



Australian Government

Comcare



WHS MENTORING: A QUICK GUIDE

This guide aims to briefly outline the basic principles surrounding mentoring for those who are first time mentors or mentees.

CONTENTS

WHAT IS MENTORING?	3
--------------------	---

THE MENTORING PROCESS IN BRIEF	3
--------------------------------	---

Mentor	3
--------	---

Mentee	4
--------	---

IN SUMMARY	4
------------	---

ATTACHMENT 1	5
--------------	---

GROW model for coaching and mentoring	5
---------------------------------------	---

Goal	5
------	---

Reality	6
---------	---

Options	6
---------	---

Wrap-up	6
---------	---

ATTACHMENT 2	7
--------------	---

Setting objectives and expectations	7
-------------------------------------	---

Mentoring contract checklist	8
------------------------------	---

ATTACHMENT 3	9
--------------	---

Listening and questioning for mentors	9
---------------------------------------	---

Asking questions	9
------------------	---

WHAT IS MENTORING?

One useful description of mentoring might be the process of supporting an individual to achieve a specific personal or professional result. As a facilitative process the mentor or coach listens, questions and challenges the individual by encouraging them to find answers to problems and determine appropriate actions for themselves. The simple [GROW model \(Attachment 1\)](#) forms the basis of the Comcare and Commonwealth Safety Management Forum (CSMF) approach to mentoring, although many other models would fit equally as well.

Since the mentoring process will be based on the mentee's individual objectives, a crucial first step in the process is for both parties to set out and agree upon firm objectives and expectations on which the relationship will be based ([Attachment 2](#)).

Only on the completion of a mentoring 'contract' outlining the agreed expectations and objectives should the parties commence the mentoring process.

THE MENTORING PROCESS IN BRIEF

In its simplest terms, the mentor can be thought of as the party responsible for leading the process and the mentee for working on the content. This, however, is not fixed and the responsibility of the parties to ensure a beneficial mentoring process may have been agreed on differently when establishing the mentoring contract. Generally speaking the responsibilities of the parties might include:

MENTOR

- > Facilitating the process: while the conversation will invariably explore many related areas, the mentor should ensure that ultimately the focus stays on the issue at hand, and retains a constructive tone; hold any subject boundaries that have been agreed ([Attachment 2](#)).
- > Listening actively ([Attachment 3](#)).
- > Adopting an observational stance rather than an interpretive one.
- > Summarising and reflecting back in their own words what they think they have heard (and seen).
- > Asking questions constructively ([Attachment 3](#)).
- > Challenging any perceived inconsistencies or assumptions in what they are hearing from the mentee. It may be that the mentor challenges the mentee to take action or accept risk. Challenging should be done sensitively and appropriately to open up possibilities rather than to close down discovery.
- > Encouraging the mentee to explore a wide range of options and possibilities.
- > Providing advice or sharing expertise and knowledge appropriately and within what has been agreed at the contracting stage.
- > Encouraging the setting of action points that are specific, realistic and time bound.
- > Reviewing progress and refining approaches where needed.

MENTEE

- > Owning and taking responsibility for the content of the mentoring relationship – mentees should not expect mentors to solve problems or provide quick fixes. Mentees should remain aware that the purpose of mentoring is for assistance with problem definition and option development.
- > Be open to developing their self-awareness and to making change.
- > Be open to what the mentor has to say and to their advice; this does not mean the mentee must simply agree with the advice provided. It does mean the mentee should receive it, reflect upon it and decide later whether they agree and whether to act on it.
- > Reflecting between sessions on what has been discussed.
- > Taking the action agreed.

IN SUMMARY

It's possible that issues will arise that will test the boundaries of the mentor/mentee relationship.

It's important to remain open to these circumstances and consider whether it would be appropriate to review and revise the original expectations and objectives that were set by mutual agreement. Should the mentoring process end earlier than expected, each of the parties to the relationship shares the responsibility to end it constructively.

Regardless, of the duration of the mentoring relationship or the reasons for its conclusion, the parties should review and celebrate the progress and achievements made, and conclude by considering how the mentee may continue to work on their development.

Attachment 1: GROW model for coaching and mentoring

Attachment 2: Setting objectives and expectations

Attachment 3: Listening and questioning for mentors

GROW MODEL FOR COACHING AND MENTORING

Comcare and the CSMF advocate using an intuitive coaching/mentoring model, expressed using the acronym **GROW**, which describes the stages of the coaching conversation. The **GROW** framework has been chosen since it is simple to remember and apply while facilitating a structured and meaningful conversation.

GROW in summary:

Goal

The goal of the conversation – what is it you want to achieve?

Reality

The background – who, what, when, where and why?

Options

What could take this goal forward? What is possible?

Wrap-up

The agreement – what are we/can we commit to do, when and by whom?

Each part of **GROW** has its own set of useful questions.

GOAL

Identifying the goal enables the safety mentor and mentee to agree on what they are aiming for in the conversation. Good goal-setting questions might include:

- > What's our aim for today's conversation?
- > What help do you need from me on this problem?
- > If this conversation went well, what would have changed for you?

REALITY

This is the part of the conversation in which the mentor and mentee establish what is going on. The mentor wants the mentee to reflect and explore, and it is the mentor's curiosity and questioning that propels this exploration.

Remember that the objective for the safety mentor is not to solve the problem – it is to work with the mentee to solve the problem for the person conducting a business or undertaking.

