
MENTORING: A POWERFUL PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND EMPOWERMENT TOOL

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Abstract

Mentoring is a formal or informal relationship where a more experienced individual helps the less experienced individual in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking. It is related to self-development, professional growth and career development of the mentee. To be a successful mentor requires adequate knowledge and understanding of process as well as the variety of styles, skills and techniques that are appropriate to the context in which the mentoring takes place. The mentoring relationship can be for beginners as well as experienced practitioners such as teachers, administrators, managers, and other professionals. The paper presented that mentoring enhances the best practices for the development of the mentee. It focuses on the concept of mentoring, its challenges and effects. The paper recognizes some recommendations which include making mentoring equally accessible to every cadre of employee. Mentoring newly appointed staff should be considered a priority and external monitoring and assessment of performance for promotion and remuneration should be separated from the day to day mentoring program.

In the workplace, relationships naturally develop between co-workers, clients, supervisors, and subordinates. As a new worker/employee, one deserves to know what to do in a bid to enhance or enforce effective work relationship. It is an acclaimed fact that in most cases all that was learnt in school is not close to what is seen in day to day world of work, therefore, to be fully abreast in the world of work, mentoring is very necessary to enable the new worker(s) to understand the roles that are expected in the work place. Mentoring are strategies used by older and more experienced person to help young people of all circumstances achieve their potentials.

Mentors are caring individuals like parents, guardian, teachers and religious leaders who provide young people with assistance, guidance, affection, support and suitable example. Every young person who would benefit from a mentoring relationship has individual needs. Effective mentoring programs offer enough flexibility to help meet each mentee's personal needs, yet allow mentoring relationships to flourish within a safe structure (Gail and Tonya 2005). Mentoring refers to an on-going relationship between a caring adult and a young person. The ideology of mentoring is that human

beings are strong and are capable of discovering what they really want by having a coach who has been there to render help.

Every profession is unique from the cleaner up to the chief executive and adequate mentoring programs have become necessary for the workers to function properly. Mentoring programs will help workers to transit in work place, finding satisfaction in the job they are doing. Mentoring programs provide the beginning worker with a personal guide who helps the new/younger staff to manoeuvre the system. Mentoring programs vary from one organisation to another. Hattie Bessent a highly respected scholar in the nursing profession is recognized for her work in mentoring and increasing the number of minority nurses assuming leadership positions (Bessent, 2002). The implication of mentoring as a powerful personal development and empowerment tool is that the individual is mentored to become and work in a manner that is acceptable. This paper therefore, with special emphasis examined the concept and types of mentoring, factors that support or hinder mentoring among workers and benefits of mentoring. The paper also investigated the roles and qualities of an effective mentor and made some recommendations.

The Concept of Mentoring

The concept of mentoring is familiar in public/private organisations and apprenticeship programs. Mentoring ensures that access to training programs and other skill acquisition opportunities are geared to the needs, objectives and pursuit of the individual. Mentoring is not limited to newly employed staff, but to older employees as it can be beneficial in enabling them to assume responsibility at all stages through training and retraining, for the growth and achievement of the departmental and or organizational objectives. There are several definitions to describe what mentoring is all about: Mentoring is defined as, “a deliberate pairing of a more skilled or experienced person with a lesser skilled or experienced one, with the agreed-upon goal of having the lesser skilled person grow and develop specific competencies (Murray, 2006).” According to Kram (1985), mentoring is a relationship between a young adult and an older, more experienced adult that helps the younger individual learn to navigate in the adult world and the world of work.

The writer’s definition of mentoring is that it is a process of informal education based on one-on-one relationships and respect which starts from birth and continues through a life time. An important part of mentoring for the writer is that, it is education first and foremost. Mentoring is a partnership between two or more people (mentor and mentee). These persons normally work in a similar field or share similar experiences. Mentoring is one type of relationship that can be very beneficial in the workplace and a tool for advancing an individual’s career. Mentoring builds long standing relationship that provides the mentor and mentee the benefits of giving support and know-how in

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carrying out a job, increased delight in the office, and piloting the affairs of an organization.

