MENTORING AND COACHING - QUICK TIPS

Mentoring (or coaching) is recognized as an important element in career and professional development and an institution benefits from an effective mentoring program. An effective mentoring program has the buy-in of academic leaders, faculty, and students. Here are some quick tips to help you implement or participate in a mentoring program.

Why Mentoring?

Mentoring programs have many possible outcomes, and are most successful when designed with identified specific goals. Outcomes of a mentoring program can include:

- pass along the practices, expectations, and core values of the institution or profession;

- welcome and encourage the inclusion of diverse and underrepresented groups into the institution or to disciplines;

- improve the recruitment, retention, socialization, commitment, and performance of members new to academia.

Mentors indicate that they often find satisfaction, fulfillment, professional renewal, broadened networks, and other personal and professional ends, through service as a mentor.

Creating a Successful Mentoring Program

Articulating specific goals when designing a program is central. A successful mentoring relationship does not happen by chance; an effective program depends on the input and buy-in of academic leaders, faculty, and students.

Mentoring pairs can arise spontaneously and informally due to the normal interaction of a senior and junior member of an institution or profession, or they can grow out of formal programs. There is no agreement about which is best. There are indications that participants prefer to have some element of choice in their pairings.

Academic leaders can create, communicate, and promote an institutional environment conducive to participation in mentoring by:

- training and preparing both mentor and mentee for their roles;

- recruiting excellent mentors;

- integrating and balancing mentoring with scholarship, teaching, and service;

- recognizing and rewarding the success of excellent mentors and mentees.

An Ideal Mentor-Mentee Pair

Not all mentoring relationships are successful. A good pairing will involve a proper match and commitment from both partners. In an effective pairing:

- both partners receive some training or preparation; share a commitment to professional development and advancement; and establish trust and confidence;

- personal styles and personalities of mentor and mentee are compatible for the goal of the pairing, taking into account goals, personalities, and level of professional development;

- the partners communicate and meet at regular and agreed times, whether in time periods or at specific professional milestones or needs;

- there is an understanding of, and reasonable expectations and boundaries for what the mentor relationship is intended to accomplish.

The effectiveness of a mentor-mentee pair depends greatly on the role of the mentor. The mentor offers two main types of support and advice:

- For career development, a mentor provides assistance ranging from introductions to others in the profession, to feedback on research and writing.
- For the psychosocial function of mentoring, the mentor provides professional emotional support, encompassing advice, acceptance or confirmation, and/or networking connections.

Ideally, the mentor should:

- have appropriate knowledge, experience, and influence, and serve as a professional role model of good practice;
- be knowledgeable about important professional issues;
- encourage the mentee's own critical self-awareness and development;
- employ effective "soft skills" in the mentoring role to elicit introspection and growth in the mentee.

Ideally, the mentee should:

- be open to accepting feedback and advice, being willing to reflect upon even unwanted messages with an open mind;
- take initiative to find mentor(s), both within and outside ones institution;
- have both formal and informal mentors, and including mentors for different areas of interest;
- be willing to ask for help when needed;
- recognize which mentors should be consulted in a given situation.

Forms of Mentoring

Mentoring has traditionally been a one-to-one relationship between a senior, experienced person and a junior partner. Emerging newer forms put mentoring in a broader context of personal development, social justice, and socialization.

There are two common forms of alternative mentoring. Your institution can offer:

- peer mentoring (or co-mentoring), which brings together individuals, colleagues, or groups at similar career stages. The peers encourage each other and share information, learning, and research methods ;
- developmental networks (also called "constellations" or "mentoring mosaics"), which provide mentoring through a network within an organization.

The functions of mentoring are increasingly being carried out electronically via email and on the Internet through social media, chat rooms, blogs, and web conferencing.

Mentoring, STEM, and Diversity

Mentoring programs can be a means toward inclusion of traditionally underrepresented groups and achieving diversity in STEM. Alternative forms of mentoring can be especially effective for these goals. It is helpful for mentors to be attentive and aware of cultural differences and biases when interacting with mentees.