

Comments On Corporate Mentoring

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COMMENTS ON CORPORATE MENTORING

For Use by Partnering Organizations with School of Business at Trinity Western University Students

Mentors interact with students in many ways. The relationships between student and adviser are varied, complicated and subtle. Among the most important is mentoring, a relationship of continuing guidance and role modeling that transcends classroom teaching or single-issue advising.

We are asking you to be frank, we remind you that good mentoring is not the same thing as leniency or permissiveness. Be as objective as you can in considering how well someone in your past has helped to prepare you for a productive and satisfying career.

WHAT IS A MENTOR?

The notion of mentoring is ancient. The original Mentor was described by Homer as the "wise and trusted counselor" whom Odysseus left in charge of his household during his travels.

In modern times, the concept of mentoring has found application in virtually every forum of learning. In academics, *mentor* is often used synonymously with *faculty adviser*. A fundamental difference between mentoring and advising is more than advising; mentoring is a personal, as well as, professional relationship. An adviser might or might not be a mentor, depending on the quality of the relationship. A mentoring relationship develops over an extended period, during which a student's needs and the nature of the relationship tend to change. A mentor will try to be aware of these changes and vary the degree and type of attention, help, advice, information, and encouragement that he or she provides.

In the broad sense intended here, a mentor is someone who takes a special interest in helping another person develop into a successful professional.

In the realm of education, we might say that a good mentor seeks to help a student optimize an educational experience, to assist the student's

socialization into a disciplinary culture, and to help the student find suitable employment. These obligations can extend well beyond formal schooling and continue into or through the student's career.

"Mentors are advisors, people with career experience willing to share their knowledge; supporters, people who give emotional and moral encouragement; tutors, people who give specific feedback on one's performance; masters, in the sense of employers to whom one is apprenticed; sponsors, sources of information about and aid in obtaining opportunities; models, of identity, of the kind of person one should be to be an academic."

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.

COMMENTS ON MENTORING

In Your Relationship to Student (e.g., as primary out of classroom mentor):

Professional Career Development

- Provides counsel for important professional decisions;
- Is instrumental in building my professional networks;
- Provides guidance on professional ethics;
- Promotes collegial relationships with professional community;
- Helps me to envision a career plan;
- Provides guidance on a full range of career options or to a referral.

Intellectual Growth and Development

- Encourages my imagination and creativity.
- Encourages my inventiveness including the identification of new case studies, and discovery of new techniques;
- Helps me develop my capacity for logical reasoning including abstract and theoretical reasoning as well as my ability to draw logical inferences from observational data;
- Helps me to be critical and objective concerning my own results and ideas.

Research

- Shows me how to do original research;
- Takes steps to improve my observation of natural concepts;
- Provides thoughtful advice and constructive feedback on my input.

Skill Development

- Takes steps to develop my planning and organization, communication, team-leadership skills
- Provides constructive feedback on presentation skills
- Provides constructive feedback on writing skills

Personal Communication

- Keeps in touch on my progress
- Takes into account gender, ethnic, and cultural issues
- Takes a respectful attitude toward my interests and work
- Does not abuse power—does not take advantage of my time and abilities
- Provides feedback in timely fashion

Why be a good mentor?

The primary motivation to be a mentor was well understood by Homer: the natural human desire to share knowledge and experience. Some other reasons for being a good mentor:

Achieve satisfaction. For some mentors, having a student succeed and eventually become a friend and colleague is their greatest joy.

Attract good students. The best mentors are most likely to be able to recruit – and keep – students of high caliber who can help produce better research, papers, and grant proposals.

Stay on top of your field. There is no better way to keep sharp professionally than to coach junior colleagues.

Develop your professional network. In making contacts for students, you strengthen your own contacts and make new ones.

Extend your contribution. The results of good mentoring live after you, as former students continue to contribute even after you have retired.

The Mentoring Relationship

The nature of a mentoring relationship varies with the level and activities of both student and mentor. In general, however, each relationship must be based on a common goal: to advance the educational and personal growth of the student. You as mentor can also benefit enormously.

There is no single formula for good mentoring; mentoring styles and activities are as varied as human relationships. Different students will require different amounts and kinds of attention, advice, information, and encouragement. Some students will feel comfortable approaching their mentors; others will be shy, intimidated, or reluctant to seek help. A good mentor is approachable and available.

