

THE MENTORING HANDBOOK FOR UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH  
AT NEW YORK CITY COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY  
OF THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

*Prepared by The Undergraduate Research Committee*

*City Tech Logo*

## **Section 2. Laying the Foundation: The Mentoring Journey.**

This section lays the groundwork for mentoring. The section contains descriptions of support roles in mentoring, types of mentoring, and stages of the mentoring process. Case studies illustrate the concepts, and exercises may be used as self-reflection and assessment tools as we lay a solid foundation for building an effective learning relationship.

### **Support Roles Involved in Mentoring**

We know that effective mentoring is a mutually beneficial relationship among individuals focused on personal and professional development and growth. Research finds that mentoring is: 1) a supportive relationship, 2) a helping process, 3) a teaching-learning process, 4) a reflective process, 5) a career development process, 6) a formalized process, 7) includes coaching, sponsoring, role modeling, and assessing, and 8) consists of the matching of mentor and mentee, either one-on-one, in dyads, or groups.

Some synonyms for mentor include advisor, coach, friend, guide, role model, and sponsor. These synonyms do not aptly capture the definition of mentor. For example, a coach is involved in the direction, training and operation of a sports team or individual sportspeople. People often confuse coaching and mentoring. A mentor may coach, but a coach does not mentor. Mentoring is "relational," while coaching is "functional." There is little consensus on what a friend is, besides that of an individual who is open to having a personal, relationship with another. A guide assists and provides direction. A role model is someone worthy of imitation, while a sponsor supports through endorsement. For the mentoring process to begin to be successful, it is crucial to understand the definition of mentoring.

### **Types of Mentoring**

Mentoring can take place in many forms. Physically, mentoring may consist of matching individuals on a one-on-one basis, or to work in dyads or in groups. Mentoring may consist of more than one mentee per mentor. Mentoring may occur via many forms of communication venues, such as in person or via the capabilities of computer networks. Mentoring does not discriminate: it knows no uniqueness based upon age, background, discipline, ethnicity, gender, level of education, race, religion, sexual orientation or socioeconomics.

### **Stages of the Mentoring Process**

There are stages in the mentoring process, where one needs to engage in self-reflection. Briefly, those stages are highlighted below:

- **First Stage: Self-preparation**

- What is the primary motivation to serve as mentor, and why?

- What does a mentor want to contribute in the role, and to whom or what?
- Second Stage: Negotiating
  - What are the conversations that need to take place?
  - What is the consensus needed to make a commitment to facilitate learning?
  - What does a mentoring partnership plan look like that is based on accountability, goals definition, success measurement, and dealing with roadblocks?
- Third Stage: Enabling
  - How does a mentor foster and nurture mentee growth?
  - How does the relationship grow as the mentee's goals are met?
  - How does mentor ensure commitment to the tasks of offering the mentee challenge, support, and vision?
- Fourth/Final Stage: Coming to Closure
  - How do mentor and mentee reflect upon growth and ways of learning?
  - How do mentor and mentee move on?

### **Grounding the Work**

We ask ourselves, "Why is mentoring essential?" Human development theory holds that among persons reaching mid-life there is a need to develop the next generation (Levinson). Investing in the success of one or more persons earlier in their life and career development provides opportunity to fill that need. It is enriching to see someone grow and succeed. When someone young comes to a role with questions and new ideas, creativity is stimulated. Pairing a mentor with a mentee could provide stimulus for the mentor's ongoing creativity. Also, the possibility exists that the mentoring relationship may develop into a friendship that lasts a lifetime.

One of the values an experienced mentor brings to the mentoring process is access to information and suggestions for success. By definition one of the contributions of a mentor is to offer the mentee helpful information, suggestions, and even introduction to others, who can be helpful to the person. To have someone be proactive in behalf of one's orientation and success should speed up the adaptation process and reduce the chances of frustration and failure. This would be true for our undergraduate students.

