

Skillbook

Mentoring Skills

Team Management
Skills



Mindtools

Mentoring Skills

Skillbook

This Skillbook is published by Mind Tools Ltd.
21 Young Street, Edinburgh, Scotland, EH2 4HU.

Copyright © Mind Tools Ltd, 2025.
All rights reserved.

Version 7.0.

This Skillbook is protected by international copyright law. You may use it only if you are a Mindtools member or have received it under corporate license.

If you have any queries, please contact us at
mtecustomerservices@mindtools.com.

Contents

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Your Own Experiences of Being Mentored	2
3.	Becoming a Mentor to Others	5
4.	Planning to Mentor Someone	7
5.	Empowered Mentoring	9
6.	Key Learning Points	11

1. Introduction

Mentoring is a fulfilling relationship between two people: the “mentor” and the “mentee.” The mentor believes in the other person’s talents, and is committed to their success. The mentee is keen and willing to learn and grow, and to be the best that they can be.

Mentoring is a skill that you can learn and use to develop members of your own team, as well as colleagues across the organization.

Both sides stand to gain a lot from the mentoring relationship, in terms of personal satisfaction and skills development. But, as with any interpersonal journey, there are challenges, such as setting boundaries, setting effective goals, and maintaining regular contact despite busy schedules. Effective mentoring involves finding your way around those challenges, and taking advantage of the many opportunities that it presents.

To be a good mentor, you need to understand what mentoring truly is, and what it takes to enter a mentoring relationship.

There are many tools that you can use to build meaningful mentoring relationships, and these can significantly improve the productivity and effectiveness of both you as the mentor, and your mentee.

You’ll be introduced to some of these tools in this **Skillbook** session. You’ll also start thinking about the role that mentoring can have in your own professional life.

In the next hour, you’ll learn:

1. How you may have benefited from mentoring in the past.
2. What you have to offer as a mentor.
3. The steps involved in formulating a mentoring plan.

“A lot of people have gone further than they thought they could, because someone else thought they could.”

– Zig Ziglar, American author.

2. Your Own Experiences of Being Mentored

Mentoring is highly effective for developing talented people within your organization, for supporting professional goals, and for sharing skills in a mutually beneficial partnership.

A mentoring relationship is often characterized by someone more experienced helping a less experienced person to grow and learn in their role.

Effective mentoring focuses on the relationships, commitments and resources needed to help the less experienced person find success and fulfillment in their professional pursuits.

Mentors help others to learn something more quickly and thoroughly than they might on their own, and help them to successfully navigate the many problems and obstacles that can come up in their careers. Mentoring can be a short-term relationship, or span many years, depending on the needs of the mentee.

Some mentors are encouragers, some are advisors, and some are more like teachers. Regardless of style, mentoring requires an investment of time, thought and energy.

One of the best ways to discover the mentor in you is to examine your past experiences of being mentored yourself. Your mentors could have been former bosses, colleagues or peers, and your mentoring experiences could have occurred in a variety of ways, whether at work or in your personal life.

During your own mentoring experiences you'll likely have established a good relationship with another (usually more experienced) person. Often, this person will have helped you to learn new skills, or to prepare for future roles and responsibilities by sharing their knowledge and wisdom with you.

Overall, when someone helped you as a mentor, you knew it!

Note:

Be aware that mentoring is not the same as coaching.

Coaching is a formal process, usually focused on specific career goals, and is “non-directive:” you encourage individuals to identify solutions themselves.

Mentoring is informal, takes on a longer-term and broader focus, and is not limited to current performance or activities. The goal is professional and personal development.

Ultimately, a mentor may also be a coach: however, a coach is often not a mentor.



Action:

To understand how you have benefited from mentoring in the past, reflect on your experiences by answering the questions in the table below.

The answers to these questions can help you to think about the kind of mentor that you want to be. They can also help you to see how to develop positive and productive mentoring relationships with others.