The Mentor: Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary sees a mentor as an experienced person who advises and helps somebody with less experience over a period of time. The word mentor, according to Webster's New World College Dictionary (2002), is defined as "a wise, loyal advisor, a teacher or coach." This person spots you, takes you under his/her tutelage, and gives you coaching and advice, both personally and professionally. Fawcett (2002) posits that good mentors have specific characteristics such as patience, enthusiasm, knowledge, respect and a sense of humour.

The Mentee: The mentee refers to the person, usually a junior, who is being mentored. The mentee is a less experienced person/employee who is guided by a more experienced employee. The mentee is offered special guidance and support by a respected and trusted person with more experience on the job. Fawcett (2002) sees good mentee as one who should be hardworking, willing to learn, and anxious to succeed.

Types of Mentoring

Mentoring relationships develop either formally or informally between the mentor and the mentee. In the formal mentoring relationship both the mentor and mentee work together in a similar field or share similar experiences. On the other hand, Chao, Waltz & Gardner, (1992), states that informal mentoring relationship occurs between the mentor and mentee naturally such as parent/child, religious leader/members, friends and others. The mentor or mentee seeks the other out because of the ability to relate easily with each other.

For a mentoring relationship to work there must be a willing mentor interested to teach a mentee to make the pairing successful. Mentoring varies from a single meeting between mentor and mentee, to a more structured type which involves frequent meetings over a period of one or more years. The mentoring relationship comes in the following forms:

Traditional Mentoring: a model which involves One-on-one mentoring where one mentor is working with one mentee. Traditional mentoring is a natural process whereby the mentor and mentee come together by collective respect, shared experiences and common interests. It is a personal face-to-face, long-term relationship between an adult and a younger person that addresses the individual's needs in knowledge, work or thinking.

Peer Mentoring: Wikipedia free encyclopedia sees peer mentoring as a form of mentorship that usually takes place between a person who has lived through a specific experience and a person who is new to that experience. Peer mentoring is a caring senior

youth mentoring a younger youth. This category of mentor has been trained to teach important skills and know-how to other students through a mentoring process.

Group Mentoring: Group mentoring involves one adult and up to four younger people with learning needs. It is also a group of individuals who engage in a mentoring relationship to achieve specific learning goals through the assistance of a mentor.

Team Mentoring: Several adults working with small groups of young people in which the adults engage the mentees to achieve their learning goals. Team Mentoring is based on accomplishment by experienced people as well as newcomer's through joint team effort. It also means a Mentee having more than one experienced mentors of the same field to take charge of fulfilling the various mentoring roles.

E-mentoring: Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia states that e-mentoring is a means of providing a guided mentoring relationship using online software or email. It stemmed from mentoring programs with the invention of the internet and is simply the mentoring via e-mail and the Internet where many forms of computer-assisted learning are widespread. There are computer-based training, interactive training programs and materials that can be down loaded from the internet that assist learning.

Locations of Mentoring

There are several locations where mentoring relationships can take place. Mentoring can take place in a wide array of settings, such as these:

Workplace: Dictionary Encyclopedia describes the workplace as the physical location where someone works. The workplace setting ranges from a home office to a large office building or factory, industry, company etc. where people are employed to work.

Faith-Based Organization: This term refers to associated religious organisations that deliver different kinds of services to the public. Some of the faith-based organization where mentoring take place are churches, mosques and traditional religious gatherings.

Juvenile Correction Facility: is a protected residential facility where under aged suspects or delinquents are kept while awaiting court hearings and/or placed in long-term care facilities and programs. At the center many services are provided according to the individual needs such as education, recreation, health, assessment, counseling and other intervention services with the aim of maintaining a youth's well-being during his or her stay in custody.

Community Setting: Communities are known by the geographical boundary area, administrative area covered by a service, social network or as a group of people with

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shared characteristics. The community level opens up opportunities for empowerment and building up the capacity of communities to participate in meeting their needs.

Virtual Community: A virtual community is a social network of individuals who interact through specific social media, potentially crossing geographical and political boundaries in order to pursue mutual interests or goals. The most prevalent virtual communities are online communities operating under social networking services.

Factors that Support or Hinder Mentoring

There are numerous factors that could either support or hinder the mentoring process of an individual or a group of persons that the mentor and the mentee need to identify. Some factors that could support mentoring include having respect for each other, having time for the process, willingness to give and keep information. Also the barriers to effective mentoring include not having an interested mentor for a mentee, unfavourable environment, lack of feedback and many others.