Often students will not know what questions to ask, what information they need, or what their options are (especially when applying to graduate programs). A good mentor can lessen such confusion by getting to know students and being familiar with the kinds of suggestions and information that can be useful. In long-term relationships, friendships form naturally; students can gradually become colleagues. At the same time, strive as a

mentor to be aware of the distinction between friendship and favoritism. You might need to remind a student—and yourself—that you need a degree of objectivity in giving fair evaluations. If you are unsure whether a relationship is "too personal," you are probably not alone. Consult with the School of Business, your own mentor, or others you trust. You might have to increase the mentor-student distance.

Students, for their part, need to understand the professional pressures and time constraints faced by their mentors and not view them as merely a means—or impediment—to their goal. For business professionals, mentoring is not their primary responsibility; in fact, time spent with students is time taken away from their main responsibilities. Students are obliged to recognize the multiple demands on a mentor's time.

At the same time, effective mentoring need not always require large amounts of time. An experienced, perceptive mentor can provide great help in just a few minutes by making the right suggestion or asking the right question. This section seeks to describe the mentoring relationship by listing several aspects of good mentoring practice.

Careful listening. A good mentor is a good listener. Hear exactly what the student is trying to tell you—without first interpreting or judging. Pay attention to the undertones of the student's words, including tone, attitude, and body language. When you think you have understood a point, it might be helpful to repeat it to the student and ask whether you have understood correctly. Through careful listening, you convey your empathy for the student and your understanding of a student's challenges. When a student feels this empathy, the way is open for clear communication and more-effective mentoring.

Keeping in touch. The amount of attention that a mentor gives will vary widely. An intern who is doing well might require only "check-ins" or brief meetings. Another student might have continuing difficulties and require formal meetings more often. Try through regular contact—daily, if possible—to keep all your interns on the "radar screen" to anticipate problems before they become serious. Don't assume that the only students who need help are those who ask for it. Even an intern who is doing well could need an occasional, serious conversation. One way to increase your awareness of important issues and develop rapport is to find ways that increase your accessibility to students in non-scheduled times.

Multiple mentors. No mentor can know everything a given student might need to learn in order to succeed. *Everyone benefits from multiple mentors* of diverse talents, ages, and personalities. No one benefits when a mentor is too "possessive" of a student.

Sometimes a mentoring team works best. A non-Chinese business professional advising a Chinese student might form an advising team that includes a Chinese colleague.

Building networks. You can be a powerful ally for students by helping them build their network of contacts and potential mentors. Advise them to begin with you, other business professionals, and off-campus people met through jobs, internships, or chapter meetings of professional societies (such as Chamber of Commerce and / or Board of Trades). Building a professional network is a lifelong process that can be crucial in finding a satisfying position and career.

Professional Ethics

Be alert for ways to illustrate ethical issues and choices and on-going character development. The earlier that students are exposed to the notion of professional integrity, the better prepared they will be to deal with ethical questions that arise in their own work.

Discuss your policies on conflicts of interest, privacy, and being taken into one's confidence. Use real-life questions to help the intern understand what is meant by professional misconduct: What would you do if I asked you to cut corners in your work? What would you do if you had a boss who was unethical?

Advice for New mentors

For most people, good mentoring, like good management is a skill that is developed over time. Here are a few tips for beginners:

Listen patiently. Give the intern time to get to issues they find sensitive and embarrassing.

Build a relationship. Simple joint activities – walks through the workplace together, informal conversation over coffee, will help you to develop rapport. Take clues from as to how they want the relationship to be.

Don't abuse your authority. Don't ask interns to do personal work like picking up lunch, doing errands.

Nurture Self-Sufficiency. Your goal is not to "Clone" yourself but to encourage confidence and independent thinking.

Establish "protected time" together. Try to minimize interruptions by telephone calls or visitors.

Share yourself. Invite interns to see what you do, both on and off the job. Tell of your own successes and failures. Let the student see your human side and encourage them to reciprocate.

Provide introductions. Help the student to develop a professional network, and build a community of mentors.

Be constructive. Critical feedback is essential to spur improvement, but do it kindly and temper criticism with praise when deserved.

Don't be overbearing. Avoid dictating choices or controlling a student's behaviour.

