

ARTICLE FOR WIIT NEWSLETTER

WHAT GETS TALKED ABOUT DURING MENTORING MEETINGS?

Mentoring is often seen as a passing on of accumulated knowledge and wisdom by the mentor to the mentee - this would seem to imply that the mentor should do most of the talking.

But research has shown that in really effective mentoring meetings the mentor should do only 20% of the talking in a session.

So then, what should happen in a good mentoring session? This depends to some extent at what stage the mentoring relationship is - whether the meeting is the first one between this mentor and his/her mentee, or whether the relationship is well established, or whether the relationship is being wound down with a view to moving on.

During the early stages of the relationship, the critical issues are to build the rapport between the two and to establish what objectives the mentee would like to achieve with the relationship. In addition, it is really important early on to agree on the "ground rules".

A well established mentoring pair should be able examine one or two key issues during one session (typically one hour). A useful structure for any mentoring meeting is:

- ❖ Define the issue to be discussed at this session
- ❖ Explore the issue from the mentee's perspective
 - Get the facts
 - Test and challenge
 - Analyse and look for patterns
- ❖ Look for options
- ❖ Analyse implications and decide on a solution
- ❖ Agree milestones, summarise and check for commitment
- ❖ Agree next meeting date

What types of issues do mentees want to discuss in mentoring? Clearly, this depends on the individual mentee, but an analysis of hundreds of mentoring pairs shows that issues tend to revolve around

- ❖ How to be successful in present job / project / assignment (issues of team leadership, working with other departments, interpersonal conflicts etc)
- ❖ How to build a career, useful next steps, how to prepare for the next step, how to improve reputation, how to improve self-confidence, how to overcome discrimination/glass ceilings etc
- ❖ How to achieve meaningfulness at work, improve quality of life, rebalance work/life issues etc

So, at the end of the meeting, both mentor and mentee should review between themselves who did the talking, who asked the questions, who found the solutions, who did the creative thinking, who was in control.

Developmental mentoring is a relationship where both parties learn from the discussions, where the mentee's issues determine the agenda and where each party respects the wisdom in the other.