

2.8 The Art of Mentoring or “Mentoring on the Fly”

Formal mentoring occurs when the mentor and mentee intentionally meet or communicate. Informal and unplanned mentoring occurs through meetings, phone calls, e-mail and chance interactions. Mentoring is an art because there is no exact method or way it always occurs. A mentoring *cookbook* does not exist because each mentee has different goals and life experiences affecting how they react to a situation. Likewise, mentors are unique individuals with their own life experiences.

Effective communication is one of the keys to the art of mentoring. Effective communication is the constant that enables the mentor and mentee to feel comfortable no matter the issue or circumstance. In a mentoring relationship, an immediate concern may supercede a planned discussion. This is when the mentor needs to be ready to change course and *mentor on the fly*.

An example of mentoring on the fly follows. For an upcoming meeting, you may have planned to review career advancement and available resources based on your mentee’s goals. You are prepared to discuss this and have identified several people who your mentee can contact about their experiences. When you meet with your mentee, however, your mentee wants and needs to discuss an event at work that she does not know how to handle. The use of effective communication skills allows you to smoothly address your mentee’s needs at the time. You first actively listen to what your mentee’s concerns are, and ask her to share more specifics about the event. You use eye contact, giving verbal cues such as “yes” while you are listening. You paraphrase back to her, including both the facts and feelings you have perceived. Then you ask some open-ended questions (Section 7 on Problem Solving lists types of questions to ask). As the mentor, you may share a personal experience, using an “I” message on how you handled a similar issue.

Remember, your role as the mentor is not to answer or solve your mentee’s issues but to help your mentee answer and solve these issues herself/himself. Mentoring is based on the mentee’s goals, needs and life experiences. The mentor’s goals include modeling and sharing.

- ❑ Wisdom on how the system works
- ❑ Judgment to understand the consequences
- ❑ Resilience to learn from mistakes and have increased confidence
- ❑ Independence to accept challenges and reasonable risks

The intent of mentoring is to make a difference in a person’s life, one person at a time.

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