

**The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
Department of Building Services Engineering**

To the Mentors



1 What is mentoring?

1.1 What does ‘mentoring’ mean?

Mentoring happens when one person assists another to grow, acquire new skills and insights, and develop his or her potential. The mentoring relationship builds confidence and helps the mentee to take increasing responsibility for his/her own development. Many successful people have had mentors; usually someone they consider more experienced. Nowadays, an important challenge is to make mentoring more accessible, so that more people can take advantage of mentoring.

Mentoring is a natural process found in all cultures throughout history. In some communities in the world, mentors are proficient hunters or good mothers: they can be a ‘critical friend’, a role model, or initiate the young into the adult and spirit world. Mentoring in our society is used for personal and professional development in education, business, the public and voluntary sectors, and community groups.

Mentors need not be qualified trainers and do not need to be highly skilled at the job the mentee does or the area in which the mentee wants to develop. It is now common to view the mentee and mentor as equal partners in the relationship, a move away from the traditional view of the mentor as a dispenser of advice.

Mentoring is the process by which one person assists another to grow and learn in a safe and sympathetic relationship

People embark on mentoring for many different reasons: to support them personally, to help them in their career, and/or to improve their effectiveness in their job. A mentee may want to learn to cope in times of change, overcome difficulties or grasp opportunities. Regardless of the specific aim, mentoring is fundamentally about learning and development. The essential quality of mentoring is that this learning and development is a proactive, positive and generally enjoyable choice for both the mentor and mentee.

1.2 Benefits to you, the mentor

Being a mentor is challenging and stimulating. You can develop coaching and counseling skills, many of which are transferable to your personal and working life. You may acquire a greater understanding of issues through reflecting on them with your mentee, which can revitalize your interest in work. As you are older than your mentee, you may enjoy the contact and insights you get into the next generation and also increase your range of networks. You will probably feel considerable personal satisfaction when your mentee

reports success, and from the knowledge that you are ‘putting something back’ into the system.

1.3 Benefits to your mentee

Many mentees find their self-confidence and motivation increase through sharing experiences and receiving one-on-one feedback. As a mentor, you act as a sounding board and a trusted ‘ally’ so your mentee can explore strengths and development areas in an encouraging environment, with the opportunity to think through his/her direction in life. You also act as a role model, consciously or not, enabling the mentee to see new ways of thinking and behaving. At times, you may provide useful contacts to your mentee and give advice and help in career progression.

1.4 How does mentoring fit with coaching and counseling?

Mentoring involves a range of approaches, which vary depending on the mentee. Many people find mentoring hard to define because it overlaps with coaching and counselling. It may focus on developing organizational and job-related skills (mentoring/coaching) or on the mentee’s personal development (mentoring/counselling). Kim Langridge describes an approach to mentoring, shown below, which highlights the relationship between mentoring, coaching and counselling. At one end of the scale is professional coaching, in which the coach intervenes directly to pass on knowledge or to develop skills. At the other end is professional counselling, where the counselor has the individual’s personal interests at heart and develops a high degree of empathy with the client. Mentoring is located firmly in the middle separated from counseling and coaching, while incorporating elements from both.



Mentoring relationships can change over time, and may require a change of emphasis in the skills the mentor uses. In a business setting, mentoring often focuses initially on coaching. More personal issues may not be dealt with until the mentee has built up confidence and trust in the mentor.

When a mentoring relationship hits the boundaries of coaching or counseling as defined by these professions, the mentor signposts the mentee to an appropriate professional.

A vital key to success in mentoring is that each relationship is custom-built by the mentee and mentor to address their specific needs. This flexibility, which is a core strength of mentoring, makes a tight definition very difficult.

2 Roles in the mentoring process

2.1 Key role as mentor

Your mentee's interests are paramount in your mentoring relationship. You are there to:

- Build an open and honest relationship, and create an atmosphere where your mentee feels safe to try out different ways of doing things
- Support and encourage your mentee's personal development and learning by giving confidential feedback to reinforce what your mentee already does well, and help in areas where s/he wants to develop
- Help the mentee to take increasing initiative for his/her own learning and development and to take increasing responsibility for managing the mentoring relationship.