What kind of mentoring did you receive? Was it at work or in your personal life, one-off or regular?
How did it compare with the mentoring that the people around you received?
What did you find helpful and unhelpful about the mentoring that you received?
How much did the mentoring you received contribute to your professional and/or personal success?
How well did your mentor(s) prepare you for your career? In what way did they do this?
What other kinds of mentoring would have been helpful to you?



Action:

Next, consider significant events and people in your life. Think about these in terms of mentoring, and then fill in the table below.

Have you had an “ah ha!” moment in your life? Who helped you to make the discovery? How did this person impact your life, and in what way could they be considered a mentor?

Has someone ever said something to you that was so profound that you’ve carried it with you ever since? Who was the person? What did they say? Would you consider this person a mentor? Why, or why not? What mentoring qualities did you learn from this person?

Is there a person who helped you uncover a latent talent, ability or desire? How did this person encourage you and help you with your discovery? How has this impacted your life and your mentoring vision?

3. Becoming a Mentor to Others

Good mentoring rarely “just happens.” It develops from reflection, planning and an understanding of your unique qualities as a mentor. Just as other people mentored you in different ways, you will help your mentees in your own unique way.

It's important to remember that effective mentoring has many dimensions. The best mentors adjust their role to meet their mentees' needs.

There is no single formula for good mentoring, but there are key characteristics and behaviors that build a strong foundation for it. These are:

- **Approachability:** let your mentee know that you are interested and available. Your mentee will likely get more from the relationship if they know that they can come to you, and that you care about their situation.
- **Desire to help:** make sure that you're truly interested in helping your mentee, without expectation of help in return, and communicate this willingness to help.
- **Information sharing:** be willing to share information openly, and establish a pattern of mutual information exchange. Share your own experiences of similar situations. Encourage your mentee to try new things and expand their own knowledge base.
- **Open communication:** make sure that contact is regular and meaningful.
- **Trustworthiness:** ensure that your mentee feels free to discuss issues with you, without fear of disapproval or judgement.
- **Respect:** let your mentee know that you respect their time and opinions. Share what you learn from them. Acknowledge their skills and progress.
- **Appropriate feedback:** offer honest observations to your mentee in a respectful and gentle manner. Timely, assertive, empathic, and clear communication is important.
- **Technical expertise:** keep your own knowledge up to date by staying abreast of relevant developments in your industry.
- **Supportiveness:** take time to motivate, encourage and empower your mentee.

These qualities tell your mentee that they are valuable, that you will be honest, and that you are engaged with – and supportive of – their development and success. These are powerful messages that will help your mentee get through challenges and emerge feeling stronger and more capable.

Remember, mentoring is a two-way relationship. It's a process in which both parties benefit from networking, sharing ideas, and interaction. This can lead to long-term friendship and mutual growth.



Action:

Think about your interest in being a mentor, and answer the questions in the table below.

Why Do You Want to Mentor?
What characteristics do you possess that will make you a good mentor?
What benefits do you believe you will gain from a mentoring relationship?

4. Planning to Mentor Someone

As you enter into a mentoring relationship with someone, it's useful to clarify your own goals and expectations. For this to be a mutually rewarding experience, you should have a good idea of how the relationship will work. Of course, as the relationship grows, your views may change but having a place to start is useful.

Issues to consider when thinking about your expectations include:

Why do you want to be a mentor?

- Help less experienced people achieve their potential?
- “Give back” and pass on knowledge?
- Provide encouragement and support to someone else?
- Challenge yourself to learn new things?
- Further develop your network?

What do you expect to discuss, explore and provide?

- Career options and development?
- Technical issues?
- How to network?
- How to maintain a work-life balance?
- How to identify and fulfill personal dreams?
- Workplace realities?
- Help in securing a job: for example, looking at opportunities, interviews and resumés?

What are the rules of the relationship?

- Confidentiality?
- Sharing personal details?
- Meeting places and times?
- Time commitments?

