

STAGES OF A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

“I am only one. But still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something. And because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something that I can do.”

—Edward Everett Hale

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Introduction

The concept of mentoring has been around for thousands of years, coming to us from Homer's *Odyssey*. Mentor was the teacher of Telemachus, the son of Odysseus. But Mentor was more than a teacher. He was all things to all people—half-god and half-human, half-male and half-female. Mentor represented the union of both goal and path (Peterson, 1993).

As Mentor represented the yin and the yang of life, so also mentors must pull and push their mentees. Mentoring requires strength in two different but complementary behaviors. First, mentors must *lead* by guiding interaction with their mentees. Mentors invest themselves in their mentees and uplift them. Secondly, Mentors must *support* mentees. Mentors push their mentees to become their best by encouraging development in areas of expressed need in their inventory.

Beyond these general parameters, what happens in a mentoring relationship has unlimited potential. The appeal of mentoring is that it is oriented toward the needs of individuals. Drawing a “one-size-fits-all” blueprint for effective mentoring would not be feasible. However, mentoring is not a completely spontaneous endeavor. Based on years of experience, mentors have collaborated and prepared guidelines for the many aspects of the mentoring relationship. The following paragraphs will provide material to be used to further understanding of a mentoring relationship, to initiate a relationship, and to enhance opportunities for success.

Who Is a Mentor?

A mentor plays many roles. In the historical sense, a mentor is one who:

- Is a loyal friend, confidant, and advisor.
- Is a teacher, guide, coach, and role model.
- Is entrusted with the care and education of another.
- Has knowledge or expertise to nurture another person of ability.
- Is willing to give what he or she knows with no expectation of reciprocation or remuneration.
- Represents accomplishment, knowledge, skill, and virtue.

The most effective mentors offer support, challenge, patience, and enthusiasm while they guide others to new levels of achievement. They expose their mentees to new ideas, perspectives, and standards, and to the values and norms of society. Although mentors are more knowledgeable and experienced, they do not view themselves as superior to those whom they mentor.

Once a person has decided to become a mentor, questions arise about how to establish a productive mentoring relationship. Knowing the expected stages of a mentoring relationship, as well as the mentee's personal characteristics, family, and socio-economic status (race, gender, age, economic status, family status) will alleviate many of these anxieties for the mentor.

Establishing a positive mentoring relationship is very much like establishing other valued human relationships. Both parties must have a genuine desire to understand the values and expectations of the other person, and both parties must become sensitive to the other's feelings and needs. At the same time, mentoring relationships differ from personal relationships because they are professional

in nature. Mentors are responsible for conveying and upholding the norms, values, and goals that are mutually agreed upon in the mentoring contract.

For a mentoring relationship to be healthy, it must be evolutionary rather than static in nature. The relationship changes because the purpose of the relationship is to enable the mentee to acquire new knowledge, skills, and standards of social competence. The perceptions of both members of the relationship evolve as the mentee's performance reaches new levels under the mentor's guidance and support.

The Four Stages of a Mentoring Relationship

Any successful mentoring relationship will move through four definite stages. The time spent in each one of these areas will differ from relationship to relationship, but the progression is uniform.

Stage 1

The mentor and the mentee become acquainted and informally clarify their common interests, shared values, and future goals and dreams. If taking time to become acquainted with one another's interests, values, and goals is given a high priority, the relationship seems to get off to a better start.

In this stage, there may be a lack of communication, or difficulty in communicating. Mentees may be reluctant to trust mentors, and may attempt to manipulate them. The relationship may remain in this stage from one to six meetings.

In the professional world, individuals who have desired to become mentors have analyzed aspiring newcomers in their field and have selected promising young protégés to nurture. Most of these relationships work out very well. Even though the commonalities between the mentor and the mentee in a community mentoring setting may be less than that of a mentoring pair in a business setting, the methods of mentoring remain similar. Mentors must be careful not to allow their preconceptions to dictate how they will approach the relationship and define who they think the mentee should become. While charting a course for her approach to the relationship, the mentor must consider three factors:

- The relative eagerness the mentee brings to this relationship.
- The similarities in your personal styles (animated, low-key; spontaneous, reflective; gentle, harsh; reticent, boisterous).
- The similarities in your expected short- and long-term goals.

Stage 2

The mentor and mentee communicate initial expectations and agree upon some common procedures and expectations as a starting point. In the less likely event that the two individuals may not be compatible, the pair is able to part on a friendly basis. In stage 2, there will be more listening, sharing, and confiding in one another. Values will be compared, and personal concerns will be expressed. During this stage, the mentor will likely be introduced to the mentee's family. The relationship may remain in this stage from one to three months.

Stage 3

The mentor and the mentee begin to accomplish the actual purposes of mentoring. Gradually, needs become fulfilled, objectives are met, and intrinsic growth takes place. New challenges are presented and achieved. Stage 3 is the stage of acceptance, but it is also a stage of change, where a mentee is more likely to exercise self-discipline.