How this actually happens will depend on your mentee's needs, the context of the mentoring and your own personality. Your mentee may describe recent experiences and you could ask questions to help him/her see things from a different angle. Or you may act as a role model, describing how you handled similar situations in the past and showing what it is possible to achieve.

There are many ways in which you and your mentee can work together, and your style will probably develop over time. It is worth considering whether you both prefer the sessions to be formal or informal, open to what emerges on the day or more structured, and whether you are directive or low key.

How much responsibility does your mentee want or need you to take at the beginning?

How much are you aware of your own style or approach?

2.2 Your mentee's role

Your mentee is there to seek development opportunities, self-learning, support and encouragement at a pace which suits him/her. Initially, your mentee may not feel very clear about what s/he wants from mentoring, and so your role as mentor is to help define these – although they may change as the mentoring process develops. Your mentee brings issues to the sessions and, hopefully, in time will experiment with new approaches, behaviours and techniques.

3 Mentoring skills and responsibilities

You bring your own unique experience of life and work combined with a friendly interest in your mentee's development. You don't need to be 'perfect'. Indeed, your mentee may find you very supportive if you are open about your own development needs as well as strengths. Some skills and qualities you will find useful are outlined below. How do you know how effectively you use your mentoring skills?

You may not be the best judge of your own performance. You may want to ask your mentee for feedback, (see section 5.2 *Giving and receiving feedback*).

3.1 Communication skills

You will need a range of interpersonal skills including:

- Listening attentively and non-judgementally
- Giving and receiving feedback
- Questioning skills to encourage your mentee to talk and think through issues
- The ability to challenge constructively.

3.2 Personal organization

Before you start mentoring, consider the amount of time you are willing to give. Is it the level of commitment that your mentee expects? When are you available for mentoring – during work or afterwards? Does your time come in one-hour slots or half-day periods? Can you give time on the phone?

3.3 Flexible attitude

Being flexible means that you respond appropriately to your mentee's changing needs, and are open to new ideas and different ways of doing things. Flexibility comes with increased awareness of your own behaviour and attitudes and those of others.

3.4 Expectations

All the key people involved with the learning and development of your mentee will benefit from openly discussing their expectations of mentoring at the outset so that you all work to the same agenda. If you are part of a mentoring scheme, the organization(s) involved will probably have aims and expectations of the process. The scheme coordinator should brief you on these. If not, then ask. You will need to think beforehand about what from the mentoring relationship. For instance, who will be responsible for the practical aspects of the process: who will organize when and where to meet, or initiate reviews of the relationship? Do you want limits on the scope of the mentoring? When you first meet your mentee you can check how closely your expectations match.

You and your mentee should consider summarising your discussion of expectations in a mentoring agreement or learning contract. This can be verbal or written. Section 6.3 *Mentoring agreement* has a checklist of points to consider.

3.5 General responsibilities

Everyone involved in the mentoring shares the responsibility for maintaining an ethical approach. This covers confidentiality to protect sensitive and personal information, and a belief in both the right and ability of mentees to make their own decisions. Other basic

values that underpin mentoring include treating people with respect and honesty, and the importance of being non-judgmental. Mentoring can sometimes evoke strong feelings, such as anger. Clearly violence or harmful behaviour against mentee or mentor is not appropriate, and you will need to discuss at the outset framework for dealing with any strong feelings.

4 The mentoring process

4.1 Phases in the relationship

Mentoring relationships tend to have 5 phases:

- **Introduction and rapport – building** you and your mentee develop trust and start feeling comfortable with each other
- **Direction – setting** your mentee sets goals which may evolve as the relationship develops
- **Progress – making** the most intensive stage where learning proceeds rapidly
- **Maturation** – learning and support becomes more mutual; your mentee gradually increases in self-reliance
- **Review and closedown** – the formal relationship comes to an end.

Individual sessions also tend to follow this pattern: introduction (start of session), direction-setting, progress-making, review and close of section.

