

9. Mentoring

Mentoring refers to a formal or informal relationship between an experienced and a less experienced staff member, or can be externally facilitated.

Being able to access support and advice from a more experienced staff member or external mentor can greatly influence the ease of your transition and your ongoing development. It can focus on professional issues as well as broader information to make you aware of culture, company specific requirements and personalities.

A productive mentoring relationship can offer you increased networking opportunities, access to resources you might not have known about, enhanced skills, support in difficult or new situations, and increased job satisfaction while reducing your risk of burnout and stress. Of course career planning can be included within the mentoring discussions as can your leadership potential.

Many workplaces have mentoring programs in place. Speak to your manager and find out what is available to you. Your professional association may also have a program. Contact your association to find out what you can access. If your workplace doesn't have a formal process, discuss this with NZSC or your manager.

If you are unable to access mentoring within your workplace take the initiative to seek out a mentoring relationship. Below are some strategies to identify a mentor:

- Join the NZSC or other professional networking groups to expand the number of professionals that you encounter. This will expose you to a broader range of possible mentors.
- Ask colleagues, your manager, or contact your association / institute for suggestions of possible mentors.
- Look for a senior person in your profession, or a more experienced colleague.
- Try using alternatives to face to face contact, such as teleconferencing or internet technologies to meet with mentors.

Getting the most out of your mentoring relationship

- Trust is essential to a positive mentoring relationship. Make sure you feel comfortable with your mentor so you can get the most out of them.
- Find a professional who is willing, accessible (phone or face to face) and reliable.
- Enlist your manager's support. They want you to succeed in the workplace and should encourage your initiative.
- Think about the support or supervision that you already have in place and identify gaps. This will help clarify what you want from the mentoring relationship.
- Many professional associations suggest about 3 hours/month is a good amount of time in a mentoring relationship. Make sure your mentor can commit to this amount of time.
- Make your mentoring appointments a 'diary priority' - never cancel a mentoring session except in absolute necessity.
- If you find that your mentoring appointments are pleasantly social but not meeting your professional needs there are a number of actions you can take: Document what you want to achieve and how you will know when you have achieved this; Be clear and set the agenda with your mentor; Remain strictly with your agreed agenda; or Prepare a list of questions or details that you would like your mentor to observe/answer.

- Decide in advance how long you would like to be in the mentoring relationship. Somewhere between 6 and 12 months would be a good initial time period before review.
- Occasionally a mentor/mentee relationship needs to be discontinued. If it is not helping you - stop.

Mentoring & You

- Is there a mentoring program within your workplace or professional association that you can access? If so: Are you currently receiving mentoring?
- Is your mentor appropriate to your needs?
- Are you making the most of the mentoring process?
- If not: Where can you seek mentoring?
- What qualities or experience would you like in a mentor?