

Improving the Mentor-Mentee Relationship

DILIGENCE

ELFA recently hosted “Improving the mentor-mentee relationship” presented by Mel Crate of Luminare, a wellbeing consultancy. The event was designed to support the mentor-mentee relationship in order to maximise the value achieved. Mentorship can make a huge difference to people starting out their careers. The key takeaways are summarised below for members to integrate in their mentorship relationships. If you are interested in ELFA’s Mentor Programme, contact [Michael Damoah](#).

Key Takeaways

Boundaries and Expectations

Parameters of the relationship:

At the outset of the relationship, areas of support, capacity, time commitment, and frequency of meetings with mentees, should be established. We also recommend discussing in general the meeting structure and method of communication (such as email, phone, etc.).

Mentors can help mentees with industry skills, career goals, interwork issues, workplace communication, introductions to other people, returning to work after an absence and much more.

Mentors should avoid getting involved with a mentee’s personal issues/relationships, mental health issues or issues with legal implications.

How to establish boundaries:

- understanding cultural stereotypes
- being open with mentees
- suggesting alternative healthy paths
- directing mentees to other parties/institutions that can offer relevant support

Mentorship session settings:

Choosing a setting beyond the standard working environment, such as a café, restaurant or bar, is beneficial in the relationship. Communicating talking points before-hand can make the session more focused.

“The line can be blurry as to what mentors can and cannot help with. If mentors are going down a route where it is blurry, there is a need to reassert boundaries through a frank discussion.”

What happens if mentees do not offer much information at our meeting?

- Ask them how things are going and what they want to reflect on.
- Find out what is going well to give them an idea of their strengths and weaknesses.
- If they tell you what they find challenging, act as a sounding board by asking them questions so that they can come to conclusions themselves – you cannot solve every problem.

How to create periods of reflection for mentees:

- Ask what career activity is working or not working for them.
- Discuss what professional route they would like to explore.

What if the mentee is reluctant to engage?

- Remember not everyone is comfortable sharing information.
- By outlining expectations and letting mentees know that you want to help them progress and you're there as a facilitator, you might encourage them to open up.
- Try sending them points consider and reflect on before the session to help them formulate their thoughts a bit more.
- If they still aren't willing to share, know there is only much you can do.

Supporting Mentees in Building Knowledge, Skills, and Contacts

The role of mentor is to help the mentee learn about themselves and see the bigger picture on their path of self discovery and self exploration. Mentors can also help them learn about their strengths, passions, likes and dislikes. Mentors should open up as many doors as possible for mentees, keep an open-minded approach, encourage well-being and a good work-life balance.

Making introductions:

Some mentees might find it difficult to form relationships. Mentors can help by making introductions to people in the industry. Some mentees might need extra support such as people who are neurodivergent (e.g., ADHD, autism).

Upskilling:

Mentors can also add value by suggesting to mentees internal or external courses they can take to build skillsets and knowledge.

The Ten Qualities & Habits of Effective Mentors

1. They care about the next generation's success
2. They're self-aware and enthusiastic
3. they set a good example as positive role-models
4. They're intentional with their time
5. They share experience, rather than only giving advice
6. They get uncomfortable
7. They're lifelong learners
8. they provide quality feedback
9. They're open and active listeners
10. They extend their network

Overcoming Imposter Syndrome

Imposter syndrome is extremely common and usually more prevalent in minority groups and women. This can be attributed in part to the lack of role models in senior positions.

Mentors can help identify imposter syndrome traits in mentees so that it doesn't hold them back in their careers, especially since diversity in a lot of organisations is yet to be optimally achieved.

IMPOSTER THOUGHTS

I was only promoted as
there was no one else

It's only a matter of time
before they realise I'm
out of my depth

When will they realise I
don't actually know what
I'm doing?



I only won that project
because I knew someone
at the company

They were just being
polite, my presentation
wasn't that good

They've hired me but I
won't be able to live up
to their expectations

Mentors can help build mentees' self-confidence and self-esteem through avenues such as self-reflection on strengths and accomplishments. By asking mentees to reflect on small wins and accomplishments, mentors can help them identify strengths that they have developed over time – these don't always have to be work related.

Coaching Style of Mentoring

Mentors are encouraged to speak 20% of the time allowing the mentee to speak 80% of the time. The mentor should facilitate a discussion of the mentee's thoughts and goals.

Mentors can ask questions such as:

- Where would you like to be in a year's time?
- Where do you see yourself working in the organisation?
- What kind of role would you like to end up in?
- What kind of leadership position would you be interested in?
- Is there an area in the business you would like to explore?