

## GUIDANCE FOR MENTORS

### What is Mentoring?

Mentoring is a highly valuable development activity implemented in many organisations. At the core of the activity is the relationship between the mentor and the mentee, where the development of the mentee is the key focus.

The development needs satisfied through the relationship can vary in focus from guidance on settling into a new organisation, performance improvement to career management. The main point with mentoring is that the focus is determined by the mentee. They must lead in identifying issues and, with guidance from the mentor, resolving them. The mentor is not there to provide 'the answers', but to guide the mentee towards 'the answer' that is right for them.

The mentoring relationship can be both short and long term. It may develop to focus on a particular issue or it may be one that lasts for years covering a range of issues. Typically the mentor and mentee meet at designated times and places to discuss issues; make plans to resolve and then review. The formal vs. informal nature of the sessions is down to those involved, however each session must have a purpose.

### Why become a mentor?

Engaging in a mentoring relationship is beneficial for mentor and mentee as well as the MRC as a whole. The specific benefits for the mentor are:

- Broadening of skills and knowledge
- Provision of a new dimension to current job
- Can increase personal and professional networks
- Seeing others develop from your experience(s)

The benefits the MRC gains from its employees entering into mentoring relationships are:

- Increase in knowledge retention within organisation
- Positive impact on recruitment and retention
- Able to adapt better to changes

## Should I become a mentor?

The decision to become a mentor is not one that should be taken lightly. Being a mentor for someone is a rewarding and valuable role to take on, however before agreeing you must understand the skills & qualities required to be a mentor and what the role will involve.

### **Skills and Qualities of a Mentor**

The MRC is keen to encourage the use of mentoring; however it is vital that those that agree to become mentors have the right skills and qualities to make the relationship work. As such below is a list of the skills and qualities we feel a mentor should have. You are encouraged to review these and evaluate yourself before agreeing to become a mentor.

- Interested in being a mentor – if asked to become a mentor you must think carefully whether you actually want to do it, you can say No.
- Available time – mentoring will require a time commitment so look at your existing time commitments and truly evaluate whether you can spare the time
- Appropriate knowledge and skills – you should be involved in a similar field to that of the mentee in order than you can provide guidance from an understanding of the area they are working
- Listening skills – are you able to actively listen to others, not interrupting but listening and reflecting back what the mentee is saying
- Patient and supportive – as the relationship is led by the mentee you will need to be prepared to support them towards achieving their goals. You need to let them reach conclusions at their own pace and not impose your views or suggestions.

- Trustworthy – the issues discussed during mentoring sessions must be treated in the strictest of confidence and therefore the mentee needs to believe that they can trust you.

### **Role of a Mentor**

As a mentor you will be viewed as a more experienced member of staff who is willing and able to pass on the benefit of that experience. However your role is not simply to 'tell' the mentee what to do, the role of the mentor is to:

- Listen and be supportive
- Provide non-judgemental support
- Provide guidance on issues raised
- Clarify goals of mentee
- Pass on knowledge and experience

## Getting Started

Once you have agreed to be a mentor, you need to agree with the mentee how the relationship will work. This should ideally be done at the beginning of the first meeting. There is no need to formalise the arrangement by drawing up a contract, but there are key issues that need to be discussed and agreed. Below is a suggested list of the topics to include in the discussion:

- Meetings
  - Frequency and length
  - Location
  - Formal vs. Informal
  - Who and how will outcomes/action plans be recorded?
- How will communication outside of meetings be dealt with; method, turnaround, frequency etc.?
- Are there any issues that will not be discussed?
- Are there any limits on confidentiality? Are the contents of the meetings to be kept confidential or can they be discussed with outside parties?

## The 3 Stage Approach

An effective mentoring relationship has been shown to move through 3 stages. Each stage builds on the learning from the previous and within each stage there are responsibilities for both the mentor and mentee.

### **Stage 1 – Exploration**

During the first stage of the process your role as a mentor is to provide information, when requested by the mentee, and to ask probing questions to help the mentee make judgements.

It is during this stage that you need to use your 'active listening' skills. Using good questioning techniques and then recapping, paraphrasing and summarising to try and get to the centre issue being raised. Remember you are there to guide the mentee, not to provide a solution or impose your point of view.

### **Stage 2 – New Understanding**

Having worked through the first stage, the likelihood is that some 'new understanding' will be reached about the issue being discussed. This may be a minor change in viewpoint or a major breakthrough in a persons thinking processes.

Regardless of the size or significance of the breakthrough, your role as the mentor is to reflect back to the mentee what they have learned. You should then guide the mentee through thinking about the implications of potential conclusions.

### **Stage 3 – Action**

If you have successfully reached a new understanding the next stage is to agree what actions should be taken. Again this is not about you as the mentor telling the mentee what to do. You need to guide the mentee towards identifying actions they can implement.

If actions are agreed you must ensure these are recorded and then monitored through regular review and feedback.

## **Resources**

- <http://www.mentoring-association.org/membersOnly/Mentors/ResMentors.html>  
Link to International Mentoring Association resources page
- <http://www.coachingnetwork.org.uk/Default.htm> Coaching and Mentoring Network
- European Coaching and Mentoring Council <http://www.emccouncil.org/>