Factors that Support Mentoring: There are several factors that can support the mentoring process in any setting: Many people feel that being a mentor requires special skills, but mentors are simply people who are good role models with good listening skills. Mentors are good guides who are practically-oriented by giving mentees tasks, setting goals and helping the mentee find direction.

Another factor that also supports mentoring is that the mentors must be accessible always and willing to educate mentees about careers and life. Mentors criticize mentees constructively pointing out areas that need improvement,

Factors that Hinder Mentoring: Mentoring process in any setting includes having special skills and qualities of good role models. However, when these special skills and qualities are not present in the mentor, it goes a long way to bridge trust and confidence of the mentee. The refusal of the mentee to listen and pay full attention to instructions of the mentor can affect the process of mentoring.

The other factor that could hinder mentoring is when the mentee fails to make himself/herself accessible to the mentor or the mentor is not accessible to the mentee. The inability of the mentor to identify the needs of the mentee and when the criticisms of the mentor are destructive or instil fear on the mentee, mentoring can be hindered.

Benefits of Mentoring

Mentoring in any profession offers major benefits to workers especially newly employed ones. Starting a career is usually a developmental period where the knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired while in school are applied in practice. Mentoring can be beneficial as well as challenging as new demands are made upon individuals who are seeking to develop their skills. It is therefore a period when a

worker is in need of direction and backing in order to develop trust and expertise. Mentoring can be very beneficial in the workplace and a veritable tool for advancing an individual's career by ensuring that access to training programmes and other development opportunities are tailored to the needs, goals and aspirations of individual members of staff.

The mentoring relationship between a mentor, a more experienced employee and mentee, a less experienced employee can provide both parties support and knowledge in performing a job and helps to speed up the process of understanding a new job and culture in the work setting. It provides an opportunity for a new member of staff to reflect on their progress and identify ways of resolving any problem. Mentoring leads to an increase in performance which leads to job satisfaction. White (1988) opines that in the discipline of education, mentoring can be used as a mechanism for recruitment and gain understanding of the barriers experienced at lower levels of the organization. It also enhances skills in coaching, counselling, listening, and modelling. Dreher & Cox (1996) sees mentoring as an effective strategy for career advancement. Robinson, (2001) describes mentoring as the most effective way to transfer skills and knowledge quickly and inspire loyalty in new employees to co-operate in an organization. Heinz, (2003) opines that mentoring helps a person to demonstrate expertise and share knowledge. It is an important developmental tool, plays a key role in career success, develops and practices a more personal style of leadership. Mentoring increases generational awareness and development of leaders in the profession. It can help broaden long held skills and knowledge. It brings new insights into the organisation and provides opportunities to demonstrate expertise and learn new ways to develop other people. Mentoring consolidates and extends professional and personal networks.

The Role of an Effective Mentor

An effective mentor guides, coaches, supports, facilitates and assists the mentee to identify his/her strength in a given task. The role of a mentor has to do with good listening and questioning skills. The mentor also gives guidance, advice and counsel to the mentee. These roles help the mentee to review, identify his/her strengths, weaknesses and areas for further development. An effective mentor provides resources and opportunities to enable learners set achievable goals and make realistic plans. It goes further to help monitor progress and provides feedback.

The mentor is a role model who passes on skills, assists the learner in solving problems and provides support and motivation. The mentor needs adequate preparation to fulfil these roles. The success of a school-based training and staff development can be dependent on the knowledge, skill and personal qualities of the mentor. A mentor's reaction depends on the organization he/she is in and the role he wants to play.

The Role of Mentee

The mentee has a lot of roles to play in achieving the objectives of mentoring which is to encourage and assist him in his development and growth and to provide him with a resource regarding his career aspirations. It is critical that the mentee communicates to their mentor about the areas in which he or she needs the most guidance. The mentees need to be willing to learn and take on new challenges. Furthermore the mentee should be receptive and open to feedback.

The mentee also should be open to new ideas and able to see things from other perspectives. He should be loyal, not violating confidence or trust. The mentee must be appreciative of the help the mentor is giving (Lee, 2003). Heinz, (2003) is of the opinion that the mentee should manage the relationship by establishing first contact and continuing the relationship through e-mail, telephone or face to face communication. The mentee has the responsibility to be willing to attend mentoring program, events and/or plan activities which may enhance the mentoring relationship.