Stage 4

The mentor and the mentee close their mentoring association and redefine their relationship. Follow-up is conducted.

In summary, in the four stages the mentor and mentee will acquaint themselves with one another, determine values and goals, achieve those goals, and close their relationship.

Getting Acquainted in Stage 1

There is no specific formula to integrate the proper personal and professional qualities to create a successful mentoring relationship. Some individuals are attracted to opposites; others are attracted to those with similar interests, styles, and backgrounds. Regardless, implementing the following suggestions will facilitate relationship development.

- Introduce yourself to your mentee and let him/her know how to address you. Be confident and smile!
- Learn how to pronounce your mentee's name. Write it down correctly and phonetically.
- Give your mentee the confidence that you will be dependable and will be coming to see them on a regular basis. Tell them the method of notification to use if either of you is unable to attend a scheduled appointment.
- Encourage your mentee to give you a tour of the school.
- Use an icebreaker activity and tell about yourself and allow your mentee to tell about themselves.
- Accept your mentee as he/she is. Be nonjudgmental and maintain composure if he/she initially acts in a shocking manner. The mentee may try to test your limits.
- Use positive reinforcement:
"You are a great tour guide. You made me feel welcome."
"It has been fun getting to know you through this exercise."
"I will be looking forward to next week."
- Avoid allowing the mentee to lead you into talking negatively about other students, teachers, or the administration.
- Ask open-ended questions that cannot be answered simply with a "yes" or a "no."
- Let your mentee specifically know when the next meeting will be.
- Begin the second week by reviewing the past week's activities. Try to learn more about your mentee.
- Help your mentee to understand the rationale for and value of goal planning. Get them to think about a long- or short-term goal that they would like to plan for the next meeting.
- End every session on a positive note.

(Points have been adapted from *VIPS Youth Motivator Program*, Volusia [Florida] County Schools [13].)

Goal Setting in Stages 2 and 3

Once the relationship has been established and trust and confidentiality created, mentor pairs will begin to outline goals for the relationship and the year ahead.

- Mentor and mentee will create a "contract" for their relationship that will outline personal, social, and educational goals for the year.
- Each month the pair will assess their successes and failures, chart their results, and reaffirm the value of their goals.

- For each level of accomplishment, mentors and mentees can reward one another in any way they choose.

A mentee's goals must be his/her own defined goals, not the goals that the mentor would set for them. It does not matter how outrageous these goals may seem. It is not the responsibility of the mentor to evaluate the goals of the mentee, but to help them decide for themselves how to attain those goals, or whether these goals are even feasible.

Outlandish goals give great opportunities for present-day planning. If the mentee wishes to live in a condo in a ski resort in the Swiss Alps, then the mentor can show the mentee how valuable an education will be so that the mentee can make enough money to afford the condo. This encouragement can be linked to lessons in studying foreign languages, learning how to ski, and observing foreign cultures.

The following problem-solving model is designed to assist the mentor with a step-by-step approach in formulating effective individual goals. Once individuals have decided upon their values, self-identity, and future ideals, then they will need to establish the goals to carry them on the way to success. But, because most at-risk middle school students have not assessed themselves in such depth, defining values will be a continuous exercise throughout the relationship. Through goal setting, mentees will discover their values. To set effective goals, it is important to observe the following guidelines. A goal must be:

- **Conceivable.** One must be able to conceptualize the goal and clarify what the first step or two will be.
- **Believable.** In addition to being consistent with one's own personal value system, one must believe that he/she can reach the goal. If the mentee has a low self-concept or is from an economically disadvantaged area, this may affect their goal setting.
- **Achievable.** The goals that one sets must be accomplished within his/her given strengths and abilities. To determine the mentee's strengths and abilities, set a goal, and then look at the individual components of that goal. Does the mentee have what it takes (physically, mentally, materially) to achieve this goal? Even if a goal is believable, it is not always achievable.
- **Controllable.** Sometimes goals involve others. If the others do not care to participate, then the goal is not controllable.
- **Measurable.** There must be some standard of measuring the progress achieved on a goal. Goals are measurable when they are broken down into intermediate steps with deadlines. Have mentees taken steps to completing their goals, and have they completed them in the expected time?
- **Desirable.** It may sound obvious, but a goal must be something that the mentee absolutely wants to accomplish. Often, mentees set goals merely to meet the expectations of others.
- **Stated with No Alternative.** The mentee should work toward only one goal at a time. Research shows that a person who says he/she wants to do one thing *or* another seldom gets beyond the "or." Even though the mentee may set out for one goal, he/she can stop at any time and drop it for a new one. Always discuss why the original goal did not work. But when the mentee changes goals, the new goal must be stated with no alternative.
- **Conducive to Growth.** The goal should never be destructive to the mentee, others, or society. If a student were seeking a potentially destructive goal, he/she should be encouraged to consider a different goal.

