

SLA Europe Mentoring Guidelines

What is “mentoring”?

Mentoring is a method of partnership learning. It offers an environment for coaching, counselling and guidance across sectors, but particularly across professions. It is a partnership between two people (mentor and mentee) normally working in a similar field or sharing similar experiences, and is an effective way of helping people to progress in their careers.

Being mentored allows someone to identify areas where they want to improve their personal performance. They can boast happily about their achievements, and can admit their misgivings about workplace events and relationships. They can try out ideas on someone who will look at a situation objectively, and help them articulate overtures and responses to make progress. Mentoring gives someone their own personal cheer leader and their own publicity agent.

Mentoring has beneficial outcomes for the mentor and the mentee. It results in better self knowledge and greater confidence in ability and career planning. It gives them more knowledge of how things work in other organisations and cultures. It grows their networks and gives them a wider portfolio of support techniques and stories to call on as they experience new situations.

What mentoring involves

Mentoring requires a degree of commitment in time given, and in a determination to help the mentee to identify evidence of development and cite examples of doing things in new ways.

It's a good idea for a mentor and mentee to have an informal face to face meeting in the first instance, to assess how they will work together in the proposed partnership. Following that, contact between mentor and mentee is agreed on a mutual basis. Trust and empathy are vital aspects of a successful mentoring relationship.

Once a commitment to working together has been made, here are some guidelines to help plan the relationship:

- Agree the length of the mentoring arrangement (a year is a good indication, but be mutually flexible) and the frequency and location of meetings. Think about the balance of face to face meetings and interim phone calls or email contact. Agree to make this as often or as infrequent as desired.
- Outline some topics for discussion, particularly if the mentee has some hoped for areas of development. This can be a helpful programme outline for both the mentor and mentee to work from.
- Think about different types of activities to include in the programme. Not every meeting has to be a one to one discussion. It could include a

plan to meet at an industry event or presentation. It could involve a third party with specific experience to contribute to discussion on a particular topic. Or it could be a plan for the mentor or mentee to visit each other's work place.

- The mentor may want to do some planning prior to meetings, to articulate helpful experience, and to identify resources which could add value to the mentee's desire to cope with a new situation. When mentoring a younger person it's not always easy to recall the anxieties of things like first speaking up in a senior group meeting, or submitting a first business case. Mentors planning for discussion on particular themes need to think back to how they coped, and who or what helped them at the time. When mentoring someone more senior, mentors may want to talk to some of their own peers in advance of the meeting to assess current issues in a given area.

Effective mentoring behaviours

- A mentor must be totally trustworthy and maintain the confidences of the mentee.
- A mentor helps the mentee to find and implement their own solutions to development.
- A mentor is not a line manager or a personal assistant.
- A mentor should ask questions and challenge, while providing guidance and encouragement

- A mentee must take the initiative and do the leg work in the relationship.
- The final responsibility for actions taken, as a result of mentoring, lies with the mentee

A mentor's role is to empower a mentee to develop their skills and improve their performance. This involves listening, questioning, sharing and translating skills.

- Listening out for what is said and what is not said.
- Questioning to establish the crucial issues for attention
- Sharing stories of success and failure to enable learning from knowledge and experience.
- Translating negative statements into positive affirmations.

Make a difference. Be an SLA mentor.