



Clutterbuck  
Associates

## WHAT MAKES A GREAT MENTOR?

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Not surprisingly, there are different views about what makes a good mentor, not least because there are two different perspectives about what mentors do. Most of the literature about mentoring is American and emphasises a model we now call sponsorship mentoring, in which a senior person adopts a more junior person (often because they remind them of themselves 20 years ago) and acts as a kind of godfather to them, promoting their career and being something of a role model to them. In return they expect loyalty. This approach went down like a lead balloon when it was introduced to the UK and Europe in the 1970s. A new model emerged, which is now the globally dominant approach, called developmental mentoring. Here, the emphasis is on enabling people to do things for themselves, helping them gain insights and motivation to succeed by their own efforts.

The skills of both models are described in the book "The Situational Mentor". In developmental mentoring there are five pairs of basic skills:

- 1) Passionate interest in developing others and in developing oneself
- 2) Communication -- listening, using anecdote and example, explaining; plus helping the mentee to communicate and understand (for example, through the use of diagrams)
- 3) Professional savvy (been there, seen it, done it) plus being able to help the learner see the big picture
- 4) Self-awareness and understanding other people's behaviour (i.e. emotional intelligence)
- 5) Helping the mentee set and work to clear goals plus the skills of relationship management -- building rapport, keeping the dialogue on track and so on.

These basic competences, derived from field work across the world, are all important for the Civil Servant, who acts as a mentor in the normal course of their work. Professional mentors need a much wider range of knowledge and skills, including at least a basic level of understanding of psychology.

Mentees also need to demonstrate a variety of competences to get the most out of the relationship. Mentors react most positively to proactive people, who take responsibility for sharing the management of the relationship.

Programmes that meet the *International Standards for Mentoring Programmes in Employment* expect all participants to be trained. In general, where neither mentor nor mentee have been given a day or so of training in the role, less than one in three relationships deliver significant results; for those where both have been trained, the figure rises to over nine out of ten. It's also important to provide follow up events, where mentors and mentees can review the experience, practice skills and approaches that hadn't gelled and learn new ways of approaching aspects of mentoring they have found difficult. Measurement is also helpful in managing the programme – we have found in our most recent studies that being reminded of good practice at various points in the first 12 months encourages people to improve the quality of mentoring sessions.

At root, being a mentor is very much about using common sense. But it also requires skills (like knowing when to shut up!) and an understanding of how the process works. Done well, it is intensely fulfilling for both parties. Done badly, it can cause severe disruption.

My organisation is running many programmes in the Civil Service, amongst them are an immense diversity mentoring for the NHS, leadership programme for the Cabinet Office, women's leadership programme for DEFRA, a programme to develop potential directors for business links and one for procurement officers in the MoD. Yet the potential for mentoring – both in structured programmes and informally – to enhance the personal development of people in the public sector, is vast.

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