

Mentoring an Apprentice - What are The Best Practices?

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The UK's leading education governing bodies, like Ofsted and BCS, identified and recommended that every apprentice must be allocated a dedicated mentor throughout his or her apprenticeship journey. Research has also shown that distance learning has low completion rates because people feel lonely and unaccountable. The role of a mentor is to make sure there's always someone there to listen and help the mentee make the most of their apprenticeship program. A mentor may not necessarily provide technical support (can do whenever possible), but to ask the right questions, reframe questions, and to point the mentee in the right direction (providing the right resources to help the mentee achieve their goal).

The question now becomes how best to implement a mentoring program in an organisation, and in this case study, an effective apprenticeship-mentoring program. This view requires utilising proven models and techniques to conduct every session, continually reviewing progress, and form professional working relationships.

But what is mentoring?

Mentoring is a highly valuable development process and at the core is the relationship between the mentor and the mentee, where the development of the mentee is the critical focus. In other words, mentoring pertains to the development of rapport involving a more knowledgeable mentor and a less knowledgeable protégé or mentee.

A mentee is a person who is guided, supported, and in most cases, protected from an experienced mentor. A mentor is the one who boosts the career of a mentee, helping him to get the best out of his career, business, or even relationships – both personal and professional.

So what is best practice?

The best practice is an organisational idea that states that there is a standard activity, process, method, technique, reward, or incentive that is more productive in accomplishing a specific result. The idea is that the desired product is delivered with few or no unexpected complications and/or problems. Best practices are also described as one of the most effective and efficient ways of carrying out a task, based on tried and tested procedures.

Therefore, best practices in mentoring involve developing an equally beneficial correlation that improves the proficient intelligence of the mentor and the mentee. A good mentor usually

projects confidence, proficiency, candidness, friendliness, and communication skills. Enthusiastic mentees tend to express a desire for knowledge, utmost discipline, and self-respect.

Who is A Good Mentor?

A good mentor is a mentor who:

1. Listens well and treats the conversation with the mentee as confidential.
2. Determines what is essential to a mentee and explores their ambitions, propensities, and skills.
3. Knows the importance of the learning process by creating a genuine and open relationship to promote confidence and trust.
4. Accepts the fact that in some cases, a mentee may need to seek other sources of assistance and help.
5. Appropriately trained and has vast knowledge in the subject matter and in mentoring.
6. Should have a professional approach in the mentor-mentee relationship.
7. Refrain from mentoring those directly reporting to them; no matter how professional the relationship is, this will avoid other colleagues to think that the mentor may influence some issues about the issues concerning the mentee's decision and position.

Who is A Good Mentee?

A good mentee is a mentee who:

1. Very enthusiastic about being taught and trained and is liberated to new ideas or concepts
2. A team player that can interact well with other people
3. A risk-taker who is not afraid to go beyond the business as usual boundaries and venture into uncertainties to learn
4. Patient enough to realize that ambition in life cannot be acquired overnight.
5. A positive attitude, even amid a crisis.
6. Demonstrates inventiveness and resourcefulness in any task assigned
7. Accepts feedback, negative or positive, about behavior and skills, to improve and learn from it.

When is a Mentor-Mentee Relationship Good?

A good mentor-mentee relationship is not just gauged by the personality that each individual brings into the relationship; more significantly, the occurrence of proper interaction and behavior is needed throughout the process. The mentor accomplishes with the mentee, and

how eager the mentee responds and receives it, is what matters most in such a relationship.

A good mentor-mentee relationship cultivates and successfully carries out the following:

Career Roles:

1. A mentor that introduces new opportunities to the mentee, which the latter believes in.
2. A mentor that coaches and sponsors a mentee, which the latter gratefully accepts.
3. A mentor that protects and challenges a mentee, which the latter understands as part of the relationship.

Psychological Roles:

1. A mentor who is a role model, which the mentee looks up to.
2. A mentor who motivates and encourages the mentee, using real-life examples
2. A mentor who counsels, which the mentee receives wholeheartedly.
3. A mentor who befriends a mentee but is still focused enough to achieve the goals of the relationship.
4. A mentor and a mentee who accept and confirm each other's ideas.

Within this representation, a mentor serves as a leader, a teacher that encourages thinking abilities, an advocate of realistic principles, an overseer, and an analyst. A mentee, on the other hand, is a student who is willing to be taught and is ready to embark on a journey towards a complete learning experience.

Mentoring programs, when practiced efficiently, establish the self-confidence and the self-assurance of a mentee who uses it as a tool for personal and professional development. The benefits of a good mentoring program cannot be overemphasized. The mentee usually learns from someone who has the necessary experience to coach them on what they have to do. Some of the benefits of an effective mentoring program include:

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- Becoming a standout
- Leadership abilities
- Working smarter, not harder

These benefits may sound simple, but when you translate it in real life, you can feel that mentoring is one of the best options to succeed in any career. More significantly, I have been a Level 4 and 7 Data Science mentor/coach within the apprenticeship sector for over three years now.

It is evident from my experience that there are immediate and measurable benefits for an apprenticeship program where the mentees have immediate opportunities to apply what they have learned.

Mentoring is a two-way relationship, and both the mentor and the mentee will learn something from the mentoring program. Primarily though, mentoring programs are designed to enhance the capabilities of the mentee.

About the Data Science Foundation

The Data Science Foundation is a professional body representing the interests of the Data Science Industry. Its membership consists of suppliers who offer a range of big data analytical and technical services and companies and individuals with an interest in the commercial advantages that can be gained from big data. The organisation aims to raise the profile of this developing industry, to educate people about the benefits of knowledge based decision making and to encourage firms to start using big data techniques.

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