

Mentoring

by Mary Kilkenny



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Mentoring is a route for professional development that is rapidly gaining popularity in the actuarial field. You've heard about mentoring and have an interest in getting involved, but where do you start? Even if your company doesn't offer a formal mentoring program, now is the time to discover what a powerful tool mentoring can be for personal and professional growth.

WHAT IS MENTORING?

Mentoring is a mutual learning relationship between two people (the mentor and the mentee), who are working collaboratively toward developing the mentee's skills, abilities, knowledge and thought process. Mentorships focus on the mentee and the issues and concerns that arise from his or her day-to-day professional activities. Typically, mentorships have a degree of informality; the mentor acts as a friend and professional confidant whom the mentee can rely on as he or she moves through the early stages of his or her career. A mentoring relationship should not be treated as a formal review or a way of providing direct feedback on performance. Instead, the relationship should give the mentee career

direction in an open, friendly and encouraging environment. Mentoring is a great way for less experienced employees to connect with company leaders who are not their immediate managers and to gain valuable insight into the insurance field, as well as their own careers.

WHO SHOULD BE A MENTOR?

An effective mentor is someone who is respected by colleagues, exemplifies high professional standards and serves as a role model. A mentor should be someone that the mentee can look up to and even model his or her own career after. A mentor should possess a strong knowledge of the formal and informal ways in which the industry works, have a strong professional network and be willing to aid in another's professional development. In addition, this person should have excellent interpersonal skills and be able to motivate, encourage and provide feedback.

WHAT IS THE MENTOR'S ROLE?

The mentor serves as an experienced industry resource to the mentee. First and foremost, the mentor must be fully committed to the time and

effort necessary to maintain the mentorship process. The mentor should listen to the mentee with an impartial, non-judgmental ear. He or she should help the mentee focus thoughts and ideas, as well as share his or her own past experiences. It is the mentor's place to advise, guide and discuss without interfering. It is not the mentor's place to solve problems for the mentee or to tell the mentee what to do.

WHAT IS THE MENTEE'S ROLE?

The mentee is responsible for driving the mentoring relationship. The mentee must be proactive and instigate and arrange meetings with the mentor. Like the mentor, the mentee must be fully committed to the process. Additionally, the mentee must be open to feedback and suggestions, but not expect the mentor to tell him or her specifically how to handle a certain situation.

HOW CAN THE MENTOR ENSURE THAT THE MENTEE BENEFITS FROM THE RELATIONSHIP?

For the mentee to get the most out of the relationship, the mentor must practice active listening by summarizing the stories and issues that the mentee shares, putting things into perspective for the mentee, and sharing personal opinions and insights. Additionally, the mentor should be patient and

sensitive, but also direct. The mentor should help the mentee understand feedback from managers and make realistic recommendations for change. Most importantly, the mentor must be available to the mentee—mentoring meetings can't repeatedly get pushed down on to-do lists when workloads get heavy.

WHAT CAN MENTEES DO TO MAKE SURE THEY GET THE MOST OUT OF THE RELATIONSHIP?

The mentee should make a conscious effort to be honest, focused and open to advice. The mentee must be comfortable hearing things that might be difficult to hear without feeling defensive. The mentee should also be willing to apply the new knowledge and insight to his or her career—after all, that's the point of the mentorship. He or she must be open to change and growth. The mentee must play a proactive role in scheduling meetings, making him or herself available, and being responsible for the progress made through the relationship.

Remember that the benefits of a mentorship are dependent on the energy and commitment you put into it. If approached the right way, a mentorship can be one of the best tools for career and personal development and growth. ●