Find your own mentors, new advisors, like new students benefit from guidance by those with more experience.

Population-Diversity Issues

In years to come, female students and students of minority groups might make up the majority of the population from which scientists and engineers will emerge. Every mentor is challenged to adapt to the growing sex, ethnic, and cultural diversity of both student and faculty populations.

Minority issues. Asians, Indo-Canadians, Blacks, Hispanics, and Aboriginal groups as a group make up a considerable percentage of our Canadian population. Many minority-group students are deterred from careers as a business professional by inadequate preparation, a scarcity of role models, low expectations on the part of others, and unfamiliarity with the culture and idioms of the work-place. Mentors can often be effective through a style that not only welcomes, nurtures, and encourages questions, but also challenges students to develop critical thinking, self-discipline, and good study habits. Expectations for minority-group students in business have traditionally been too low, and this may have had an adverse effect on achievement. A clear statement that you expect the same high performance from all students might prove helpful.

Cultural issues. You could find yourself advising interns of different cultural backgrounds (including those with disabilities) who have different communication and learning styles. Such students might hail from discrete rural or urban cultures Canada or from abroad; in many programs, foreign-born students are in the majority. If you are not familiar with a particular culture, it is of great importance to demonstrate your willingness to communicate with and to understand each student as a unique individual.

Female representation. In some fields females are well represented as students but have in the past been underrepresented in the corporate arena. In other fields—such as mathematics, physics, computer science, and engineering—females have also been underrepresented at all levels. In all fields, the confidence of female students need be no different than their male counterpart...especially as female role models are increasing.

Sexual harassment. If you mentor a student of the opposite sex, extra sensitivity is required to avoid the appearance of sexual harassment. Inappropriate closeness between mentors and students will produce personal, ethical, and legal consequences not only for the persons involved but also for the programs or institutions of which they are part.

Be guided by common sense and a knowledge of your own circumstances. Is it appropriate to invite the student to discussions at your home? During meetings, should you keep the office door closed (for privacy) or open (to avoid the appearance of intimacy)? Make an effort to forestall misunderstandings by practicing clear communication. If you do have a close friendship with an intern, special restrictions or self-imposed behavior changes might be called for.

But do not restrict interns' opportunities to interact with you because of sex differences. In a respectful relationship, mutual affection can be an appropriate response to shared inquiry and can enhance the learning process; this kind of affection, however, is neither exclusive nor romantic. For additional guidance, talk with human resources personnel, or Trinity Western University – School of Business representative.

Disability issues. Students with physical, mental, emotional, or learning disabilities can constitute approximately 10% of first-year students with planned majors in business administration. Be careful not to underestimate the potential of a student who has a disability. Persons with disabilities who enter the business and corporate workforce perform the same kinds of jobs,

in the same fields, as others in the workforce. You should also keep in mind that persons with disabilities might have their own cultural background based on their particular disability, which cuts across ethnic lines.

As a mentor, you might be unsure how to help a student with a disability. Persons with disabilities can function at the same level as other students, but they might need assistance to do so. You can play a pivotal role in finding that assistance, assuring students that they are entitled to the assistance, and confirming they are able to secure assistance. Another very important role of the mentor is in making colleagues comfortable with students who have disabilities.

Some businesses offer programs and aids such as special counseling, special equipment (adaptive computer hardware, talking calculators, and communication devices).

Remember that the student who lives with the disability is the expert and that you can ask this expert for help.

Summary

- In a broad sense, a mentor is someone who takes a special interest in helping another developing into a successful professional.
- In Business Administration, a good mentor seeks to help a student optimize an educational experience, to assist the student's socialization into a disciplinary culture, and to aid the student in finding suitable employment.
- A fundamental difference between a mentor and an advisor is that mentoring is more than advising; mentoring is a personal as well as a professional relationship. An advisor might or might not be a mentor, depending on the quality of the relationship.
- An effective mentoring relationship is characterized by mutual trust, understanding, and empathy.
- The goal of a mentoring relationship is to advance the educational and personal growth of students.
- A good mentor is a good listener.
- Everyone benefits from having multiple mentors of diverse talents, ages, and personalities.
- A successful mentor is prepared to deal with population-diversity issues, including those peculiar to ethnicity, culture, sex, and disability.

