



The AHADI Mentoring Approach

This short guide to the AHADI Mentoring Approach covers the following areas:

1. The mentoring approach
2. Things to think about in advance
3. Getting started—the first session
4. Techniques during sessions
5. Follow up between sessions
6. Managing Relationships
7. Adult Learning Principles and Mentoring Practices

1. The mentoring approach

It is important to see the mentoring role as something different from the role of a trainer. While your mentoring activities may include workshops and training types of activities, the main emphasis of mentoring is the ongoing relationship with the mentees to work through a process. As noted above, it is a process of ‘working it out together’, rather than simply transferring information.

The other distinction of mentoring is the provision of follow up support in the workplace, to ensure that any information that has been presented is understood by the mentees and is being applied and incorporated into their existing work practices. The ongoing relationship and the ability to follow up with mentees over an extended period, is one of the main advantages of a mentoring approach, compared with say a traditional ‘face to face’ training approach, where there may be good interaction and learning during the training event itself, but not much scope afterwards for follow up to ensure the application of the learning that took place in the classroom.

As such, the points below refer to mentoring ‘sessions’ (rather than workshops or trainings) in order to make this distinction clearer. To mentor is to take people through a process, which may involve spending time together in a session and then giving an assignment, and after a time reconvening to review and revise what has been done. In this way, the learning that takes place is more in the hands of the mentees themselves, and can be referred to as ‘self-

directed' learning, which is one of the adult learning principles that underpin the mentoring process.

The following attributes of a good mentor were identified by a group of experienced mentors:

- Able to win trust and confidence, and to be at their level.
- Good listening skills – someone to talk to, who can give appropriate advice.
- Good conceptual skills – understanding the process itself and the context.
- Able to do an assessment – who do I have in the room and what are their skills?
- Accommodating to the different challenges and issues experienced in the daily work of the mentees.
- Able to carry everyone along with them.
- Non-judgemental, for example if mentees have done things in a different way.
- Flexible, for example with regard to the structure and timing of mentoring sessions.

2. Things to think about in advance

- Think about your mentees in advance, and the blend of learners – who are your mentees and what experience do they have? If possible, a short questionnaire in advance of the first session can be very helpful to gather some information from your mentees, for example, their work roles, their areas of experience, and what aspects of their work they find most challenging, or most exciting. This will help you get to know your mentees a bit better, even before you have your first session.
- Think about the seating arrangement for your sessions in advance. These sessions are important, so you want to ensure you have the right mix of people for any group work. For example, you could be working with a group of up to 20 people, so you might divide them into smaller groups for some sessions. The seating arrangement should allow for group work and interaction, and not just one-way presentation of information. Therefore, round tables are preferable over a seating in rows arrangement, for example.
- When allocating mentees to groups, think about what each person brings to a group, in terms of their knowledge, experience and personality and how they can best help the group in its assigned tasks.
- Think about the physical setting of your session—can it be done in the workplace, or does it need to be taken to an external setting in order to minimise distractions?

3. Getting started—the first session

- When starting work with a group of mentees, it can be tempting to jump straight in and get started on the assigned tasks and the technical work. However, it is extremely important to go through a process of building a relationship with your mentees, by

understanding what is important to them, and what challenges they face. Spending time in your first session focussing on this will go a long way to helping down the track, as the process unfolds.