Tip:



“Reverse mentoring” is when younger, junior or less experienced staff share their knowledge with senior team members.

It can lead to significant insights about how groups differ to you think and behave. It's also a good way to keep up with the latest industry trends, using the expertise of people who may have learned new techniques or approaches. It's also a great opportunity for newer or younger workers to connect with the company and become more engaged.



Action:

Use the questions on the previous page to help you think about your expectations as a mentor, and note these on the table, below.

Mentoring Expectations
Who are you thinking of mentoring? Perhaps someone you work closely with or who's asked for help.
What will you discuss and explore? Have they mentioned anything they want to work on?
What rules do you want to apply? Consider confidentiality, meeting times and time limitations.
How will you get started? Identify some next steps.

5. Empowered Mentoring



nce you begin mentoring, it's essential to maintain the momentum of the relationship, and to continue to respect its boundaries. It's easy to get too involved, and want to solve your mentee's problems for them. Remember, you are there to support and teach, not to take action.

The best mentoring is a process rather than an event. As a mentor, you are providing guidance so that your mentee can solve their own problems and develop in their own way. You are not expecting your mentee to do exactly what you did. You are empowering them with knowledge, so that they can decide the best steps for their unique situation.

You want to encourage your mentee to take responsibility for achieving the goals they set, and this means giving them the time and space to complete their own tasks. Be prepared and available to provide advice and counsel as your mentee nears completion, but resist the temptation to solve the problem for them directly.

Some of our most valuable lessons come from making mistakes, so let your mentee fall down occasionally, as long as this isn't too damaging. Then, encourage them to get back up again, and find an alternative way to reach their goal.

As a way to build confidence, find areas where your mentee can prove their success, and help them to showcase their accomplishments to others. Not only does this increase their visibility across the organization, it helps them build a useful network of experts to consult. This is essential, as no matter how experienced you are, you won't have all the answers. So help your mentee connect with others that can help them in pursuit of their goal.

The ability to ask great questions is a valuable mentoring skill. It will help your mentee to consider challenges from a different perspective. This pushes them to think for themselves, and it encourages more comprehensive discussions.

Similarly, where they've identified things that they need to work on, encourage your mentee to set and achieve SMART goals that lead to this.

To make the most of any mentoring relationship, make sure that you have thoughtful discussions with your mentee, and check in regularly to see what they need from you to achieve their goals and objectives.

Finally, effective mentoring requires you to actively listen to what is being said, which goes beyond just the words your mentee says. You also need to watch for other signals, such as their body language and tone of voice. Show your mentee that you're paying attention by maintaining eye contact, restating what they've said, and asking questions. Some of the topics your mentee wants to discuss could be emotional for them, so make sure to show empathy at all times, too.



Action:

Think about some ways that you can empower your mentee and make a note of these, below.

Empowering Your Mentee
What knowledge or experiences can you share that relate to your mentee's challenges or goals?
What are some of the steps you could recommend to your mentee to put their learning into practice?
Who could you introduce your mentee to, who might be able to help with a challenge or goal?
What questions can you ask to help your mentee see their situation from a different perspective?

6. Key Learning Points

Done properly, mentoring can be fulfilling for both the mentor and the mentee. It's great for training and development, and it can have a significant, positive impact on the way that mentees achieve their goals. Both mentor and mentee will often learn from one another in a mutually satisfying way.

To prepare for a great mentoring relationship, examine your own experiences of being mentored – what did you learn that you can apply as a mentor?

Treat the mentoring relationship with the respect it deserves. Use the benefit of your own knowledge and experience to guide them, but focus on your mentee's needs. Regularly check how you can help them; this could be through advice, or by helping them be seen by others in the organization.

As a mentor, your role is to be supportive, share your experience and expertise, and to encourage your mentee to achieve their goals. But remember, you're not there to solve their problems for them.

Finally, be sure to use techniques such as smart questioning and active listening in your interactions, to make sure that your mentee feels listened to and valued.