Guidelines to the stages of the mentoring relationship

The mentoring relationship may typically go through three stages, these are described as follows:

Stage 1 - The Beginning

This phase is all about developing rapport and building trust.

One of the best ways to build trust is to help the mentee quickly accomplish something tangible that is important to him/her. For example, to assist them in following up on an interest, getting involved in a club, or meeting someone important in a career or a field of interest. Testing behaviours may occur particularly when the client may have experienced failure and disappointments in the past.

It is important for the mentor to be predictable. Predictability builds trust so the mentor should, for example, always:

- Be on time for arranged meetings.
- Bring promised information and materials.
- Follow through on agreements and arrangements with the client.
- Provide client's reassurance that what is discussed together is confidential.

Though this phase may not be difficult in all relationships, it may be in some. It is important for the mentor to be prepared for initial disappointments and frustration, and be prepared for this to take some time.

Stage 2 - Developing The Relationship:

This phase is all about working together in order to reach goals. This can be a time of closeness in the relationship, the relationship as it develops can take on many forms, these can be broken down into two key types, namely:-

a) A relationship where contact meetings are frequent.
b) A less intense relationship where the focus is on accomplishing tasks.

Mentors may find the relationship fluctuating between a) and b) over time.

Stage 3 - Ending:

This phase is all about re-defining and evaluating. It is a crucial part of the relationship, the way the relationship ends can shape how both the mentor and the mentee thinks about and learns from the experience.

The mentor should plan ahead for the end of the relationship with the client, and encourage the mentee to verbalise her/his feelings about the relationship and help him/her to feel supported and in control. Whatever you do, do not just drop out of sight.

First Session with Client

Although initially the mentor may find him/herself doing most of the talking, the mentor should encourage the client do most of the talking by the use of appropriate questioning skills (see Box 1). A typical format for the discussion could be for the mentor to:

- Introduction them self to the client
- Explain who he/she is
- Where she/he works
- What jobs have you done in the past?
- What the client understands about mentoring - why they think the mentor is there
- What the mentor believes she/he is there for:
    - Links to the business and commercial world
    - Someone objective for them to talk to
    - Opportunity for the mentor to assist with a small business
    - Opportunity for mentor to develop
- What 'ground rules' need to be agreed on? It is important that any 'rules' should be agreed upon at the outset. A “Mentor / Mentee Agreement” Form should be completed at this stage and a “Code of Ethics” may also referred to.
- The issue of confidentiality. It would be useful to restate that a mentor will not gossip, but may have to discuss some issues with the Coordinator. Equally, clients should agree not to gossip about anything personal that might be said.
- It is important to discuss the issue of responsibility. The mentee is responsible for all decisions affecting his/her business, but the mentor needs to agree that both have a responsibility to attend meetings and that each person will let the other know well in advance if they are unable to attend.

- Confirm that if an agreement is made, both will stick to it. For example, if one person promises to find out some information, it will be done.
- Meeting durations which will vary according to the needs of the mentee. As the relationship evolves meetings may last for about 2 - 4 hours, and occur once every 3-4 weeks.
- End on a positive note - looking forward to working together, etc.

Second Session with Client

The mentor should:

- Review the last session. How did the mentee feel about it?
- Try to get to know mentee better
- Find out how the mentee is doing at place of work/in the business
- Find out what elements of their work do they enjoy?
- Find out what do they find difficult? Are there particular problem areas?
- Find out what do they think of the help they have received in setting up their business?
- Find out if the mentee is willing to make any changes?
- Find out what outside interests the mentee has

This is not an interview. To build up a rapport with the mentee the mentor will need to develop a conversation, rather than just ask questions. It is up to the mentor to decide how much they want to talk about themselves. In some ways it would be helpful to share experiences, but neither parties should feel that they have to 'bare their souls'!

In summary, in the first session the scene should be set with both parties discussing what will happen. In the second session the mentor is finding out more about the client and the client should be doing more of the talking. Box 3 summarises some typical forms of listening.

If appropriate session 1 (setting the scene) and session 2 could be combined.

Ideas for future meetings

It is really very much up to mentor and mentee to decide what to talk about. For the mentor listening is more important than talking.

When objectives are discussed, mentors should ensure that they are SMART:

- **S**pecific:- are clearly defined
- **M**easurable:- the metrics of the objectives are understood
- **A**chievable:- may be stretching, but are achievable
- **R**elevant:- relate to the overall goals of the organisation
- **T**imed:- are to be completed within a specified time-frame.

Box 3: Some typical forms of Questioning

Questioning Technique	Description	When is it useful?	When is it not so useful?
CLOSED	"How long have you been in business?" Narrow; establishes specific points of fact.	Probing single facts. Starting the discussion	Gaining new and unexpected information in areas not known by the mentor
OPEN	"How do you feel about e-commerce?" This encourages a person to talk.	Most openings. To open up the discussion and gather information	With talkative person!
PROBING	"Exactly what happened next?" This could follow an "open" question to get further information	Gaining detail	Exploring emotionally charged areas.
REFLECTIVE	"That confrontation with your customer bothered you?" Repeat back emotional content of a person's statement	Emotionally charged situations. However it is straying into the counselling arena!	Getting to know what makes the client "tick"
LEADING	"I suppose you're sorry now are you?" This invariably leads to the answer you expect.	Gaining acceptance of your viewpoint	Gaining new information
HYPOTHETICAL	"What would you do if ...?" Posing a hypothetical situation	Very powerful for getting a person to think about new areas	With a person who needs time to give a reasoned reply
MULTIPLE	String of questions/statements	Never	Always