

# The Many Modes of Mentoring: New Spins on the Classic Relationship

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**G**ONE ARE THE DAYS WHEN mentoring merely meant that an experienced staffer devoted significant time advising a newcomer to the field. Now, mentoring may be as brief as one quick encounter. Even more surprising, the encounter may be initiated by an executive seeking the expertise of a tech-savvy new hire. In fact, smart executives will make a point of interacting with new people for their mutual benefit. The executive gets a question answered and the newcomer, feeling valued and welcomed, has enjoyed a positive collaboration with an established colleague.

## MENTORS, MENTEES, AND COACHES: WHO ARE THEY?

*Mentors* are the more experienced individuals (in general, or on a specific subject), and *mentees* are less experienced.

Mentoring is an art, not a science, and it is not the same as coaching. Mentoring generally brings colleagues together voluntarily to interact in an informal way. Coaching, on the other hand, usually involves managers whose job it is to guide those reporting to them toward results-oriented outcomes. Although mentors and coaches are concerned with the organization and the individual working within it, *managers are more focused on the organization* whereas *mentors focus*

*on the individual*. Mentoring and coaching have their place, and are frequently mentioned in tandem, but they are not interchangeable.<sup>1</sup>

## WHY ORGANIZATIONS CREATE MENTORING PROGRAMS

Much has been written on the subject of mentoring, and the consensus is that successful mentoring is highly effective. It boosts morale, increases organizational productivity, and enhances career development. Stephen Callender, EdD, a senior consultant with Personnel Decisions International who designs and implements corporate mentoring programs, says that employees who participate in mentoring programs “are typically people you don’t want to lose—the high potentials, the next generation of leaders, the valued experts, the star performers.”<sup>2</sup>

There are many apathetic employees who perhaps could be energized if they were guided into mentoring. A survey of 3 million employees by the Gallup Organization ([www.gallup.com](http://www.gallup.com)) concluded that 71% of Americans who go to work every day are not engaged in their jobs. This means they tend toward indifference and do not use their talents to develop productive relationships. To move these employees to an “engaged” status, Richard Bayer, PhD, chief operating officer of the career management Five O’Clock Club, includes these ideas among his recommendations<sup>3</sup>:

- Develop mentoring relationships between senior and junior members of the organization.
- Encourage employees to talk about their needs in their present position.
- Expand everyone’s network within the organization. Allow more access to senior management for a good cause.

Note how all of these promote mentoring and its positive effects. The following list describes several nontraditional approaches to mentoring that employers

can use to help employees become more engaged.<sup>4</sup>

**Flash mentoring** involves brief, one-time exchanges like the one described at the beginning of this article. Even busy staff can participate, because the time commitment ranges from a few minutes to a couple of hours. Matching can be random, with little or no criteria. After mentors share information, mentor and protégé might decide to continue the relationship, or perhaps just wait and see if they have reason to connect again.<sup>5</sup>

**Group mentoring** occurs when one or more mentors work with several protégés at one time. Participants share insights and experiences. Group mentoring relationships focus more on peer interaction, with the mentor acting as group facilitator.<sup>6</sup>

**Peer mentoring** is the interaction of individuals who are at about the same place/level in their careers.

**Reverse mentoring** often involves a “junior” person (in terms of age, experience, or position) mentoring a “senior” one. The classic example is of tech-savvy juniors helping seniors who are technology-challenged. Companies say one outcome is reduced turnover among younger employees, who gain a sense of purpose and rare access to top-level brass.<sup>7</sup>

**Situational mentoring** is usually a short-term interaction for an express purpose providing “the right help at the right time,” but can evolve into a longer-term connection.<sup>8</sup>

**Supervisory mentoring** is the closest to “coaching,” in which a supervisor outlines expectations and goals. Ideally, however, the supervisor also offers informal mentoring and encourages his or her direct reports to seek outside mentors. (See “Mentoring 101: Building a Mentoring Relationship” in the July 2010 issue of the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* for more on supervisory mentoring.<sup>9</sup>)

**Team mentoring** takes place when two or more mentors work with one individual or with a group.

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**Virtual mentoring** connects mentor and mentee electronically (eg, by e-mail, Skype) and thus provides many choices for all concerned. At least one face-to-face meeting is recommended if this is possible. Virtual mentoring is meant for those who cannot easily gather together with colleagues due to distances separating them or for other reasons. (See "Instant Mentoring: Sharing Wisdom and Getting Advice Online with E-Mentoring" in the August 2010 issue of the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* for more on virtual mentoring.<sup>10</sup>)

**Speed mentoring**, like speed dating, gives mentees an opportunity to meet potential mentors in 3- to 5-minute intervals.

