

## Mentoring

### **Mentoring: Two Approaches \***

While many models for mentoring exist, there are essentially two (2) approaches. The best is call “instrumental”. The goal in this approach is to foster learning and competent workplace behavior. Instrumental mentoring might include advising interns on appropriate work attire, teaching phone etiquette, and “helping” interns understand the demands of the workplace. Most programs with an instrumental focus identify workplace readiness or, more broadly, career development as the primary goal.

The second broad approach to mentoring may be referred to as “developmental”. Programs like Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America, for example, help build self-esteem and personal efficacy by pairing a young person with a caring adult who is viewed as a friend rather than an authority figure. In some cases, this relationship may provide the only stability in a young person’s troubled life.

Because of limited resources and available volunteers, most mentor pairings in work-based learning programs place the site supervisor in the dual role of boss and mentor. Many experts would argue that the hierarchical supervisor/intern relationship makes developmental mentoring difficult to accomplish. However, high school students need, and can benefit from developmental as well as instrumental mentoring. The challenge is to create a mentoring program that can do both.

### **An introduction:**

A formal mentoring program may or may not be part of your work-based learning program, but the activity of mentoring should always be included in work-based learning activities. Recent research into School-to Work and School to Career programs nationwide, find that these activities bring adults and students together in positive ways and the adult workplace mentors serve as ongoing resources to students and schools. \*\*

The following information on mentoring can help you insure mentoring is a strong component of your activities and is structured in a safe and effective manner. It can also be used in training of worksite supervisors who might be serving in the dual role of supervisor and mentor, or in the training of other work-based learning volunteers: Job shadow hosts, speakers etc.

\*The New Urban High School: A Practitioner’s Guide

\*\* Hershey, A.M., Silverberg, M.K., & Haimson, J. (1999, February) Expanding Options for Students: Report to Congress on the National Evaluation of School-to-Work Implementation. Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

## **Workplace Mentors**

### **Defining a Workplace Mentor\***

When students are exposed to an adult environment, adult standards, and adult mentors, they change the way they behave and the way they look at their world. A mentor can play many different roles: teacher, supervisor, coach, counselor, and role model. A workplace mentor helps students make the connection between their present performance-both at school and at the workplace, and their future.

#### **Examples:**

Teacher – instruct students in various areas not limited to job tasks.

Supervisor – Give direction. Think in terms of how students fit into the needs of the organization.

Coach – Provide motivation and information to help students meet performance expectations. Give ongoing feedback and encouragement.

Counselor – Help students work through problems or attitudes that affect job performance.

Role Model – Lead by example. Help students develop effective professional skills and habits.

### **Qualities of a Good Work-based Learning Mentor\*\***

A good mentor:

- Is respectful of others
- Keeps a positive outlook on life
- Enjoys working with young people
- Likes or loves his/her work
- Listens and communicates well
- Stays flexible while keeping healthy boundaries
- Has capacity for sharing and empathy
- Promotes the growth and development of the student
- Can make people and resources of the organization available to the student
- Sees the student as capable of making decisions and learning new things

### **The Most Important Responsibilities of a Mentor**

- Take the time to structure the student's experience at the site
- Get to know the student well
- Spend time with the student and give encouragement
- Reveal oneself as a person, not just a worker
- Tolerate frustrating behavior from the student and guide him/her toward maturity
- Understand the goals of the program and work toward them.
- Communicate with teachers and coordinators from the partnering school
- Assist the student in obtaining additional resources and professional contacts
- Model professional behavior and work habits

\* Adapted from the Hospitality Business Alliance, Mentor's Guide

\*\*Adapted from the New Urban High School, A Practitioner's Guide

## **Teachers/Coordinators**

Developing work-based learning mentors also demands developing worksites. Below are three ways to assess the learning potential of a workplace:

1. Review job descriptions and interview mentors;
2. Observe or shadow your students at work, see it through their eyes; and,
3. Participate in mini-internships and engage in the work your students will be doing.

## **The following questions can help Internship Coordinators/Teachers develop and maintain a successful work-based learning mentoring program:**

### **Goals and outcomes**

Why do you want a work-based learning mentoring program?

What goals have you identified?

What will it look like in daily practice?

Does your overall plan meet student's needs?

### **Mentor selection and matching**

What kinds of experience, position or ability are you looking for?

What is the best way to insure a successful pairing?

Will mentors have contact with students outside the workplace or have regular unsupervised access to the student at the worksite? If so, criminal background checks are necessary. (See the Appendix for the Request for Criminal History Information and Applicant Disclosure forms.

Once these forms have been completed, turn in to staff person in your building who has responsibility for processing this request. If no one in your building has the ability to access this information, the procedure for gaining access to ACCESSING WATCH [Washington Access to Criminal History] is also included in the Appendix.)

### **Mentoring should not be a blind date**

Give students and adults opportunities to get to know one another before pairing them. Bring them together in settings where they can exchange ideas and share interests. Invite adults to be guest speakers, carry out mock interviews, advise student projects, and participate in portfolio review panels. Have students initiate these contacts as much as possible.

### **Mentors may come from many sources**

Many senior citizens have had interesting careers and rich lives and have time and resources to devote. School alumni often want to help their school beyond donating or raising money. Hoover High School in San Diego, for example, has had excellent success drawing on its alumni association for mentors. Local universities and colleges may also supply mentors; many college organizations have community service requirements.

