

What is Mentoring?

Definitions

Mentoring

- ◆ a developmental caring, sharing and helping relationship where one person invests time, know-how and effort in enhancing another person's growth, knowledge and skills (Shea, 1999)
- ◆ responding to critical needs in the life of another person in ways that prepare that person for greater performance, productivity or achievement (Shea, 1999)
- ◆ a deliberate pairing of a more skilled or experienced person with a lesser skilled or experienced one, with the agreed-upon goal of having the lesser skilled person grow and develop specific competencies (Murray, 1991)

Mentor

- ◆ anyone who has an important, long-lasting, beneficial life- or style- enhancing effect on another person, generally as a result of personal one-on-one contact (regardless of the media used) (Shea, 1999)
- ◆ one who offers knowledge, insight, perspective or wisdom that is helpful to another person in a relationship that goes beyond doing one's duty or fulfilling one's obligations (Shea, 1999)
- ◆ one who is involved in the life-long process of self-development, stays current in his or her respective fields, and understands how networks operate (Minor, 1995)
- ◆ someone who helps someone else learn something the learner would otherwise have learned less well, more slowly, or not at all (Bell, 1996)

Mentee

- ◆ a person being mentored by another person or persons; especially one who makes an effort to assess, internalize and use effectively the knowledge, skills, insights, perspective or wisdom offered by the mentor(s) (Shea, 1999)
- ◆ a recipient of a mentor's help, especially a person who seeks out such help and uses it appropriately for developmental purposes whenever needed (Shea, 1999)

Types of Mentor Assistance

There is no single formula for good mentoring; mentoring styles and activities vary. Different mentees will require different amounts and kinds of attention, advice, information, and encouragement. Some mentees will feel comfortable approaching their mentors; others will be shy, intimidated, or reluctant to seek help. Dietitians, as mentors, will likely take on different roles when mentoring a mentee. At times, he or she may be an **appraiser, an adviser, a teacher, or a role model.**

Appraiser

As an **appraiser**, the dietitian helps the mentee assess his or her strengths, as well as development needs, blind spots, interests and career goals. The appraiser observes performance under certain conditions and provides appropriate feedback and support.

An effective appraiser:

- ◆ observes numerous situations where the mentee can demonstrate dietetic competencies
- ◆ provides frequent constructive, positive and corrective feedback that focuses on specific, concrete, observable behaviours or competencies
- ◆ addresses performance problems in a direct, constructive way
- ◆ helps mentees define performance criteria they can use to judge their own performance
- ◆ at evaluation time, compares performance with previously agreed-upon goals and expectations
- ◆ helps mentees analyze the reasons for their successes and failures

Advisor

As an **advisor**, the dietitian, gives suggestions and advice. Bell (1996) cautions that we can fall into several traps when giving advice. These include not letting a learner struggle and find his or her own way, thinking that we alone know best, and letting the mentee become too independent on us.

An effective advisor:

- ◆ understands that for advice giving truly to work, one must be ready for a mentee to *not* take the advice
- ◆ differentiates between advice and directives - if you want the mentee to do something, you should simply give a directive; couching your requirement as advice is manipulative and will only foster distrust and resentment
- ◆ ask permission to give advice (i.e., I have some ideas of how you might improve if that would be helpful to you.)
- ◆ states his or her advice in the first person singular (i.e., "what *I* found helpful" or "what worked for me")

Teacher [facilitator]

As a **teacher [facilitator]**, the dietitian helps mentees develop and enhance their knowledge and skills. They help them understand the big picture, as well as specific skills.

An effective teacher:

- ◆ helps the mentee build knowledge and skills
- ◆ demonstrates good written and oral communication skills
- ◆ shows awareness of different learning styles
- ◆ objectively observes a mentee and analyzes causes of positive and negative performance
- ◆ demonstrates supports for a mentee when he or she is learning new tasks and roles
- ◆ provides clarity around performance expectations
- ◆ breaks tasks and activities into small meaningful chunks and manageable steps
- ◆ provides information about general trends in the dietetics field
- ◆ offers technical advice and expertise when needed

Role Model

Serving as a role model is **crucial** to mentoring. An effective role model:

- ◆ demonstrates enthusiasm for dietetics and the vision and values of his/her organization
- ◆ pursues opportunities for personal and professional growth
- ◆ stays current in one's field of expertise
- ◆ gives mentees the opportunity to voice concerns and discuss issues
- ◆ communicates and models the importance of cooperation and collaboration when solving problems and making decisions
- ◆ demonstrates integrity
- ◆ shows strong interpersonal skills
- ◆ admits mistakes and grows from them

In general, an effective mentoring relationship is characterized by mutual respect, trust, understanding and empathy. Good mentors are able to share life experiences and wisdom, as well as technical expertise. They are **good listeners, good observers, and good problem solvers**. They make an effort to know, accept, and respect the goals and interests of a student. IN the end, they establish an environment in which the student's accomplishment is limited only by the extent of his or her talent. (Advisor, Teacher..., Chapter 1, p.1. see Handout [HO])

How to Be a Great Mentor

- ◆ Know how to develop rapport with mentees.
- ◆ Protect mentees from unnecessary stress.
- ◆ Have an open-door policy and be accessible to mentees.
- ◆ Show appreciation for a diversity of opinions, work styles, etc.
- ◆ Maintain confidentiality.
- ◆ Convey empathy and support when mentees need it.
- ◆ Assist mentees in removing obstacles that may be hindering their development.
- ◆ Show interest in mentees by asking questions.
- ◆ Ask mentees about barriers to the performance or development of their desired competencies.
- ◆ Listen to mentees responses.
- ◆ Explore options for removing barriers and enhancing performance.
- ◆ Serve as a role-model.
- ◆ Allow mentees, at times, to struggle and find their own way. In doing so, be tolerant of mistakes. Making mistakes and learning from them can be a major gift in one's professional development.
- ◆ Know when to seek other mentors for the mentees. Mentors don't always know. An effective mentor recognizes that someone else may be a more helpful mentor.
- ◆ Recognize that the focus should be on helping the mentee become strong, not on helping the mentee feel better about being weak.

