person can be supported as they find their way around an organisation. It is important that the pairing should be with someone other than the line manager, whose role may conflict with the requirements of mentoring.

Mentoring can facilitate the mentee's integration into the organisation and the speed at which they learn how to be effective in a new environment. In this context, the mentor needs to be someone from within the organisation..

Mentoring is also increasingly used to support new entrants to a profession, particularly where they have initial qualifications from college or university, but are also required to charter or obtain professional accreditation. A mentor enables them to keep on track, offers guidance as necessary, and also provides support for them as they identify their career path and negotiate their way in their organisation.

In this context, it is helpful if the mentor is from the same profession, whether within the organisation, or from outside.

Having a mentor can also be useful at other career stages. For example, a mentor can help keep a mentee focussed on their professional development and career path, or support them in important decisions about changing jobs or changing careers. An internal or external mentor may be appropriate at these stages. As the benefits of mentoring become apparent, many organisations are now developing workplace mentoring schemes which are offered to all staff and which use internal mentors.

Such schemes are preceded by an appropriate period of training and awareness raising for both mentors and potential mentees about what is involved.

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