A spotlight on mentoring

Mentoring is a relation-based method of learning, but it is more than a friendship. Mentoring requires that there is a mentor and a mentee (referred to in some programs as the "mentoree").

Mentoring models and the relationships that develop can vary to suit the needs of individuals and workplaces. There are both formal and informal mentoring approaches.

A formal mentoring approach is set up, usually deliberately, and the participants (mentor and mentee) are matched up on a one-to-one basis (by the program coordinator). There is a clear purpose for the relationship, and through the relationship the mentor and mentee establish a habit of learning and evaluation of that learning. In a formal mentoring program, the mentor and mentee are usually given additional support and guidance to ensure that both parties are contributing and gaining equally from the relationship. Mentor preparation programs are likely to cover the following areas:

- Clarification of what time, energy and so on a mentor might reasonably be expected to commit to the mentee
- Clarification of the purpose(s) of the relationship
- Clarification of the recruitment, matching and monitoring procedures with a prospective mentee
- Information about confidentiality and liability
- Developing knowledge and understanding about the boundaries and limitations for the mentor's contact with the mentee
- Identifying what benefits a mentor may gain from participating in a mentoring relationship
- Skills training in areas such as listening, questioning and problem-solving
- Crisis management and dealing with difficult situations
- Options for ongoing support and development
- Ending the mentoring relationship

A critical success factor is the development and support of the mentors and mentees. Areas of preparation for mentors are also likely to be relevant to mentees, but each role will have a different perspective and responsibility within the relationship.

There may also be situations where informal mentor relationships develop. Characteristics of an informal mentoring relationship are likely to be loose inter-personal relationships that are more opportunistic, irregular; arise spontaneously and are based on good rapport and mutual attraction which usually leads to, if not already, strong ties.

Sometimes people question what the difference is between a coaching and mentoring relationship. Depending on what you read, or whom you listen to, the distinction can be clear-cut or fuzzy. They appear to be similar in that they both aim to support and develop a protégé. They appear to be different in that coaching tends to focus on technical skill (eg. feeding) or knowledge acquisition (eg. child development) and implementation (eg. approaches to parenting). Mentoring is likely to involve some of the skills of coaching, such as the use of open-ended and non-judgemental questioning but it takes a broader focus to the growth and development of the individual. View the "Glossary of terms" which provides a definition for coaching and mentoring.

Take a moment to consider:
- ✓ Would you consider any of your current work relationships with colleagues or other professionals outside your workplace to be mentoring relationships? Think about the

relationship from the perspective of whether it is a formal and/or informal relationship, and whether you consider yourself the mentor and/or mentee.
✓ Compare a mentoring relationship with other workplace relationships. In what way(s) might a mentor role be different from a manager / coordinator role? In what way(s) might it be similar?

The potential for a high quality mentoring arrangement that supports learning depends on a number of factors, such as:
- Clear purpose
- Dedicated time
- Recognition of participation
- Identification of limitations

What problems and challenges can mentors and mentees encounter?
Brian Hansford and colleagues (2003) reviewed over 150 mentoring studies. Nearly all the studies identified at least one problem encountered through mentoring. The problems identified for mentors and mentees went something like this:

Problem Experienced	For Mentor	For Mentee
Lack of time	✓	✓
Professional expertise / personality mismatch	✓	✓
Mentor's lack of skill and understanding of the goals and processes within mentoring (eg. guidance, sharing, feedback, modelling)	✓	✓
Found it challenging to meet, be observed and observing		✓
Lack of interest and commitment to mentoring	✓	✓
Lack of proximity	✓	✓
Found it challenging to seek and receive critical feedback		✓
Feelings of inadequacy		✓
Unrealistic expectations from the relationship	✓	✓
Perceptions of an unequal status	✓	✓
Conflicting mentor role – advice versus assessment	✓	
Emotionally draining / stressful	✓	
Colleagues feeling jealous	✓	
Mentoring not always necessary	✓	

Janine Knackstedt's (2001) Canadian study identified six types of health care professional needs that mentoring was used for:
- Professional development
- Sponsorship and recognition
- Equal partnership
- Friendship
- Coaching on work issues
- Role modelling

Knackstedt found gaps between what mentees needed and what they actually received from the mentoring experience. It seems that clarifying expectations from mentoring is an obvious, but often overlooked, consideration.

Take a moment to consider:
- ✓ At this point in time, if you were entering a mentoring arrangement as a mentee, what would you set as the purpose for this type of learning?
- ✓ At this point in time, if you were entering a mentoring arrangement as a mentor, what would you set as the purpose for this type of learning?

Establishing and managing an effective mentoring program

Mentoring Australia is the official website of the National Mentoring Association of Australia Inc. It outlines a core set of 15 principles for establishing and managing an effective mentoring program. Mentoring Australia claim that a responsible mentoring program requires:

1. A well-defined mission statement and established operating principles.

2. Regular, consistent contact between mentor and mentee.

3. Establishment under the auspices of a recognised organisation.

4. Paid or volunteer staff with appropriate skills.

5. Written role statements for all staff and volunteer positions.

6. Adherence to Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) requirements.

7. Inclusiveness in relation to ethnicity, culture, socio-economic background, gender and sexuality as appropriate to the program.

8. Adequate ongoing financial and in-kind resources.

9. Written administrative and program procedures.

10. Documented criteria which define eligibility for participation in the program.

11. Program evaluation and ongoing assessment.

12. A program plan that has input from stakeholders.

13. Risk management and confidentiality policies.

14. Use of generally accepted accounting practices.

15. A rationale for staffing arrangements based on the needs of all parties.

(See http://www.dsf.org.au/mentor/benchmark.htm)

Take a moment to consider:
- ✓ Do you think that some of these principles for establishing and managing an effective mentoring program would be difficult to implement in your workplace? If so, which ones and why?