



### **Purpose of the Guidelines**

The purpose of these Guidelines is to:

- provide information about effective mentoring practice and
- suggest how mentors and mentees can get the best out of a mentoring relationship.

For a successful and productive mentoring relationship, it is important for both the mentor and mentee to have a common view of their roles and to understand how to get the best out of the mentoring experience. Of course, as mid-career researchers, many of the mentees in the Developing Research Leaders Program are already experienced mentors themselves. It is hoped that these Guidelines will provide a useful framework for all participants to reflect upon their mentoring practice and organise their thinking about the different roles and skills that are involved in the mentoring process.

Information in the Guidelines draws extensively on a number of publications that have been adapted and expanded, where necessary, for the Developing Research Leaders Program. These publications are not footnoted thoroughly throughout, but sources are acknowledged at the end of the Guidelines, along with other useful references.

### **Not just a bit of advice: the idea of mentoring**

The idea of mentoring is ancient but is used today in every almost every forum of learning. Mentors as often described as advisers but while advising plays a major part in any mentoring relationships, the idea of mentoring is broader. Mentoring is a more holistic relationship. It involves a commitment to helping mentees develop and progress in their professional field. To do this successfully, a mentor need to consider the mentee's whole situation, including their personal circumstances and psychosocial factors that may impinge upon their ability to achieve their objectives and progress in their research career. As well helping mentees to develop their publications, grants etc mentors advise on issues such as work life balance and understanding the 'culture' of a faculty or university, as well as developing confidence in mentees and building their identify as successful researchers and research leaders.

## What roles do mentors play?

A mentor has been described as “someone who takes a special interest in helping someone develop into a successful professional” (Handelsman ed, 2005).

Mentors have multiple roles – being an adviser is one of these. There are also others roles they may perform at certain times depending on the need of the mentee and the nature of their objectives.

*Mentors are: ‘advisers; people with career experience willing to share their knowledge; supporters, people who give emotional and moral encouragement; people who give feedback a colleague’s performance; sponsors, sources of information about and aid in obtaining opportunities; models of identity of research leaders in an academic environment.’*

- Handelsman ed, 2005

Mentors are:

- **Advisers-** a senior academic with career experience and expertise who is willing to share their knowledge.
- **Supporters** - give moral support and encouragement
- **Coaches** provide feedback on specific tasks
- **Sponsors** – is a source of information about opportunities, contacts etc and helps mentee to access them
- **Role Models** – demonstrates research leadership skills and values.

In reality, a mentor is unlikely to have all the experience and expertise that is need to support a mid-career researcher. No one person can fulfil all the roles. Mentors need to know when to advise a mentee to seek information or feedback from someone else and who they can approach. As a sponsor, for example, they may put the mentee is touch with an external contact who could provide the help required.

## Features of a good mentoring relationship

An effective mentoring relationship is characterised by:

- Clear roles and expectations
- Excellent two-way communication
- High level of trust with regard for confidentiality
- Clear planning framework with a focus on the mentee’s needs and objectives
- Additional support for both mentors and mentees

## What mentoring is not about

Many people think of mentoring as a passive activity. However, mentoring is not about telling a mentee what to do, passing on wisdom and experience or by observing what the mentee does and passing on comments. The roles that mentors play require considerable input and active engagement with the mentee in thinking, planning, assessing needs, problem solving and providing feedback.

The relationship between mentors and mentees in the Developing Research Leaders Program is collegial rather than hierarchical. A number of mentees have well developed track records in research and most will have experience of working in a number of professional and academic settings. It is important therefore that the mentoring relationship is one of mutual regard where both parties are committed to achieving good outcomes.

## What are the attributes of a skilled mentor?

Effective mentoring can be learned but not taught. (Handelson ed 2005)

There is no book that can tell a mentor how to deal with each situation, but having a systematic approach and sharing methods and ideas with other mentors is one way to hone your mentoring skills. It is helpful if mentoring is part of a research culture that values and supports the process. Skilled mentors discover their methods and style by mentoring over the length of their career. Many will be skilled in adapting their style to fit the needs and characteristics of the mentee with whom they are working.

