

**Mentor** - a wise and trusted guide or teacher.

### **The Role of Mentoring**

Mentoring is central to the training of staff. We assess and promote all staff in their ability to perform and mentor a given skill. In addition to formal training, mentoring should be built into the core structure of the organization throughout all relationships. Often most leaders state that the most effective “training” comes from the direct mentorship of two staff working through the experience of course/experience delivery. In the field, mentoring can play a large part in the education and training of staff and is consistent with the core value of learning through experience. In this way, every field staff, student, and course experience actively plays the role of trainer/mentor and defines a Culture of Mentorship.

### **Culture of Mentorship**

By providing resources for mentorship, emphasizing its value in trainings, and actively practicing mentoring, leaders can effectively train every staff to be a mentor and a mentee. It is valuable for staff to recognize and balance their dual responsibility of each role which includes the ability to perform a given skill and the ability to mentor a given skill.

In a culture of mentorship, it is also valuable for staff to be open to being a mentee no matter what their role. Mentoring relationships cross boundaries and roles in a wide variety of ways and in order to use mentoring to its full potential staff must be willing to be the mentee. Monty Roberts said, *“There is no such thing as a teaching; there is only learning.”*

### **Value of Mentoring**

Mentoring practices are most beneficial to staff and the organization when staff fully recognize the value of the practice. Consider the following list in delivery of your trainings to increase investment and excitement for mentoring:

- Ensure the continued training of staff beyond formal trainings
- Accelerates the development and growth of the mentee
- Aids mentees in finding paths they can pursue to grow, improve, and advance within the organization
- Provides relational support to mentees that may prevent premature “burnout”
- Impels mentors to reflect about their own teaching and learning skills
  - Increases the conscious competence level of mentors
  - Mentors are challenged to provide a higher level of educational structuring and skills such as listening, asking inquisitive questions, providing non-judgmental feedback, which makes them more effective in their other roles
- Builds and maintains strong relationships that aids in retaining staff.
- Mentors often experience professional renewal, are re-energized, and often strengthen their commitments to the organization.
- Mentoring enhances mentors self-esteem and gives them a greater sense of significance within the organization.

### **What effective mentors do: Strategies and tools for mentoring**

The question of how we effectively mentor is difficult to define. Every person has their own unique learning style, philosophy, and approach to education. The mentoring tools that work for one mentor/mentee may fail when applied to another relationship. However, there are some common mentoring practices that you have successfully used over time. Ultimately, your role as a mentor is to continually assess what mentoring tools apply best to the relationship you are in. The appropriate use of the tools and strategies alone is one of the most valuable skills and effective mentor possesses.

1. Intuition
2. Reflection and sharing of your own experience.
  - Who has influenced you?
  - What and how are you passing it on?
3. Genuine commitment and care to the development of the mentee – on a personal and personal level. Personal investment is generally a pre-requisite to the sincere relationship which defines effective mentorship. Act with empathy and compassion. Learning is a growth process and growth is often difficult.
4. Study and know your mentee: Make and accurate assessment of your mentee’s learning style and development needs. Traits to assess:
  - Who is this person
  - What is their communication style?
  - Learning style?
  - Their relevant human, technical, and educational skills.
  - Their development goals
  - Their development NEEDS (from and organizational perspective) and how it relates to their goals
5. Role model what you are mentoring
6. Encourage reflection
7. Build a safe learning environment
  - Introduce a culture of feedback
  - Frame expectations, and acceptance of imperfection
  - Show/role model your vulnerabilities
  - Mentor from a place of caring, not a place of power
  - Build a reinforce a trusting relationship
8. Challenge the mentee’s self imposed limits by pushing them out of their comfort zone.
9. Oversee the big picture
10. Act with empathy and compassion
11. Inspire
12. Allow the mentee time to practice the skills
  - Utilize free time on course
  - Check in on their progress and give feedback/further instruction as needed
  - If appropriate, supervise them teaching or using the skills with students
13. Be transparent and communicate the thought processes behind your decisions and actions
  - Find time afterwards to tell the mentee about the options you were considering and how you went about making the decision, why you chose the option you did, and your opinion on the appropriateness of that choice in retrospect.
  - Articulate the process aloud as you are going through it, and allow the mentee to observe you as you make the decision.
14. Make it a two-way relationship
  - Share how the mentor relationship will benefit you
  - Ask the mentee what they want/expect from the relationship (and what they will mentor you with)
  - Ask for feedback on your skill, actions, etc.
  - Communicate your learnings from their skills, actions, etc.

### **Considerations for mentees**

Understanding your role as a mentee is critical no matter what end of the mentoring relationship you find yourself on.

- Commitment to personal and professional development
- Acceptance and trust of the mentor’s guidance

- Openness to feedback and all the learning opportunities
- Self motivated in seeking out the mentorship they need
- Use your mentor strategically: Mentorship takes a lot of energy. Recognize what you can do on your own and what you need supervision or direction on from your mentor. Also come prepared, having completed tasks and with clear questions or requests for help on specific things. Utilize your mentor's time and help focus your development.

### **Assessing effectiveness of mentors**

1. Conscious competence in their skills: Effective mentorship starts with the ability to articulate why and how one is doing the things they are doing. Does the mentor know "why" behind what they are doing? Can they reflect on their own experiences and their observations of others and articulate the conceptual underpinnings of the event?
2. Engagement in the process of mentorship: Does the mentor seem genuinely invested in the development of their mentees? Does the mentor actively seek out mentoring opportunities?
3. Ability to create structured learning experiences for their mentee in a variety of settings: Does the mentor recognize and use teachable moments? Is the mentor experienced enough to predict when opportunities for learning will arise and be prepared for them? Does the mentor effectively frame and debrief learning experiences with her mentee?
4. Awareness of their role and effect as a mentor: Does the mentor carry themselves in a professional manner at all times? Does the mentor maintain an encourage healthy relationships with their mentee?
5. Effectiveness in facilitating development of mentee's recognized goals: Does the mentor have an effective system for referring to development goals, linking experiences to these goals, and creating opportunities for the mentee to work on these goals?
6. Working with diverse population of mentees
7. Feedback from mentees: Does the mentor solicit feedback from the mentee?

### **Practical strategies for various mentoring relationships**

1. Initial meetings
2. Check-ins ( mid course, and end of course)
3. Using scouting activities
4. Teaching lessons to students
5. Asking for input and working through decisions together

### **Questions to spark discussion and reflection on mentorship**

- What (or who) has taught me lessons that I'd like to pass along to others?
- What losses or hardships have I endured in life or professionally? What have I gleaned from these experiences?
- What type of person would I like to mentor?
- What burning issue or ideas drive my work with the Mountaineers?
- How might I enhance the future of other Mountaineers generations or develop their potential?
- What are 5 Mountaineers lessons I would like to share?