Mentor Behaviors to Watch Out for [be aware of]

- ◆ cultural biases and stereotypical thinking
- ◆ not taking mentees seriously
- ◆ belittling mentees for mistakes and errors
- ◆ being dictatorial
- ◆ not heeding warning signs that might indicate a mentee having problems
- ◆ abusing one's power
- ◆ couching directives as advice
- ◆ not giving feedback or giving inappropriate feedback
- ◆ having unrealistic expectations
- ◆ taking credit for a mentee's work
- ◆ not letting mentee's take the risks necessary for learning
- ◆ inadequate listening skills
- ◆ taking over mentee's problems and trying to solve them
- ◆ expecting the mentee to be perfect or as good as you are
- ◆ not being open to alternative views and unique interpretations
- ◆ thinking that you cannot learn from the mentee - work as hard to learn from them as you hope they do from you

Mentoring Across Differences

Adapted from: Mentoring Across Differences (Part 1 and 2) by Dr. L. Phillips-Jones (www.Mentoringgroup.com/html/mentor_12.htm)

Cross-difference mentoring is where the mentor and mentee differ in some ways that seems particularly large to either or both parties (i.e., race, age, culture, language, religion, style, gender, or upbringing). Dr. Phillips-Jones (2003) suggests several factors that could be standing in the way of one's comfort and effectiveness in mentoring someone considered "different." She also suggests "best practices" in cross-difference mentoring.

Best Practices in Cross-Difference Mentoring

- ◆ Become culturally self-aware: know your own values and assumptions that someone not from your culture (or group) might not readily understand.
- ◆ Know your biases and prejudices. Make a deliberate decision to change them.
- ◆ Look for commonalities.
- ◆ Don't pretend you are the same. Openly bring up the topic of differences.
- ◆ Building trust may take longer, but take some steps to enhance it. For example:
 - convey the message that you like being in this relationship and you look forward to being together
 - mention any experience you've had (or not had) working with persons with this background. Reveal mistakes you've made.
 - let the person know you want to learn about him/her as an individual and also learn about situations and challenges faced by this group. Don't assume he/she agrees with all beliefs or practices of others in the group.
 - do the usual trust-building steps: keep your promises, keep confidences, don't talk badly about someone else in front of each other
- ◆ Pay special attention to language and meanings of words.
- ◆ Learn what you can about the mentee's world.
- ◆ Don't treat the relationship as overly fragile [protective hesitation]. Use sensitivity and good manners but come up with an agreement that allows you to be open and frank with each other.
- ◆ Do several things to help your mentee succeed. Help him/her develop critical skills and gain knowledge needed to get ahead. Acknowledge your mentee's good ideas.
- ◆ Confront others who make unfair remarks about your mentee.

Advisor, Teacher, Role Model, Friend

Dietitians may find the handbook [Advisor, Teacher, Role Model, Friend: On Being a Mentor to Students in Science and Engineering](#) useful. It can be printed off from www.nap.edu/readingroom/books/mentor/. Chapters include 1) What is a mentor? (The mentoring relationship, professional ethics and population-diversity issues), 2) The mentor as faculty advisor (mentoring undergraduates), 3) The mentor as career advisor, 4) The mentor as skills consultant, 5) The mentor as role model, 6) Recommendations for improving the quality of mentoring, and 7) resources.

Excerpts from the handbook are found below. Additional information on each point can be found in the handbook.

Advice for New Mentors

- ◆ Listen patiently.
- ◆ Build a relationship.
- ◆ Don't abuse your authority.
- ◆ Nurture self-sufficiency.
- ◆ Establish "protected time" together.
- ◆ Share yourself.
- ◆ Provide introductions.
- ◆ Be constructive.
- ◆ Don't be overbearing.
- ◆ Find your own mentors.

Building Respect

- ◆ Take students seriously.
- ◆ Don't dictate answers.
- ◆ Be frank and direct.

- ◆ Held students develop self-esteem.
- ◆ Invite other mentors.
- ◆ Address fears without belittling.
- ◆ Meet on "neutral ground." Don't always meet in your office.

Building Trust

- ◆ Be a "wise and trusted counselor."
- ◆ Don't try to over-direct a student.
- ◆ Look for the "real" problem.
- ◆ Encourage feedback.
- ◆ Be direct.
- ◆ Talk at a good time.
- ◆ Watch for depression.
- ◆ Remember the goal

Mentoring is an honor. Except for love, there is no greater gift one can give than the gift of growth. It is a rare privilege to help another learn, have the relevant wisdom useful to another, and have someone who can benefit from that wisdom.

(Bell, 1996, p. 12)

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