- Ask your mentees first up ‘what are your expectations?’ ‘what do you value?’ Also ask ‘what are the challenges?’ This is very important for finding out where they are at and grounding your support in something that is real and practical. It is also the starting point for building a relationship based on trust. If people can see that you understand and care about them and the challenges they face, they will be more willing to open up in an environment of mutual trust.
- Building relationships is very important, and some self-disclosure can help in building this relationship. For example, you may like to share something about yourself, such as your family life, or your interests outside of work. You can decide what level of self-disclosure is appropriate, as there is always the question of ‘how far’ to take the relationship. While you may be working closely with people over a period of time, it is still important to be mindful that it is primarily a professional relationship between you as the mentor and your mentees.
- Remember that you are not there to judge, and it’s important that you understand the context. As mentioned above, this is critical to developing a good relationship. It also prevents you from forging ahead too soon, before you really understand the situation on the ground.
- Honesty is important, particularly in terms of your role. As a mentor, there may be very different expectations on the side of mentees about what you are here to do. It is important to be upfront from the beginning about your role—‘as a mentor, this is what I can/can’t do’.
- A good activity to do at the first session is a ‘self-portrait’ or ‘self-assessment’ activity, to build discussions around what people are currently doing. This process can provide valuable insights for both you and the mentees, to draw out what they know and what their issues are. For example, rather than starting a session on budgeting by presenting a lot of content on ‘budgeting’, find out what your mentees know first.
- Setting ground rules is an important part of self-directed learning. It is good to do this at the first session, and these should come from the participants themselves. For example, one group of mentees made the ground rule of mobile phones needing to be removed during sessions because of the distraction. Another example was to agree on Chatham House rules, so that people feel safe and trust was built. People agreed to this and it has reduced distractions. The key was getting agreement on this ground rule from the mentees themselves, rather than something that was imposed by the mentor.

4. Techniques during sessions

- As trainers and facilitators, even in a mentoring role we can feel that we need to present a lot of content first before people can do anything, such as an activity based on the content, for example. On one hand, it makes us feel that the mentees have what they need to do the activity, and as an added benefit it makes us look knowledgeable. However, it can often be better to ‘flip’ this process and do it the other way around—start with an activity or exercise based on a real problem that the mentees can tackle for themselves, and then come in with relevant content as needed to fill in gaps, or provide additional information.
- In some cases, people will need to have some content. For example, if you are inducting new county assembly members to better understand budgeting processes. However, in such situations it is still important to find out how much they know first (don’t assume they know nothing—chances are they will know more than you think!).
- Workshops and trainings can support the mentoring process, it all depends on what actually happens within a workshop/training and how it is followed up. For example, if real interaction takes place, not just information transfer, and if you have the right people who can make some progress, then a workshop or training activity can be very useful as part of the mentoring process.
- The golden rule is to avoid ‘Death by PowerPoint’—endless slides of too much information, where the mentees have no opportunity to work with the information they are seeing.
- A lot of training tools and techniques can be applied to a mentoring setting—for example, using flip charts to capture ideas, using meta plan cards for brainstorming and arranging ideas.
- Wherever possible, use real examples to illustrate the points you are making. For example, real policy documents and plans can help mentees to visualise what is needed and better understand what they are working towards. It is also important to make links between relevant national documents and processes, and those happening in parallel at county level.
- Take advantage of technology where you can. For example, google documents are helpful for sharing documents, and keeping track of progress, to see where people are at with the work. But of course, only use technology where it clearly benefits the group, not for the sake of it. If you are using a particular form of technology, make sure all your mentees are set up to access and make use of it, so no one is excluded. For example, if setting up a What’s app chat group, make sure all your mentees have What’s app downloaded on their phones and know how to use it.
- Be open to opportunities for self-directed learning. For example, there was one situation where a mentor had originally planned group work, but participants said they couldn’t be

divided up because there was only one person with the relevant technical knowledge, so the session was done as a plenary. It is important as a mentor to have this flexibility and adaptability and be willing to adjust the original plan as circumstances change. Where mentees want to have input into how the sessions are run, see this as a positive development in self-directed learning, rather than as a sidelining of your role as a mentor.

Useful Techniques

a. Help mentees identify what success looks like

Helping mentees picture what success looks like is a great starting point for any development initiative.