Points adapted from the *Resource Manual for Campus-Based Youth Mentoring Programs* (81–82).

The mentees will be encouraged to set goals using the mnemonic, “S.M.A.R.T” (Specific, Measurable, Action-Oriented, Realistic, and Timely). These five areas cover all of the necessary parameters in goal planning while helping mentees to memorize those parameters. Goal planning will be discussed in more detail in the goal-setting chapter.

Communication in Stages 2 and 3

Effective verbal and nonverbal communication is paramount to the success of the mentoring relationship. Mentors have the responsibility for effective communication because they are the primary source of support and challenge to the mentees. Because the mentees will most likely be different from the mentors in age, and sometimes culture, race, and gender, the mentors must know the different nuances of communication and interpretation particular to the mentee. Part of this understanding will be gained through trial and error in the relationship, but there are also factors to consider beforehand:

- How do I perceive myself in the many roles a mentor plays?
- How well do I understand my mentee’s overall expectations for our mentoring relationship?
- In general, is my communication with him/her effective, including my nonverbal and verbal communication?
- What is my objective in this conversation?
- Am I too formal or informal?
- What assumptions have I made in this conversation?
- What kind of response do I expect from my mentee?
- Am I prepared for a very different kind of response?
- Do I give him/her enough time to respond or ask questions?
- If I think I have been misunderstood, can I clarify and paraphrase?
- Am I willing to set aside my agenda to listen to his/hers at any time?

Closure in Stage 4

Closure in the relationship occurs in two major places. Naturally, closure occurs when the relationship is redefined (Stage 4) at the end of the mentoring term. But, proper closure needs to be achieved after each meeting with the mentee.

Weekly Closure

The following steps should be taken during or after each meeting with the mentee:

- During the first meeting, mentors should tell their mentees how long they will be typically meeting. Mentors should remind their mentees each week about the duration of the meeting. If the mentor lets the mentee know that he/she has another appointment five minutes before the normal ending of the session, then the mentee will feel unappreciated. Giving the notification prior to the meeting will meet expectations and avoid disappointment.
- Before leaving each week, mentors should discuss achievements and give some positive feedback to their mentees. Mentees need positive closure to make them feel upbeat, to look forward to the next week, and to motivate them to work harder during the week to please the mentor.
- Both the mentor and the mentee should keep a mutual calendar that shows the mentee when the meetings will take place. Their calendar should include vacations, business trips, holidays, and other events that would disturb the normal routine. The mentor should remind the mentee once again a week in advance of departing, and should then send a postcard while away.

- Mentors should not overstay their welcome by trying to fill extra time if they do not have activities to last throughout the duration of the meeting. If mentors do this frequently, mentees may find them boring. The best solution is to be over-prepared.
- The mentor should take this mentorship and the weekly commitment seriously. These students do not need one more insincere or unreliable relationship in their lives.

Redefining the Relationship

To have a satisfactory redefinition of the relationship at the end of the agreed term, the mentee must experience a sense of closure. The mentee should feel a sense of accomplishment, knowing that he/she is headed in the right direction toward achieving his/her goals. Because many of the youth in the program come from difficult situations, they naturally feel a sense of abandonment at the conclusion of the mentoring term. For this reason, they must know that the relationship is changing not because it was unsuccessful, but because they have succeeded and it is time for them to pursue goals in a different way. This will be achieved through verbal communication and through a little extra effort and planning on the part of the mentor. The mentor should not be limited by the following suggestions, but should rely on his/her own creativity to determine what would be the most fun and beneficial for the mentee.

- The mentor and mentee should swap some sort of an item or souvenir that would remind them of the positive experience they shared.
- The pair should have their picture taken together, and the mentor can have it framed and given to the mentee. The mentor might also prepare a scrapbook or photo album for the mentee.
- The entire group of mentors and mentees should have a final banquet, picnic, or awards ceremony for the last meeting.
- The mentor must redefine the relationship. While the mentee is still in middle school, he/she can only be considered as a “friend” to the mentor, but that does not keep the pair from using a more creative definition, such as being “associates” or “partners.”
- The mentor must assure the mentee of future communication and accountability. They must decide on their method and frequency of future communication.

Such end-of-the-year activities can be effective ways to redefine the relationship, leaving it on a happy note.

(Points adapted from the *Resource Manual for Campus-Based Youth Mentoring Programs* [83].)

Stages of a Mentoring Relationship

Lesson Plan

Objective: To help mentors understand and give insight into the stages and importance of the mentoring relationship.

