# The Importance of Mentoring at UL

Mentoring is a trusted staff development support in the workplace. It provides a safe and supportive environment for the mentees to assist them in their careers and in psychosocial functioning in the workplace. It is collegiate and collaborative and provides benefits to both the mentor and mentee. To maximise the benefits, it is important that the skills and practices identified in the paper are complied with to ensure that the relationship operates to the best extent possible.

# The Benefits of Mentoring.

Mentoring and coaching is important for staff development particularly with its emphasis on mutual respect, openness, empathy, and a strong commitment to speaking truthfully (Kowlaski 2020). It is solution focused, but within a supportive environment. It is co-creative, and it can be layered – mentoring at the bottom and providing more coaching type approaches the further up you go. Ordinarily, in such a setting, the mentor is experienced in the discipline (Jones, Woods, Guillaume, Yves 2016). Research work on mentoring in the workplace can trace its genealogy to Levinson’s study (Levinson 1978), which documented how the process of mentoring facilitates the transition from early to middle adulthood. Other influential studies (Lunt et al 1992) included Roche’s (1979) *Harvard Business Review* publication on 4,000 executives listed in Wall Street Journal and the significant number who claimed to have the support of a business mentor. His article suggests that those with a mentor had better career plans and better career satisfaction. Kram’s (1985) study emphasised the benefits for the mentor and mentee. For the mentee, it was a developmental benefit, providing a ‘range of career and psychosocial functions’ (1985: 621). For the mentor, it permits midlife reappraisal (1985: 621).

Mentoring is a collaborative relationship and a focus on possibilities rather than an authoritarian approach (Kowalski 2020). It is communicative, based on a supportive and non‐judgmental approach (ibid). It sets realistic expectations and seeks to nudge the mentee to think about their career and their choices in the workplace. It is a personal, one-to one (Jones, Woods, Guillaume, Yves 2016) relationship. It is, in effect, a ‘pastoral’ approach (Jenkins 2013) and is more often associated with much broader, holistic development and with career progress (Clutterbuck 2008, 8). Crucially, the agenda is created by the learner – it is therefore very employee focused (Jenkins 2013). There are different stages to the development of a mentoring programme. Megginson and Clutterbuck (2006: 232) have argued that it comprises of four stages: nascent, tactical, strategic and embedded. These range from a lack of organisational commitment right through to an embedded culture. Obviously the more embedded the mentoring process, the more work can be done developing on models and techniques, from the GROW model to ‘Models-based’ ‘Process-based’ and Philosophy-based’ mentoring (Megginson and Clutterbuck 2009: 5) Mentoring relationships are time limited.

Mentoring has the potential to provide a very good understanding of organisational mission goals. It is a reflective process which helps the mentee to think about their career choices and their strategy choices. It enhances skills – questioning, listening, communicating empathically, listening actively (Kowalski, 2020), and sharing perceptions or observations. It is a unique relationship and the dynamics of each mentoring relationship are different (Jacobi, 1991). It is an important anchoring point in the workplace, particularly in an uncertain age. It provides for a ‘secure attachment’, ‘one rooted in a helping relationship’ (Eby 2007, xix).

Mentors offer *career functions*. Career functions involve a range of behaviours which help mentees to “learn the ropes” and prepare them for development and progression within their organisations. These behaviours include sponsoring advancement, reflecting on work choices, potential for career advancement, and the development of the soft skills necessary. Mentors may provide *psychosocial functions* which help to build relations of trust and confidence (Jenkins 2013). Ideally a mentor should have the desire to be of service to others, to approach the mentee with ‘unconditional positive regard’. Learning therefore rests upon certain ‘attitudinal qualities which exist in the personal relationship between the facilitator and the learner’ (Rogers 1983: 121). In this sense, it is ‘a way of being’ rather than a ‘way of doing’ (Clutterbuck 2006b 16-17). The relationship therefore is reciprocal, albeit that the primary focus is the development of the mentee (Jacobi, 1991).

## The Essential Skills

The essential skills of a mentor including building rapport, listening, questioning, reflecting back, and summarising (Gravells and Wallace 37-47). To work effectively it requires the establishment of a process. This includes contracting – setting expectations, maintaining confidence, meeting times and number of meetings (Garringer et al 2015: 12) It also involves exploration - examining the mentee’s current circumstances. Once these foundations have been put in place, the process then moves on developing new understanding: this essentially seeks to re-frame issues where necessary, to shed light on intractable challenges. Finally, the process moves in to action planning (Gravells and Wallace 2007: 26-38; Megginson and Garvey 2002: 281). So essentially what we are looking from a mentor is the following:

* Enthusiasm
* Relevant Expertise
* Will commit to the role
* Strong listener
* Will encourage the mentee to step outside their comfort zone
* Value learning and development
* Wants to help and support colleagues
* Is discreet
* Is emotionally intelligent, empathic and respectful of others.
* Will be honest enough to give you feedback that is going to help the mentee and call them on any incorrect assumptions or thinking

## The Basics

* The first meeting is a contracting meeting. It would be important in the first meeting to clarify and confirm the confidentiality of the process.
* The mentee should consider some specific objectives which they wish to achieve in this relationship. For example, what are your career goals? What are your biggest challenges in achieving them? What are the opportunities?
* At the end of each meeting, a meeting time should be arranged for the next meeting.
* Remember that it is about growth and development – it should be beneficial, rewarding and fun. It is also voluntary. If, in exceptional circumstances, the relationship is not working for either party, the allocation can be revised.
* The mentor-mentee relationship is finite with an end date as agreed.
* Feedback will be requested at the end of the process, to see what improvements might be made to the mentoring scheme.
* A new mentoring scheme will then be put in place again in next year.

**Readings (not essential)**

If you would like to see some basic articles on the necessary skills, see the links provided below:

<https://www.thebalancecareers.com/qualities-of-a-good-mentor-1986663>

<https://www.themuse.com/advice/how-to-find-qualities-good-mentor>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbooksauthors/2020/10/15/what-makes-a-good-mentor/?sh=22cc163113c2>

https://www.forbes.com/sites/work-in-progress/2011/06/18/how-to-start-a-mentorship-relationship/?sh=2e45f6d44a27

For more academic reading, the work of David Clutterbuck is generally considered to be very good. For example, the following reference may be helpful:

David Clutterbuck, ‘Establishing and maintaining mentoring relationships: an overview of mentor and mentee competencies’ *SA Journal of Human Resource Management* 3(3): 2-9. Other references are provided below:

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