Mentors should beware of spending too much time on this phase or of asking more and more factually-based questions on subjects already well known to the mentee. The aim is not for the mentor to fully understand it, as it would be if they were the owner of the problem, but for the mentee to understand it – a very different emphasis.

Good questions at this phase of the safety mentoring conversation might include:

- > Who are the key stakeholders?
- > What will your contribution be?
- > What have you already tried?
- > What will happen if you do nothing?
- > What would an ideal solution look like sound like and feel like?
- > What's standing in the way of that happening?

OPTIONS

The *Reality* part of the safety mentoring conversation will normally have brought out the underlying problems, so now the mentor can move to *Options*. Good questions here are:

- > So what do you think might be possible?
- > When you've met this kind of situation before, what did you do?
- > What have you seen other people do?
- > What might they cost in time, skill, effort and money?
- > Which one do you think is worth taking forward?

Since this part of the conversation has the flavour of a brainstorming session, it is fine for the mentor to offer their own ideas, as long as the mentor accepts that the ultimate choices about which ideas to act on or reject are the mentee's in full knowledge of the constraints that might attract within the nature of their business or undertaking.

WRAP-UP

Wrapping-up is about achieving a commitment from the mentee and agreeing which of the options they are going to present for endorsement. Safety mentors may like to measure how committed the mentee is to an option, and how they might seek commitment. For example, a mentor might say:

- > On a scale of one to ten, how happy do you feel about going to the WHS Committee to have this discussion?

If the mentee replied that they felt they were at five out of ten, the safety mentor might ask what would need to happen for it to become a nine. Another possible double-checking question here is:

- > What might stop this from happening?

SETTING OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTATIONS

Probably the most effective process to facilitate a meaningful mentoring relationship is through the establishment of a mentoring “contract”. Likely discussion in developing a mentoring contract might include:

Element	Objective	Expectation
Governance	How often and for how long do we meet?	About once a month for about an hour is generally considered to be the normal arrangement, although this can be adjusted according to what is appropriate for the people and objectives involved. Consideration should be given to the time restrictions of both parties, particularly the mentor.
	How many meetings or how long should the process last?	The usual cycle is about 6 meetings over 6 months, but this may vary depending on what suits the mentoring pair. Certainly there should be clarity at the beginning about how long the process will continue. You may also want to consider whether to set dates and times for all the meetings at the beginning of the process, or to set each one as you go along.
	Where do we meet?	As well as considering the practicalities of a suitable place to meet, think about what kind of perspectives the environment might bring to the mentoring process. Somewhere neutral might be preferable to the mentor or the mentee’s office. Above all wherever you meet it should provide privacy and be a place where the mentee will feel confident and secure enough to discuss concerns openly. You may also want to consider whether ‘meeting’ virtually might be appropriate for you.
Communication	What level of communication occurs between meetings?	How much communication do you expect between meetings? How will you communicate? – By phone, email, face to face? Discuss and agree each party’s preferences. What will happen if one party is unable to make a scheduled meeting? What notice is required?
Recording	How will action items be recorded?	Who will be responsible for keeping a note of what is discussed and actions to be taken? In what format? How will this be exchanged?

MENTORING CONTRACT CHECKLIST

Who	Consideration	✓	X
Mentee	Objectives and expectations for the mentoring process have been determined		
	Measures of success have been determined		
	Confidentiality has been discussed		
	Dispute resolution and end state discussed		
	Subject matter boundaries have been set		
Mentor	Have the objectives and expectations been clearly stated? If not clarify before continuing.		
	Are you able to contribute to these expectations and objectives? If not a mismatch of need and skill has occurred and a meaningful mentoring process is unlikely		
	Have any boundaries been clearly stated? If not this may be a source of friction as the relationship develops		
	Has a process for ending the mentoring relationship before time been discussed? Clarity surrounding the responsibility of the parties in ending a relationship before time constructively should not be overlooked.		

LISTENING AND QUESTIONING FOR MENTORS

Listening well is a key skill that needs practice. On occasion each of us may not listen well when our attention may be on something other than what the other person is saying.

To listen well:

- ✓ Practise concentrating on the other person and what they are saying. When you notice yourself not listening well, bring your attention back to the speaker, and gradually you will find that it becomes easier to concentrate on what is being said.
- ✓ Practise listening for the unspoken messages underneath the words. Often these become easy to 'hear' when you turn your awareness to them. Be aware of body language – both your own and the other person's.
- ✓ Keep your mind open and suspend judgement. Concentrate on the content of what is being said. Develop an awareness of how you respond. Do your responses seek to explore, clarify, understand and reflect back what you think you heard?

ASKING QUESTIONS

There are two main types of question – open and closed.

Open questions encourage the exploration of a topic and tend to start with words or phrases such as 'What, How, Where, Describe, Tell me about...', for example:

- ✓ Tell me about your experience of.....
- ✓ How do you feel about....?
- ✓ What were your reasons for.....?

Closed questions often encourage yes or no responses while asking 'Why?' can sometimes sound accusatory. Closed questions can, however, control the limits of the person's reply and can be used to focus, summarise, move to action and round off a discussion. Examples might be:

- ✓ Have you completed that action?
- ✓ What are your next steps?
- ✓ When are you going to do that?

Both types of question are useful for different purposes and it is important to think about what results your different questions will have and which will best serve the purpose of the mentoring and any given time.