So the mentor might ask *“If you could clap your hands and suddenly things went perfectly, what would it look like?”*

The mentor then encourages the mentee to describe the positive, tangible, detailed signs of the picture to bring it to life.

b. Help mentees identify what’s already working

As human beings, we tend to be deficit-focused. Our focus is typically on what’s not working, what problems we need to solve, what challenges we need to overcome. Even the optimists among us need help to focus on what’s already working. Mentors have a valuable role to play to help mentees identify what’s working. One simple technique is to use a scale of 1 to 10.

So the mentor might ask, *“If you imagine a scale of 1 to 10 where 10 is the picture of future success you just described and 1 is the worst it has ever been, where are you today?”*

The mentor then explores why the mentees have given themselves that score on the scale, so the mentee can identify what’s already working that they can then build on.

c. Help mentees produce ideas and alternatives for making progress

One powerful role a mentor has to play is to hold a mirror up to the mentees to remind them of their achievements and the skills and qualities that will help them make progress. Providing genuine positive feedback on what impresses them about the mentee will help to generate ideas and options for making progress.

Another valuable mentoring technique is to encourage the mentee to reflect on any similar challenges they or others have tackled in the past and what or who might be able to help.

So the mentor might ask *“Have you ever faced something similar? What helped then? Who else do you know that has dealt with a challenge like this? How might they be able to help?”*

These 3 key areas are a simple starting point for a mentoring conversation but often the simplest techniques are the most powerful.

<http://www.antoINETTEGLETHORPE.COM/what-mentoring-tools-and-techniques-are-available/>

d. Top Tips—Advice for new mentors

The following advice was identified by a group of experienced mentors as the most important things a new mentor should keep in mind, before starting to work with a group of mentees.

1. “Even though you may be an expert, success will depend on the interpersonal relationships and the process, so keep an open mind.”
2. “Know when to push, know when to stop. For example, if you meet resistance you may be pushing too hard and need to back off for a while. Again, the process is paramount.”
3. “Don’t be afraid to admit when you don’t know the answer. You might need to go and find out some more information about something. Be honest, your people will respect that.”
4. “Know the power dynamics of where you are—how is power playing out here?”
5. “Give them their space—to learn, and to make mistakes.”
6. “Don’t be afraid to ask other mentors for help if you need it.”

5. Follow up between sessions

- The follow up in between sessions can be as critical as the sessions themselves. Following up includes checking in with people often, and creating ‘feedback loops’, which simply means making improvements to processes by collecting information, reviewing the information, and making changes based on what the information is saying, then putting the changes into practice. Then the process of collecting-reviewing-changing-practising repeats over again. It will be important to have such mechanisms where you can get valuable insights from your mentees on what is working, and where they might need more support.
- Follow up can be broad, and not just confined to the specific activity you have done in the previous session. However, make sure that your follow up support is related in some way to the area you have been assigned to work on, for example PEM. Otherwise you might find yourself pulled away from what you are there to do.
- When you reconvene with your mentees after a time away, it is very important to start with a recap on what happened last time, with the mentees giving this information in their

own words, rather than you as the mentor telling them what happened. It is important to remember that the mentees 'own the process', as your mentoring may only last weeks or months, but what they learn will stay with them for years to come.

- Trial and error is an important part of the mentoring process. When you reconvene, try asking these four simple questions:

Since our last session...

- What have we achieved?
- What have we learned?
- What challenges do we face and what adjustments do we need to make to what we are doing?
- What do we need to do next, and who are the people who will lead this?

These questions can help to draw out a lot of useful information, and give a clear understanding of what has been achieved, what has been learned, and what the next steps should be.

- Celebrate successes—people enjoy being successful and so where there are gains being made, no matter how small, it is important to draw attention to these and what has been achieved. This can go a long way towards increasing motivation for the tasks.
- Where there are issues that can't be solved, you as a mentor can help identify where to go to find those answers in a spirit of 'we can find the solutions together'. Even if you are an expert, your role as a mentor is to go alongside your mentees and provide guidance, not to simply provide them with the answers.
- In addition, the more you can link what you are doing to people's job roles and responsibilities, the more they can see the relevance of what they are doing.