### MENTORING: WHAT'S IN IT FOR DIETETICS PRACTITIONERS?

Peer educator Sally Saleh reports that at California State Polytechnic University in Pomona (Cal Poly Pomona), speed mentoring was set up at orientation sessions for students entering the department of Human Nutrition and Food Science. Saleh reports that the activity was very popular and allowed students to rank mentors based on interest and compatibility, making for better matches.

Kara Freeman, DrPH, RD, past internship director at Cal Poly Pomona, explains that mentoring is an important role for both educators and dietetics practitioners. If current professionals don't train the next generation and give them the skills they need to succeed, the profession stagnates. Discussing her own experience working as a mentor of new students, Freeman relates, "For me, a highlight is seeing students in the first quarter of my foodservice class, students who have no idea of what goes into planning a foodservice operation and developing a facility. By the end of year, they have developed a facility that includes a business plan and a kitchen layout and design. When industry people come in to review plans, they are amazed at the depth of knowledge of these students. What I learn from students is the creativeness of individuals when you give them free rein to dream."

When it comes to working with interns, Freeman says the challenges are different. Since these are graduates, they are now facing the last part of their

training, and the internship should expose them to as many areas of the profession as possible. Most interns do not know exactly where they want to go. "Even those who have a good idea [as to how they want to build their career] may change their mind during the program," says Freeman. "The best part is after they graduate, when I see that their training prepared them for jobs in a wide variety of areas. They continue to grow and develop and that is also a neat part of seeing your mentees take off and expand their horizons. And sometimes I learn about different areas when they look for different or unique free choice experiences or jobs." In addition to expanding her own knowledge, Freeman says, "The best parts of mentoring are the relationships you build. Many (mentees) stay in touch. I still write letters of recommendation for them as they change jobs. And I have called on them to help me."

Regarding reciprocity, Carol Ceresa, MHS, RD, Clinical Nutrition section chief at San Francisco's VA Medical Center, shares some of the benefits of reverse mentoring. "I have been both a mentee and a mentor, having worked 43 years as a dietitian in many roles related to nutrition. In my early years, I chose an RD [registered dietitian] mentor, someone I wanted to emulate. Even this informal type of friendship/mentoring relationship had a huge impact in terms of helping me meet career challenges, resolve problems, and help me develop confidence and new ways of thinking. Even now, in my work setting, although I serve as a mentor, I benefit highly from 'reverse' mentoring, from very capable staff, students, and interns, in [the] areas [of] use of technology, research study design/data analysis, and grant writing."

Ceresa also believes mentoring assists in adapting to changes in the dietetics profession. "Technology has allowed increased access to nutrition information, but the human element/personal connection will always be needed. A caring nutrition professional can supply encouragement, support, and help guide decisions for improved nutritional health/well-being. We as dietetics/nutrition professionals cannot be complacent and have to work to support readiness and ability to meet any challenge/need for change. Mentoring (both serving as a mentor and

being a mentee) prepares us for constant change."

### BUILDING RAPPORT AND RETAINING MENTORS AND MENTEES

Peer Mentoring Chair Sally Saleh of the Foods and Nutrition Forum at Cal Poly Pomona says one of the most important takeaways from the mentoring relationship is that dietetics practitioners learn about building rapport. "The mentor-mentee relationship is based on the mentee's participation: the mentee dictates how often they talk, the subject matter of any interactions, and the overall nature of the relationship. In this way, mentors can gain experience working with people in an individually relevant manner, a skill that will undoubtedly be a benefit in the workplace."

Saleh also explains that, "Innovative practices in a mentoring program can seriously affect the program's effectiveness in a positive or negative way. While Cal Poly's program is several years old, it has only been within the last year, as unique strategies have been implemented (speed mentoring at student orientation, an e-newsletter, and social gatherings), that the program has experienced tremendous success in both the retention of mentors and the extent of impact on mentees."

### ACADEMY eMENTORING

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' eMentoring program is a communications and matching tool designed to fit around any style of mentoring that can get you started, keep you going, and provide free continuing professional education. The program was designed to match mentors to mentees easily and accurately, while flexibly fitting around their unique schedules and communication styles. To participate, visit the Mentoring Resources page of [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org). The only thing members have to do to get started is complete an online profile to be added to the eMentoring database. The system will then use the member's profile information to suggest available mentor or mentee matches who best fit their selected areas of interest, practice, geographic location, number of years in the field, languages spoken, and even preferred communication style.

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