

# Why do we need to train mentees?

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## Article by Professor Clutterbuck

One of the most common reasons for mentoring programmes failing is that they forget to train mentees sufficiently. Programmes that train only mentors deliver less than half the benefits, on average, than those that train both participants.

The reasons include:

- Mentees' often have little experience of mentoring and come with unrealistic expectations – for example, expecting to be sponsored. When those expectations aren't met, they tend to be frustrated and blame the process (or the mentor)
- Mentees need to drive the process, for it to work properly. Without training, they often lack the confidence to be proactive in managing the relationship and/ or to inject sufficient positive challenge into the learning conversations
- Mentoring requires a relatively high level of dialogue, as opposed to discussion or debate. Effective training provides the skills to engage in and sustain learning dialogue. Without this, conversations tend to focus on the shallow and on tactical issues, or on transfer of basic skills, rather than on developing insight and personal capability
- The techniques that effective mentors use are most effective when the mentee understands what is happening and is both comfortable with and able to cooperate with the process
- Briefings don't work. People need time to discuss, reflect and practice their role and behaviours as a mentee, and to modify their expectations
- Research strongly associates mentee training with both mentors' and mentees' subsequent perception of relationship quality
- Mentees, who have not received training, tend to report feeling unsupported as programme participants. This in turn affects their commitment to the programme and the mentoring relationship
- Training helps mentees perceive the relationship from other perspectives – in particular, that of the organisation and their mentors
- Successful mentoring is strongly associated with a sense of relationship and programme purpose – that sense tends to be much weaker in relationships, where the mentee has not attended training

In environments, where mentors and mentees are from different cultural backgrounds, training is even more vital. Expectations about how the relationship should be conducted, where the boundaries are, what success will look like and so on are likely to be very different – so people need time and opportunity to reflect on these matters. (In a south-east Asian operation of an oil company, for example, expectations of expatriate mentors and indigenous mentees were almost total opposites.)

## **How much training is needed?**

Recommended good practice is at least one day initially, followed up by two or more opportunities over the year to explore how they are using the relationship and what they can do to help their mentor be more effective in helping them.