6. Managing Relationships

- It may not always be smooth sailing with your group of mentees. There may be issues which arise between you and your mentees, or between the mentees themselves. It can be difficult sometimes, for people to understand why some things are necessary, for example 'why is it necessary to have a plan'? You may need to spend some time working through this as a first step to ensure that you have everyone 'on board' before moving further.
- Some people will tend to work in 'silos', and not be willing to work across different areas, they only want to know about what directly relates to them. Others are curious and want to expand their learning. As a mentor, you should try and maximise the opportunities for those who are curious and want to think beyond what directly relates to them, while at the same time, gently encouraging those who are used to working in a certain way and are more reluctant to change.

- Protocols of engagement (for example, due to levels of seniority) can be problematic, but there is one example of success where an intern was paired with a director for a session and it worked well. It can often be beneficial for people to work with others from different levels, in order to see things from different perspectives. As a mentor, if you have established an environment of trust within the group of mentees, these types of interactions are more likely to emerge.
- As a mentor, it is important to think about the 'space' where interactions take place (not necessarily the physical space), but rather the interactions happening at a 'point of need' as identified by the people you are mentoring.
- Sometimes it can be difficult to manage the relationship between you and the program who employs you, as well as the relationship between you and the county, and even the county and the program. It is also important to understand that these relationships are playing out within a context of political issues. It is possible to get 'burned fingers' where there is an expectation that you will keep a promise made by others who have come before you. In this context, it is very important that your management team has clarified what you as a mentor can or cannot commit to. It may be necessary to reinforce this throughout the period of your mentorship, and it is important to have a clear line of communication to the program where needed, to seek advice on operational issues that can arise during the course of the mentorship, particularly where there is no program staff member on the ground.

7. Adult Learning Principles and Mentoring Practices

Adult Learning Principles	Mentor	Mentee
Adults learn best when they are involved in planning, implementing, and evaluating their own learning.	Facilitates learning activities and encourages the mentee to share, question, and practice knowledge and skills.	Actively plans and carries out learning activities.
The role of the mentor is to create and maintain a supportive climate that promotes conditions necessary for learning to take place.	Creates a climate of respect and a physical and social climate conducive to learning. Acknowledges the experiences each bring to the learning environment.	Acts in partnership to share ideas, content and experience.
Adult learners have a need to be self-directing.	Assists mentee in determining learning needs and to incorporate these into a learning contract or learning plan. Uses these resources to guide discussion and agree to mentee's goals and objectives.	Determines own learning needs and discusses how best to incorporate these into a learning contract or learning plan.
Readiness for learning increases when there is a specific need to know.	Works with the mentee to clearly state the learning goals at the beginning of the activity.	Commits to the learning goals and understands how the learning event will help achieve them.
Life's experiences are a primary learning resource; the life experiences of others add enrichment to the learning process.	Relates new material to the mentee's existing knowledge and experience. Guides learning by helping the mentee connect their life experiences and prior learning to the new information.	Brings valuable personal and professional experience to the relationship. Relates experiences to the new learning event.
Adult learners have an inherent need for immediacy of application.	Ensures learning is applicable to the mentee's work or other responsibilities of value.	Learns effectively when there is a specific, work-related problem to be solved.
Adults respond best to learning when they are internally motivated to learn.	Recognizes different learning styles (influenced by personality, intelligence, experiences, education). Adjusts learning strategies to accommodate mentee's learning style.	Aware of own learning style and is willing to adopt and change learning style to accomplish learning goals.

Source: Registered Nurses Professional Development Centre & Nova Scotia Department of Health (2011). Nova Scotia Mentorship Program. Department of Health, Halifax. Available from: <http://www.healthpei.ca/nursingeducation/index.php3?number=1044201&lang=E>