Most mentors learn by experimenting and analysing success and failure and some say that developing an effective method of mentoring takes years. No two mentees are the same or develop over the same trajectory. Mentees at the mid-career stage are likely to be quite divergent and to have developed along different trajectories. Mentoring must therefore be continually customized, adjusted and redirected to meet the objectives, backgrounds and career profiles of each mentee. A skilled mentors 's decisions and actions are guided by a reflective philosophy, a well-developed style, an ability to assess needs and a collection of strategies that can assist mentees in working towards their goals.

A skilled mentor's decisions are guided by:

- a reflective philosophy
- a well-developed style
- the ability the assess the needs of a mentee
- effective strategies for helping the mentee achieve their objectives

## Traits of an effective mentor

The best mentors are often those who have been mentees themselves.

- Accessibility and reliability– is approachable, keeps meeting, provides feedback on time
- Empathy – has personal insight into a mentee’s skills, need and personal circumstance while understanding that these will differ from their own experience
- Open-mindedness – respect for mentee’s individuality, working style, background, career goals
- Consistency and integrity - act on principles, demonstrate good values and ethical practices both personally and in a research context
- Patience - doesn’t teach or instruct, assists the mentee to explore their options and supports them in taking action
- Honesty –provides honest feedback, sensitively and in a positive spirit
- Savvy – understands the pragmatic aspects of working in an academic environment and developing a research career.

## Mentoring across differences

Each individual mentee will require different levels of support and encouragement. Mentors need to be flexible, sensitive and open-minded when dealing with the different mentees. This may be especially the case where cross gender and cross cultural mentoring are involved. In these situations, mentors can learn a lot about the different kinds of issues that might arise for an academic of another gender, culture or sexuality or who has a disability. It is important to respect and understand these differences, to be sensitive to various styles of communication that may be gender or culture based, and to recognise the needs of a mentees from whatever their background.

## Confidentiality

As a mentor you may be party to certain kinds of information about a mentee: from their past professional struggles and achievements, to their future plans (eg for promotion) and their personal circumstances (eg health, family responsibilities etc). Your mentee should feel that they can trust you with personal information that is affecting their progress generally and which may have relevance for the mentoring process.

Similarly, mentees need to be sensitive to information that mentors provide and not convey anything to others anything that could be confidential.

As a rule, all information should be treated as confidential or the level of confidentiality discussed and agreed.

## The first meeting

The initial meeting is important for providing a framework for how the mentoring relationship is going to proceed.

Here are some suggestions as to what needs to be discussed in the initial meeting.

### 1. Objectives

Discuss and review four objectives identified in the mentee's Expression of Interest. These objectives are listed on the Mentee Information Sheet in the folder.

Discuss whether the objectives are reasonable, achievable and appropriate at the mentees career stage. Revise and re-prioritise them as necessary.

### 2. Planning

Draw up a plan for working towards each of the objectives over the period of the DRL Program. Some objectives such as preparing a grant application, will require a number of key dates for completion of tasks. This will help keep the drafting of the application on track and ensure that the mentee meets important deadlines, has time for discussing feedback with the mentor etc. ,

Other objectives, such as time management strategies may require only one or discussions to discuss strategies and some ideas for the mentee to work on. (For example, the mentee could be given the task of talking to other academics about how they manage their workload and discuss findings with their mentor).

### 3. Memorandum of Agreement

Go through the MoA and discuss. The decisions may need to be revised as you go through the Program if there are changes in circumstances of the mentor or mentee.

### 4. Confirm whether you want to continue

After the initial meeting is a good time to discuss whether or not the match is going to be successful for both parties. If either party feels that the match is not going to be productive and satisfying, this is the time to mention them. It may be possible to clarify or resolve issues in some way (eg by re-examining expectations, reviewing the mentee's objectives, changing the meeting arrangements etc) as long as the arrangement is still going to meet the mentee's needs and achieve worthwhile outcomes.

## As a mentor, what do you do if the mentoring relationship is not going well?

Not all mentoring relationships are successful. This may be apparent early in the process eg because of communication problems or a bad match on objectives or you might just run out of steam half way through. If you feel that you are not able to assist a mentee for whatever reason, talk to them about it in a positive and constructive way. After all, you have volunteered to be a mentor and are committed to helping them get the best out of the arrangement. If that approach isn't successful or you would just like to talk through the issues, contact the Maree Gladwin, the Program Coordinator. In the end, it may be better to change the arrangement. Take care to sever the relationship in the most positive way you can. This will

## How to be a successful mentee

Being mentored is as much an art as mentoring. (Bonetta ed2006)

Here are some qualities to cultivate that will help to make the mentoring process a more enjoyable and productive experience for you and your mentor.