4.2 Your first session

It is natural to feel nervous about your first mentoring session, even if you are already involved in coaching, counselling or supporting people. Your mentee probably feels more apprehensive than you do! Being a mentor is not about acting a role, but about being aware of processes – listening, questioning, problem-solving and so on – that you are probably already familiar with.

4.2.1 Before the Session

- **Context** – Be aware of the context within you are mentoring. Going through the checklist in section [6.4](#) *Preparing yourself for the first session* may help you to feel more prepared and confident.

4.2.2 During the Session

A general agenda for the first session is given in section [6.5](#) *Agenda for the first meeting*. Other points to consider are:

- **Building rapport** – You set the tone for the mentoring from the very first time you meet your mentee or speak on the phone. You are most likely to build rapport quickly if you are welcoming and your mentee feels you are listening and are on his/her wavelength. Your mentee needs to feel that you understand and respect his/her circumstances, feelings, priorities – and pace. Practically, this means that before your first meeting you think about the venue, check it is private and comfortable and that

you have allocated sufficient time away from any interruptions and the mentee feels that it is a safe learning environment.

- **Agreeing ground rules** – Together, you and your mentee need to agree guidelines on the practicalities of meeting and on how you will work with each other. This agreement can be verbal or written and helps you both to manage the sessions from the start. Suggestions for points to think about are given in section 6.3 *Mentoring agreement*. Some mentoring pairs agree ground rules in their first session, other meet beforehand to do this.
- **Direction-setting** – The mentee's aims need to be discussed at the outset, otherwise your relationship may lack focus and direction. The mentee needs to think about what you, as mentor, can do to help. How will you both measure progress? (see section 4.3 *Reviews*). Some mentees are not sure about what they want to achieve, and exploring this is an important part of your work together.
- **Review** – Reflection and review are important parts of learning which many busy people do not make time for. Build in some time from the beginning for the mentee to reflect on what s/he has got from the session, what was useful, and what was less so. You may also like to share what you have gained.

4.3 Reviews

4.3.1 *Reviewing the Relationship*

You should arrange regular reviews with your mentee to check that you are both finding the relationship useful, and to learn from your shared experience. Reviews can be formal or informal. Aim to create an atmosphere where your mentee feels comfortable expressing views on all aspects of the mentoring.

Ask your mentee whether s/he is feeling sufficiently challenged, getting into issues sufficiently deeply, meeting frequently enough. If you agreed stages of achievement of milestones at the outset, you will both know whether you have made progress.

4.3.2 *Checking You Are Doing OK*

Trust your gut feeling during each session – does your mentee seem engaged, responsive and spontaneous? Does s/he turn up regularly and promptly to the sessions and seem keen to set the next date, or frequently postpone or forget sessions? If you feel concerned, discuss this with your mentee. You both may feel relieved to have any problems out in the open so that you can deal with them together.

4.4 Ending the relationship

If you and your mentee have not been able to work together effectively, you may decide to terminate the relationship early. It is important not to assign fault to either side. Use this as an opportunity to help the mentee be clear about the type of mentor they would like to work with.

5 Supporting learning and development

5.1 Differences in style

Over the years you have probably developed preferences for the way you learn. You may learn best from ‘hands on’ experiences, preferring to act first and think afterwards. Or you may prefer to watch an expert, or read a book on the subject, or work out a theory of what is happening before you launch in. You may like to have precise instructions, or you may find these get in the way.

There is no one right way to learn and you may find that your own style is different from your mentee’s. Try to adapt your usual approach to suit your mentee, while paying attention to your own level of comfort. Regularly reviewing your relationship will indicate if you are being successful.

5.2 Giving and receiving feedback

All of us have blind spots – aspects of ourselves that others see but we cannot. We become more self-aware when someone else alerts us to these and gives us feedback about what we do or how we do it. How do you tend to react to feedback? Do you take it on board totally without discriminating or do you reject it straightway? Do you think about it, explore it and make sense of it in a way that is right for you? Your reaction may be affected by the manner in which the feedback is given.