The mentee should make an attempt to contact the mentor as the need arises so that the relationship can be built and maintained (Davis, 2004). The frequency of meeting and length of association should be mutually decided upon. Stephens, (1996) explains that the mentee should bear in mind the need to have a sincere interest in developing a personal and professional relationship that supports development towards graduation and securing the job that is desired. Richo, (1991) in his opinion said that in order to ensure that the relationship is rewarding, mentees should talk to their mentors about what they hope to gain from the experience.

Qualities of a Mentor

To be a successful mentor, one need to possess certain qualities, characteristics and skills that will help meet the expectations of the mentoring role. Fisher, (1994) notes that the common characteristics of a good mentor include intelligence and integrity, ability, professional attitudes, high personal standards, enthusiasm and a willingness to share accumulated knowledge. A mentor among other things should have the quality to help others to succeed. The mentor should have the confidentiality and trust of the mentee. Other qualities of the mentor are good questioning and listening skills and willingness to commit time to the mentoring relationship.

The mentor must be well educated with high command of respect and not undermine the line relationship. A mentor must be a good coach, communicator, adviser and not authoritarian. He must keep in touch by maintaining regular contact with the mentee and a people's person that enjoys working with people and able to spot their positive qualities and abilities. He/she must have a strong sense of equity, fairness and patience, a role model with knowledge of value of action, who demonstrates interest and exchange of information when needed and offers timely feedback.

Stages in Mentoring

Mentors must be flexible and willing to accept decisions made, however, for effective mentoring, there are stages that the mentor is required to follow:

- Mentoring process firstly, must identify the aims and objectives.
- The mentor should ensure that the mentee(s) are given adequate orientation.
- The mentor and mentee must work in a similar field or share similar experiences.
- Determine the duration of the mentoring program.
- Frequent face-to-face meetings by the mentor and mentee would be needed.
- Evaluation of the mentoring process to know the progress and extent the aims and objectives where achieved.

Conclusions

This study revealed that mentoring has a positive impact on the development of staff personality and performance on the job. Mentoring can change attitudes of employee towards work and improve their relationship with colleagues and the larger society. Mentors have tried to maintain a close relationship with the mentees which helps to improve their self-confidence and to reduce many problems faced by them within the public and private organisations. Mentoring is undoubtedly a useful tool for supporting the development of the mentee.

As mentees have practical knowledge and understanding of their roles, they prove to be better contributors to their colleagues and organisation. Mentoring increases satisfaction which leads to organisational efficiency, effectiveness and profitability. The role of the mentor is to help the mentee to achieve the expected goals by acting as counsellor, coach, guide, facilitator and advisor. Counselling which is an important function in relation to mentoring leads to an improved relationship between the mentor and mentee. It consists of backing, teaching, discussions, evaluation, encouragement, and feedback on issues.

One of the important functions of a mentor is to be a role model for the mentee. This is supported by the view that the mentor is someone who has greater experience and helps the less skilled or experienced persons to achieve professional abilities. Saul (2004) posited that a structured mentoring program should give benefits in at least three ways, the mentee, the mentor and the institution or organisation. Institutions or Organisations can improve the delivery of service by having more informed and skilled staff through mentoring, the mentor will have the opportunity to test new ideas and a mentee can increase the skills and knowledge for professional development.

Recommendations

Mentoring is a protected relationship in which learning occurs through practice and examination of the mentor and the mentee to identify opportunities and gaps in knowledge skills. It helps the mentee to grow and develop self-confidence and maturity. It is also a powerful and emotional relationship. The quality of the relationship between the mentor/mentee is crucial to a successful outcome and hence the following recommendations from this study:

- Public and private organisations should invest more on sending their workers to mentoring experts, persons who work in a similar field or share similar experiences outside their organisations;
- Training of some categories of staff to become effective mentors to other staff as this would provide an effective but cheaper form of staff development;
- Mentoring should be used to enable social cohesion, allowing staff to integrate fully into the organisations and reach the peak of their career;
- Mentoring programmes should be made accessible to all categories of workers with adequate time set aside by the organisations for effective mentoring; and
- Mentoring newly appointed staff should be considered a priority and external monitoring and assessment of performance for promotion and remuneration should be separated from the day to day mentoring program.

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