

ISSUE 1 : FINDING YOUR MENTOR

Welcome to the first of a series of guidance notes on mentoring. This issue will provide an overview and give you some practical hints on how to make the mentor/mentee selection. Later issues will appear at 3 or 4 week intervals, taking you both through the various stages involved in a mentoring relationship. Issues will continue for up to 18 months although your relationship may last longer than that.

If you are the mentee, you will receive 2 copies of each issue so that you can give one to your mentor. The intention is that the two of you use the guidance notes together. If you have not yet made a choice, work through this paper to clarify your own thoughts before approaching a potential mentor. Then ask them to do the same. If you have already selected your mentor, use these notes to check that you have matching expectations.

If you are the mentor, the aim of these notes is to provide you with a framework for an approach to mentoring that encourages shared responsibility between mentor and mentee.

WHAT IS MENTORING?

As this is the first issue, it seems appropriate to include something about the basic subject matter. However, defining mentoring is not so easy. From its origins in Greek mythology, when Mentor looked after Hercules' son as he grew up, the term has come to represent a range of significantly different approaches, including:

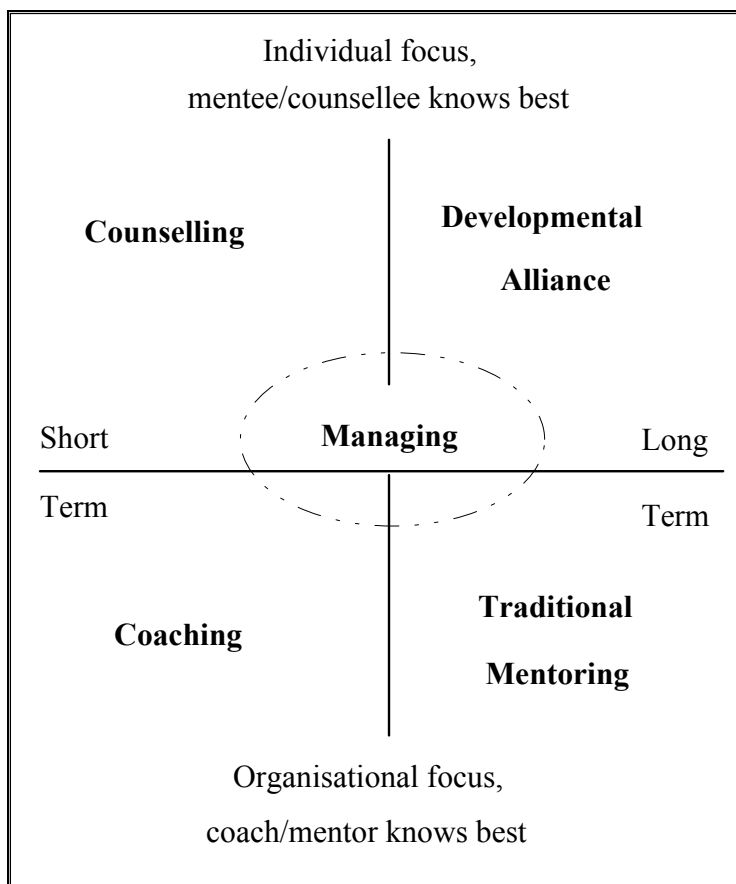
- an older, wiser manager with a young protégé (the closest to the original!)
- a manager or skilled worker who provides coaching
- a lecturer or trainer who is available for one-to-one tutorials
- an experienced worker to sit beside until you 'learn the ropes'
- a colleague who has already obtained the qualification for which you are now studying
- the adviser or assessor who checks your portfolio
- a friend or 'buddy' who listens while you review your development plans.

You may know of yet more formats!

Another way to consider mentoring is to use the dimensions shown in Figure 1. This makes it easier to see that there are basically four options:

- **traditional mentoring**, which is usually long-term, has a broad focus and is geared mainly to organizational needs. This approach is often associated with formal mentoring schemes, where selected high-flyers are allocated to senior managers who serve as role-models and sometimes as sponsors.
- **developmental alliances**, which are also long-term and have a broad focus, but which emphasise the needs of the individual. This approach is more suited to current organizational cultures where employees are expected to take responsibility for their own career development.
- **coaching**, which is short term and focused on specific tasks that the organization needs to be done.
- **counselling**, which is also short-term and focused on specifics, but which deals with issues that concern the individual.

Figure 1 : Different Perspectives



Note that **managing** may involve elements of all four of these approaches. However, managers have limitations placed on them because they are responsible for ensuring that the 'contract' between the employee and the organization is fulfilled. This pushes them towards the organizational end of the continuum. It makes it difficult sometimes for managers to encourage individual development when this is not consistent with organisational requirements.

PERCEPTIONS OF MENTORING

✍ **Exercise** The key to successful mentoring is for the parties involved to share an understanding of its purpose and parameters. Take some time to consider where you would place **your** current perception of mentoring within Figure 1. Then work individually through the questions below.

🗨 **Activity** When you have both done this, compare your responses. However far apart you may be, you will need to agree a common understanding if your mentoring relationship is to succeed. If this is too difficult, it is better to find out early and make other arrangements than to struggle on with conflicting perspectives.

1. What is the purpose of the mentoring relationship?
2. In what ways might the mentor support the mentee?
3. How much challenge should there be from the mentor?
4. What impact might there be if the mentor is a senior manager within the same part of the hierarchy (including the Chief Executive or a Chief Officer)?
5. What might be the advantages and drawbacks of having a mentor who is the same as or different to the mentee on the following characteristics:
 - a) gender?
 - b) age group?
 - c) cultural background?
 - d) education experiences?
 - e) professional background?
6. What topics would be appropriate to discuss within the mentoring relationship?
7. What topics would be inappropriate?
8. What agreement should there be about confidentiality? (remember that the mentor may self-disclose also)
9. How often should we meet? For how long a session? Where?