Your feedback to others will be more effective if you describe specific behaviour that you have observed. Focus on aspects of performance that your mentee can improve on. Ask questions rather than make statements so that your mentee can reach his/her own understanding of the situation. Remember also to give positive feedback on areas where your mentee did well.

5.3 Action planning

To make something happen, your mentee will need to decide what to do and when. You may want to discuss breaking the goal down into easily achievable steps. For example, if your mentee aims to get a job, the steps for next week might be:

- (1) getting hold of the jobs section of the local newspaper,
- (2) identifying appropriate vacancies, and
- (3) phoning the companies concerned for more details.

The first step is often to convert a vague aim into one with a clear outcome. Effective actions are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-based).

6 Some useful checklists

6.1 Aims at the start of mentoring

You could write your mentee's aims in the table below at the start of mentoring and refer back to them regularly to check you are on track.

What are my mentee's aims for learning and development?

What can you, as the mentor, do to help them reach these aims?

6.2 Review of aims (every 1-6 months)

It is worth reviewing progress together at regular intervals to make sure your mentee is getting what s/he needs from mentoring. You might consider reviewing:

- Aims your mentee has already achieved through mentoring
- Aims your mentee has not yet achieved
- Are any of these aims now irrelevant or unrealistic?
- Does your mentee have any additional aims for mentoring?

6.3 Mentoring agreement

- What outcomes are you aiming for? What milestones might you set?
- What are your responsibilities, and what are your mentee's?
- What limits are you setting to confidentiality?

PROCEDURAL ISSUES

- How often will you meet? (If necessary this could be once a month with phone contact in between, once you have established a working relationship.)
- How long are the sessions likely to be?
- Where will you meet – in work or out?
- Will you go to your mentee, or vice versa?
- Who will arrange room bookings?
- Who takes responsibility for ensuring meetings are private and uninterrupted?
- What are the arrangements for cancellations?

PROFESSIONAL ISSUES

- Can your mentee contact you between sessions and vice versa?
- Will there be limits to the scope of mentoring?
- Do you intend to keep records? If so what will you record, do you have your mentee's agreement and where will you store the information?

PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES

- How will you and your mentee check that everything is going well in the relationship on an ongoing basis?
- Who will initiate reviews and how often?
- What will you both do if things are not going well?
- How will you both end the relationship if either think it is not working? How do you both think you will finish if everything goes well?

6.4 Preparing yourself for the first session

- Ask other mentors of mentees about their experiences
- What are the scheme's scope and aims?
- Before starting mentoring, find out at least your mentee's name and role. A CV can be useful.

6.5 Agenda for the first meeting

- Introductions
- Agree in advance how long the first session will be and check this with your mentee in the session
- Any previous experience of mentoring or of being mentored?
- If required by the mentee, briefly describe what mentoring is, and what it is not
- Discuss your mentee's circumstances, aims and expectations. Complete your mentoring agreement if you have not already done this.
- Clarify what you both have agreed to do before the next meeting
- Review first impressions
- Agree date and place of next meeting, and outline 'agenda' you want to set

6.6 Are you an effective mentor?

You are probably working effectively when:

- Your mentee achieves his/her aims
- Your mentee thanks you
- Your mentee wants to proceed to a new stage of development with you as mentor
- Your mentee admits that you were a help even though s/he did not appreciate it at the time

7 Mentorship Certificate

To encourage regular communications between mentees and their mentors, we are introducing a measure to enhance mentees' initiation. Mentees are now expected to properly log the events conducted under the Mentorship Programme. Upon finishing the Programme, only those mentees who return to the General Office the log sheet below, with minimum 2 events per year properly recorded and countersigned by their mentors, will be given a certificate.

The measure should pose no extra burden on you, except that you will be requested by your mentees to countersign on their log sheets as verification for the logged events.

8 Mentorship Programme - Log Sheet

(Sample)



Department of Building Services Engineering Mentorship Programme - Log Sheet



Name : _____ (33 _____) Student Number : _____
Prog. code

Name of Mentor : _____ Submission date: _____

Date of event	Activities/functions held during the event ¹ ¹ Events may include meeting, email/telephone communication etc.	Signature		For Office Use
		Mentee	Mentor	