- **Be organised** - plan ahead work towards agreed tasks between meetings. Think about issues before you meet with your mentor. Doing your homework will avoid wasting their time and enable you to get the most out of the meetings with your mentor.
- **Be proactive** – Don't expect to be looked after or given all the answers. Universities and academia are tough environments. Maintain your independence. Be responsible for your own decisions regardless of the mentor's advice.
- **Ask useful questions**. Don't pretend you understand what the mentor is saying if you don't. The mentoring meeting is your time and the mentor will expect you to want to make the most of it and draw upon their knowledge and expertise.
- **Have respect** – Be considerate. Make and keep appointments. Stay focused. Don't overstay your welcome.
- **Show appreciation** - Everyone likes to be thanked. Remember that your mentor has volunteered to help you. When you achieve a great outcome, let them know and acknowledge their role.
- **Reciprocate**– being willing to share what you have learnt from mentoring by mentoring others
- **Have humility** – be willing to accept critical feedback so that you are open to learning new ways of thinking about and doing research.

## What do you do if the relationship with your mentor is not working well?

Not all mentoring relationships are successful. As a mentee, you may find difficulty communicating, making times to meet or simply have run out of steam half way. Problems may also arise because of a mentor's personal style or because you hold different understandings of the mentor or mentee role.

Try having a conversation with your mentor about what you need. If that doesn't help, contact the Maree Gladwin, the Program Coordinator to talk it through. Sometimes it is difficult to identify what the problems are and what you are actually gaining from a particular mentor. Talking it over will give you time to reflect on the mentoring relationship and get a perspective on things. Talking things over in confidence can also help to clarify the benefits of continuing or changing the arrangements. If there are persistent difficulties an alternative mentor will need to be arranged.

## Maintaining the mentoring support you need after the Program has ended

As a mentee, you need to know how to ask for and accept the professional advice you need, and how to maintain long-term personal and professional relationships that support informal mentoring relationships.

Some suggestions for maintaining a network of informal mentors:

- Don't let go of old mentors or supervisors
- Establish a relationship with more senior people who can act as informal mentors. They are usually experienced academics in your own University or elsewhere who can give you a broader perspective on academia or with whom you discuss research issues. They may be your collaborators of the future, serve on an academic promotion committee, end up as your Head or Dean, or be on a grants panel. Take care to maintain a good relationship with people in this group. Value these professional relationships and treat them with respect. Generally, it is not a good idea to vent your frustrations or confide your uncertainties with these kinds of mentors unless you know them very well.
- Establish a set of confidantes. These are people with whom you can openly share information about politically sensitive issues. Choose them carefully as they need to be trustworthy and prepared to look after your interests.
- After the DRL Program, keep your formal mentor posted on your progress and acknowledge their contribution to your achievements. They may also become an informal mentor and a friend, but this is not an expectation of the Program.

## Support for mentors and mentees

Support for all participants in the Developing Research Leaders Program is provided by the Program Coordinator, Dr Maree Gladwin. The Program Coordinator is responsible for introducing the Developing Research Leaders Program across all faculties and for fostering new research links and collaborations.

As well as working with Faculties to introduce the Program, the Program Coordinator provides ongoing advice and support for mentors and mentees, including a series of research seminars, workshops and retreats, that support the needs and objectives of mentees.

The Program Coordinator also has a role in monitoring and reporting on mentoring outcomes and assessing the impact of mentoring generally on the research performance of mid-career researchers and the University's research targets.

A Staff Research Development website is being developed by Kate Dawson, the SRD Project Officer. This will provide access to a range of information about research mentoring, the Developing Research Leaders Program and associated activities.

Mentors and mentees are welcome to contact Staff Research Development Office at any time for information or assistance.

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**Feedback on the Guidelines**

These Guidelines are a work in progress. If you would like to provide feedback on their usefulness and have suggestions for additions or changes, your comments are very welcome. A copy of the Guidelines will be made available on the Staff Research Development website later in the year.

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March, 2009