### **Develop partnerships**

Local employers and agencies often feel a strong obligation to help local schools. Mentor programs are far easier to develop when employers provide lists of prospective mentors, give workers time off or flexible time to meet with mentees, and recognize mentors through publications and special events.

### **Current mentors are good recruiters**

Mentors themselves are the best source of new mentors. In addition, the school should document successful relationships as a way to recruit prospective mentors.

### **Key program elements**

Can you identify enough mentors to maintain a one-to-one ratio?

If mentors are assigned to more than one student, what support will you provide to ensure success?

How often will students and mentors meet?

Will mentors be their workplace supervisors at well? If so, how will this work?

### **Mentoring doesn't always have to be one-on-one**

If your pool of mentors is small, try to match more than one student per mentor. It is better for some students to share a mentor than for some students to have no mentor at all. In fact, students may benefit from having a common mentor, or from having more than one mentor.

### **Take affirmative steps for students with special needs**

Students with special needs often benefit the most from adult mentoring relationships. It is not necessarily best to pair these students with adults who have disabilities themselves—empathy is what matters. At the same time, information makes a difference. Some students have never had stable, trusting relationships with adults. Others may have citizenship concerns or other legal issues that make them nervous or self-protective around adults. Mentors need training to prepare them for these situations and help them develop stronger relationships with students with needs.

### **The mentoring process**

Will you prescribe certain activities for the mentors, or will you let them develop their own or both?

What roles do you want your mentors to serve; teacher, supervisor, coach, counselor, role model?

### **Mentoring is a two-way relationship**

Make it clear to both student and mentor that they are responsible for making sure that each benefits from the relationship. Without that reciprocity, the relationship will not last. And the longer mentoring relationships last, the more energy can be invested in expanding the existing pool of mentors.

### **Coordination and training**

Whom can mentors call with concerns?

How can you be sure your mentors have the skills necessary to make the mentoring work?

How will you know if students are ready to accept mentoring from an adult?

How will you support mentors in times of frustration or difficulty?

### **The community needs a reliable point of contact**

It is common for adults from the community to call or write schools about volunteering time. If possible, the school should assign a staff member to serve as a liaison, to monitor existing relationships, maintain a database or contact information, and promote the program.

### **Evaluation**

How will you monitor the program?

How will you tell whether your mentoring relationships are successful?

How will mentors and students give feedback and evaluate the program?

### **Maintain relationships with mentors**

Recognize and celebrate mentor relationships through events like brunches, exhibitions, and performances. Gatherings of this kind can also be a powerful recruiting device. Be sure to thank mentors for participating, even when relationships don't work out. Take note when mentors stay a second semester, make a difference for a student, or recruit other mentors. Like the students they work with, mentors need to know that their efforts are recognized and appreciated.

### **Tips for Workplace Mentors\***

#### **Keep a watchful eye**

Watch for signs of boredom or indifference. Try to create opportunities and experiences that foster discovery of new ideas and development of new skills.

#### **Ask open-ended questions**

Check periodically to see how well and how much the student is learning. Ask open-ended questions such as, "What has been most challenging to you these past few weeks?"

#### **Provide support without rescuing**

Too often mentors say "Let me show you how to do that," when they should be asking, "What do you think you should do next?" It takes patience and courage to stand back and let a student risk failure. However, the most significant growth happens through the discomfort of grappling with a new situation.

#### **Avoid messages of perfection**

The greatest gift a mentor can give students is to be authentic. When you make a mistake, you can show how you learn from that mistake and are more competent as a result. Make sure the student sees and hears that you are not always an expert and that you are still a learner yourself.

### **Including Intellectual Rigor in the Workplace Mentoring Experience\***

Connections – It is essential students see how their work relates to their lives, the work of others and broader purposes (community, economy, environment). In addition, always ask the student how what they are doing in the workplace connects to what they are learning in school.

Perspective - It is important for students to be able to identify the perspective from which someone approaches a situation. Ask students to explain their point of view and consider how things look from another point of view.

Evidence – In school students need to develop the habit of giving evidence for any point they are trying to make. They should be encouraged to do the same at the workplace. In your conversations with students, ask them to elaborate on their thoughts and support their ideas. Don't be satisfied with one word responses.

Speculation – It is important for students to know that there is more than one way to accomplish a task and that their feedback is important. Where it is appropriate, ask students to consider ways of managing a place or ways to more efficiently spend time.

\*Adapted from the New Urban High School, A Practitioner's Guide

Significance – Students need to understand why the project they are working on is significant. It makes a great impact on students if their efforts have contributed to the success of the organization or project. Help students reflect on the importance of their work for their own development.

## **SchoolNotes.com**

Another way of providing students with mentors is through SchoolNotes.com, an on-line mentoring opportunity. This is a free service available to all Seattle Public Schools staff and teachers.

SchoolNotes.com is an easy way for teachers and staff to create their own website. Teachers/staff can post events, coursework, and class issues on this site. It's very easy to update and modify. Using this service, teachers can have students post questions to employers/mentors, possibly as an assignment in class, and the employer can use the service to respond. This is an easy, sustainable way to encourage mentorship without the need of a background check for the mentor. The teacher will see all the interactions between students and mentor and can use the opportunity as a safe learning tool.

In order to subscribe to SchoolNotes.com:

In a search engine, such as Yahoo.com, type in SchoolNotes.com. Click on "Create Notes" and follow the simple instructions.

Students, parents and mentors can access the account by knowing the teacher's school zip code and scrolling to find the teacher's name.