Lesson: The instructor will discuss:

- Who Is a Mentor?
- The Four Stages of a Mentoring Relationship
- Getting Acquainted
- Goal-Setting
- Communication
- Closure
- Redefining the Relationship

Materials:

- Worksheet (1): Openings and Closings
- Worksheet (2): Mentor/Mentee Ice Breaker
- Worksheet (3): Additional Information
- Two Sets of Calendar Months from September To December
- Handout (1): Getting Acquainted
- Handout (2): Relationship Considerations
- Overhead (1): Objectives
- Overhead (2): Stage One Considerations
- Overhead (3): Closure
- Overhead (4): Three Necessities in Closure

Openings and Closings

Three factors for me to consider in Stage 1:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Five ways for me to help my mentee experience closure each week:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Three necessities for me to tackle when closing (Stage 4) the relationship:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Mentee

Favorite color:

Height:

Last book read:

Most admired celebrity:

Three wishes:

Favorite memory:

Best friend:

Time I get up in the morning:

Makes me mad:

Eye color:

Last time I cried:

Food I hate:

Belief in which we agree:

Mentor

Favorite color:

Height:

Last book read:

Most admired celebrity:

Three wishes:

Favorite memory:

Best friend:

Time I get up in the morning:

Makes me mad:

Eye color:

Last time I cried:

Food I hate:

Belief in which we agree:

Additional Information

Write three additional questions that cannot be answered with a “yes” or a “no.”

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Checklist for the Completion of the First Meeting

Did I:

- Introduce myself and let the mentee know how to address me?
- Learn how to pronounce the mentee’s name?
- Tell the student how I will notify him or her if I cannot make the meeting?
- Use the icebreaker activity effectively?
- Accept the student as he or she is and not be judgmental?
- Use positive reinforcement?
- End on a positive note?

Insert a current calendar similar to this one for each month of the mentor’s commitment.

October

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

Getting Acquainted

There is no specific formula to integrate the proper personal and professional qualities to create a successful mentoring relationship. Some individuals are attracted to opposites; others are attracted to those with similar interests, styles, and backgrounds. Regardless, the mentor should do all of the following when becoming acquainted with the mentee.

- Introduce yourself to your mentee and let him/her know how to address you. Be confident and smile!
- Learn how to pronounce the mentee's name. Write it down correctly and phonetically.
- Give your mentee the confidence that you will be dependable and will be coming to see him/her on a regular basis. Tell the mentee the method of notification to use if either of you is unable to meet.
- Allow your mentee to give you a tour of the school.
- Use the icebreaker activity and tell about yourself and allow your mentee to tell about himself/herself.
- Accept your mentee as he/she is. Be nonjudgmental and maintain composure if he/she initially acts in a shocking manner. He may try to test your limits.
- Use positive reinforcement:
"You are a great tour guide, you made me feel welcome."
"It has been fun getting to know you through this exercise."
"I will be looking forward to next week."
- Avoid allowing your mentee to lead you into talking negatively about other students, teachers, or the administration.
- Ask open-ended questions that cannot be answered simply with a "yes" or a "no."
- Let your mentee specifically know when next week's meeting will be.
- Begin the second week by reviewing the past week's activities. Try to learn more about your mentee.
- Help your mentee to understand the meaning and value of goal planning. Get your mentee thinking about a long- or short-term goal that he/she would like to plan for the next meeting.
- End every session on a positive note.

Relationship Considerations

Part of relating to your mentee will be learned through trial and error in the relationship, but there are also factors for you to consider beforehand.

- How do I perceive myself in the many roles a mentor plays?
- How well do I understand the mentee's overall expectations for our mentoring relationship?
- In general, is my communication with him/her effective, including my nonverbal and verbal communication?
- What is my objective in this conversation?
- Am I too formal or informal?
- What assumptions have I made in this conversation?
- What kind of response do I expect from the mentee?
- Am I prepared for a very different kind of response?
- Do I give him/her enough time to respond or ask questions?
- If I think I have been misunderstood, can I clarify and paraphrase?
- Am I willing to set aside my agenda to listen to his/hers at any time?

Objectives

In this lesson, the mentor will:

- Learn how to use and practice using an icebreaker activity.
- Learn how to create and implement a mentoring contract.
- Learn how to use a meeting calendar.
- Learn how to close a relationship.

Stage 1 Considerations

In Stage 1, while charting the mental course for the relationship, I must consider:

- The degree of eagerness my mentee brings to our relationship.
- The similarities in our personal styles.
- The similarities in our expected goals.

Closure Considerations

For my mentee to experience closure each week, I must:

- Notify him or her about the duration of our meeting.
- Discuss achievements and give positive feedback.
- Update our mutual calendars.
- Be prepared to fill the meeting time with activities.
- Take every moment seriously.

Closing the Relationship (Stage 4)

Three necessities:

- Trade a memento with your mentee.
- Redefine your future relationship with him or her.
- Develop a plan for future communication.

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