How Do I Mentor For Career Development?

Many mentoring programs are aimed at assisting participants with career management but just how can a mentor help? This section provides some activities to assist with career development conversations.

Career management involves assessing the current situation and making informed decisions about the future. It requires reflection - thoughtful assessment of yourself and your situation; and action - deliberate movement toward selected goals.

You can do this alone; however, a trusted confidante who can skilfully listen and question, may elicit insights that may otherwise remain unavailable.

Your Supervisor/Manager will support you in this process by holding a career discussion as part of your Performance Development Planning discussion. They will work with you to identify opportunities within your current job role that will assist to strengthen and develop transferable skills.

Part of your career plan may include finding and building a relationship with a mentor who can assist by providing additional support.

ASSessING THE CURRENT REALITY (SELF ASSESSMENT)

Take a detailed look at yourself and the current situation.

A detailed conversation with a mentor will help you to get clear about what you like and dislike about:

- Your job content – Are you doing what you enjoy and what you are good at in the work tasks, activities, role and responsibilities?
- The work environment – Do the people, physical surroundings and organisational culture bring out your best? Is the field you work in something you value?
- Work/Life – How does work impact on how you want to live life? Does it match your personal values and goals?
- A personal stock-take is in order. A mentor will ask:
  - What values and beliefs guide your priorities right now?
  - What personal considerations, such as relationships, finances, family, health, education and other commitments, need to be taken into account in your decision making?
  - What knowledge, skills, experience and other strengths and career assets have you?
  - What interests and motivates you?
  - In terms of your personality, are you a people person who wants to help or serve, a fix-it type, into technology, machines and tools? Do you love ideas or are you happier working with solid data? Are you inquisitive, driven by the quest for knowledge or is your preference artistic expression?

IDENTIFY THE IDEAL OCCUPATION (EXPLORE OPTIONS)

Having assessed the current reality, it is time to imagine future possibilities. The value of the mentor earlier was their ability to stimulate introspection and examination of the present; now the mentor encourages looking outward and contemplating future prospects.

Creativity, optimism and good information are vital at this stage so that you can entertain many possibilities before you set more specific goals.

As an alternative to a goal such as “I want to be a …” or ‘I want job xyz’ try defining the ideal occupation using the exercise in the following attachment and make it your aim.

Share your responses with your mentor.

Compare the ideal you have described with current reality. Discuss what is working well for you right now and how you might close the gaps between what you have and what you would like.

MAKING INFORMED DECISIONS (DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT YOUR PLAN)

Narrow the list of possibilities to a few options that appear to align with your ideal occupation and allow you to set a general direction for your actions.

The mentor acts as a facilitator of the inward looking self-assessment and the outward looking exploration of options before assisting you to develop plans and identify the resources you need to implement them.

This is a practical phase where the mentor is a collaborator and creativity, combined with pragmatism is used to generate and evaluate various strategies.

THE MENTORING CONVERSATION

The mentor facilitates this kind of career planning by leading a conversation based on four questions:

- Where are you now?
- Where do you want to be?
- How might you get there? And, as the mentoree starts to act on their plan,
  - How are you doing?

The aim of this conversation is to enable the mentee to reflect on their experience and take stock, make informed decisions about their options, set goals then plan and implement appropriate actions.

In facilitating decision-making the mentor may:

- Draw ideas from the mentee and help them use their existing knowledge;
- Assist the mentee to find and access other related sources; or,
- Offer information and advice based on personal knowledge and experience.

As the saying goes:

“Give a person a fish and you feed them for a day; teach a person how to fish and they can feed themselves for a lifetime”.

This is particularly important because career management is not a one-off event. It is an ongoing cycle of reflection and action, learning and growth.

For tools and resources please visit go.unimelb.edu.au/3d7

Information correct as at 1 June 2012.