

Seven Keys to Ensuring Successful Mentoring Outcomes



By Melanie Wass

www.naturalconsulting.com.au

www.naturalconsulting.com.au



Melanie Wass has been conducting Mentoring training since 2003 for numerous government agencies and programs. Much of her mentoring has been focussed on career development and personal development. More recently she has operated in mentoring for small businesses and start-ups.

Mentoring is an outstanding development process, when done well.

Most people can recall at least one person who stands out in their life as one who provided guidance and wisdom and served as a positive influence for them.

Nearly every biography of a successful person gives credit to one or more people who functioned as mentors in their life and with whom they credit their success.

Research over recent years repeatedly attests to the power and value of having mentors throughout ones career. In one case¹, for example, mentoring was found to increase salary grade changes of both Mentors and Mentorees; increase chances of promotion for both Mentors and Mentorees and significantly improve retention rates.

There is no question that mentoring works. Whether it is a formal or informal process, a peer or more senior person, a group or individual arrangement or highly structured or minimal structure, the evidence all points to mentoring being successful when key points are followed.

Here are a number of those key points to ensure your successful partnership.

1. October 2006, Sun Microsystems study into the impact of mentoring over 5 years

Have a clear idea what mentoring means to you

If you are unclear on what the whole process is about, how can you expect to enjoy success?
How will you even know what 'success' is?

What is 'mentoring' in your eyes? Guidance? Advice? A friend in your corner? A way to learn all those nuances of organisational life? Someone who will hold you accountable? Challenge you? Support you? A way to 'give back'? Help to accelerate someone's career? A chance to be recognised for your expertise? New ideas? A chance to reflect on your own practices?

Think about what your hopes and expectations are of mentoring. What does it represent? What kind of mentor/mentoree would work best with you? How much time do you have to commit? How often do you expect to meet? What do you want to not have happen during mentoring? What do you expect to be able to give/get?

The clearer you are on what mentoring means to you, the easier it will be to negotiate a productive relationship with your partner once you clarify your expectations with them.

Know the goals

By goals, I'm talking on different levels here.

Firstly, it pays to keep in mind the overall goal of mentoring (and that is to develop the Mentoree).

Second, there is the goal of the organisation's mentoring program. What is the focus and aim of the program itself? How will your mentoring partnership tie in with that and enhance it? How will you know you have 'met requirements'?

Finally, what are the goals your partner brings? Early meetings will be spent becoming very clear about goals, especially the Mentorees. Is it clarity on reaching the next level? Gaining specific experience? Developing more strategic thinking? Improving a global perspective? Learning organisational 'smarts'?

For mentoring to be successful, each party needs to be clear on what they want as an outcome and, with planning and foresight, achieve those goals.

Know what you're talking about

One of the biggest downfalls in a mentoring relationship is being unclear of what will be discussed at each meeting. It is incredibly unproductive and wasteful to start a mentoring session with no agenda or focus.

Have a plan. Be prepared.

Think through what will be needed next, what resources will be required, logical next steps for developing the discussions. Develop an action plan early and revisit it frequently to accommodate changes and evolution. .

Once a mentoring partnership is underway it will be the Mentoree who will set the agenda, and in those rare circumstances where this does not happen, the Mentor needs to be adept at initiating conversations which maintain the relationship and keep the Mentorees development on track.

Give and receive feedback constructively

Gaining feedback is a fantastic learning process. It's also problematic.

The challenge is that many are either not good at giving it productively and others are not good at receiving it constructively. Despite that, many don't enjoy giving it and many complain they don't get enough feedback.

Part of the role of mentoring is to challenge thinking and behaviour. This evolves for the most part throughout the mentoring process. At times, however, direct feedback is needed.

It is important that both parties recognise this and agree to give and receive feedback in an appropriate manner. Focus on the Program outcomes, on the development process and avoid the personal character assessments. Be very clear on what the preferred model is.

The individual is responsible for deciding whether to act on any feedback.

Make mentoring a priority

Time is perhaps the number one challenge for ongoing mentoring arrangements. At first, everyone is super-committed and keen and then after a while, life and work take priority. Before you know it mentoring meetings are rescheduled, pushed aside and sometimes just never get going again. Be alert. Be persistent.

Firstly, commit the mentoring appointments into your schedule like any other regularly recurring meeting. Put them in the diary upfront to reserve that space. There is no reason (short of an unplanned absence) as to why you can't schedule all your mentoring meetings for the entire duration of the Program.

Second, make sure they happen. Honour your appointment. Don't treat it as always negotiable or optional. By keeping the appointment you are valuing your partner and respecting their time. More importantly, regular time commitments keep you on target.

If a critical issue prevents the meeting from proceeding, make sure it is rebooked. Mentorees especially need to be persistent and not reticent about taking up space in their Mentors diary.

Stand by your word

When you commit to something, that stands for something. It stands for your reputation, reliability and consistency. Failure to honour your commitments has a negative impact on others perception of you, and your own sense of self-worth.

The whole mentoring relationship is built on trust and as we all know, trust takes time to build and seconds to destroy. Your partner is prepared to work with you. Honouring your commitments reassures him/her that the effort is worthwhile.

When you commit, make sure it is something you can commit to and not an idea, desire or to look good in the eyes of your partner. When you've made a deliberate and conscious choice to do something, put action behind it – even if the action is a diary note of what steps to take, and then follow through before the next meeting.

If you'd like to do something but aren't aware of the consequences, don't commit – commit to finding out more. Your mentoring partner will appreciate you more for it.

Leverage your network

One of the beautiful things about mentoring is that you are not alone, either individually or as a pair. Each of you has networks which can prove a useful additional resource.

Mentoring is not an automatic entre into the world of your mentoring partner, but there are times where people in your network can add real value to the mentoring process.

Extending and leveraging your network helps to get work done more effectively, enhances development, increases referrals and reputation, aids in identifying future opportunities and develops important relationships.

Perhaps there is someone you know whom you could refer your partner to so he/she can gain deeper input or advice on a particular matter. Perhaps there is something outside your area of expertise that your partner needs to know but you know someone they could talk with. There could be a number of reasons why you might look into your network to supplement your mentoring. Think now about how your networks could assist your partner.

In Closing

Obviously there are many things that contribute to a successful mentoring experience. What I have provided here are perhaps the key elements that contribute most.

Any relationship is built on trust and the more you can focus on behaviours and actions that will build that level of trust between yourself and your mentoring partner, the better the outcomes will be for both of you.

If I had to distil this document into a shortened version, this would be it:

- Be clear on what you want.
- Be clear on what you expect of the other party.
- Be open.
- Be prepared.
- Commit.

Enjoy your mentoring!

© Natural Consulting

Please feel free to share this document on the following basis:

1. You cannot charge for it.
2. You must not change alter or modify it in any way.
3. You must distribute it in its original PDF format in its entirety.

The content remains the intellectual property of its author, Melanie Wass. If you would like to print copies or quote or use the material in any other way, simply contact me and we'll see what we can do.

Melanie Wass

www.naturalconsulting.com.au

mentoring@naturalconsulting.com.au

Phone +61 4 1998 8303