Our ultimate goal of mentoring, in its simplest form, is for the mentor to help the mentee define her or his goals and help the mentee acquire the skills to achieve those goals. Mentoring is a relationship that enables purposeful conversation. The conversation assists the mentee to reflect

on their own experience, make decisions and act upon the ideas that are generated. The purpose of mentoring is development. It is about learning, not teaching, and both mentors and those mentored grow from the experience. In mentoring, people develop a synergetic relationship through a conversation that enables them to set and achieve goals, make decisions and solve problems. A consistent commitment from both partners to this relationship will enable achievement of their goals. In the mentoring relationship, the sharing of personal experience and the transmission of knowledge intersect in a trusting learning environment that provides opportunities for both mentor and student to stretch beyond their boundaries. Another goal of mentoring is to encourage individuality, by standing aside and allowing students to blossom on their own terms. Domination of and interference in the mentoring process may slow down natural growth and discourage independence.

To begin the mentoring journey, mentors, must ask the following questions:

- How does mentoring begin?
- What does the mentee need?
- Do I, as a mentor, have the ability to help?
- Am I willing to mentor the mentee?

Mentors must have a clear understanding of their own personal journey. Mentors who fail to differentiate between self and others in a mentoring relationship may project their own lived experience onto the mentee. The result is a learning experience for the mentee that may not be individualized, interactive, or self-aware, and may be dispiriting.

### **Claiming The Journey**

Mentors must claim the mentoring process by developing self-awareness through self-reflection. Mentors need to understand the mentee's own experience with mentoring. Lastly, the mentor must gain perspective by revisiting his or her own journey as well as that of the mentee. These distinct paths, that have included challenges, change, dangers, delights, disappointments, doors opening and closing, revelations, and tedium, have direct implication for the learning outcomes. The case study examples below illustrate both a mentor's and a mentee's journey (2.1 and 2.2).

#### ***Case Study 2.1 When a Door Closes, A Window Opens***

Kate had volunteered to serve as a mentor to nursing students who were looking to make a difference in a community setting. In preparing for her own role as mentor, Kate reflected upon her journey to become a professor of nursing. When she started out on her journey, she had been hired as a health promotion educator while in nursing school. During school, one of her professors encouraged her to volunteer in several organizations, helping to raise disease prevention and health promotion awareness. Kate also served in leadership capacities while in

school-based clubs. After graduation, Kate was offered several nursing positions. Over the years, she worked her way up to managerial and administrative roles. She then faced a divorce, with two very young children. Kate decided to leave her high-powered job to make herself more available for her children. She struggled over many years, sacrificing job and educational opportunities that interfered with her children's schedules. When her children were past adolescence, Kate pursued graduate school, and her doctorate. During her doctoral studies, Kate's parents were severely injured in an automobile accident. Kate left her doctoral studies, devoting herself to caring for her parents and children, while taking a low-paying teaching position at a local university that offered her flexibility. After years of emotional and financial struggle, Kate went back for her doctorate. She now holds the academic position of her dreams.

Kate realized that her school experiences, volunteer opportunities, divorce, children's life stages, parents' accident, and going back to school were all significant life events that helped shape her development along her life's journey. She carefully considered how along her journey, Kate had many experiences that blocked her development, when doors closed. But, there were windows that opened, when people along the way who helped her as mentors, often in a hidden fashion, that changed her thinking over time and helped form her devotion to her goals, and to altruism. It became clear to her to give back some of the strength and wisdom she had received from others. It was clear to her why she wanted to be a mentor.

*Reflection: In what ways did Kate claim her mentoring journey? How do you feel her own self-reflection provided her with the tools necessary for positively impacting her future mentees?*

### **Case Study 2.2 Rank Does Not Provide Privileges**

Thomas expected to be mentored, as he came from a family with a history of exemplary financial acumen and professional status. Immediately after graduation, a prestigious financial firm employed Thomas. He was assigned to a mentor who knew his family. Within a few years, Thomas became an executive who was expected to mentor a new generation of financial wizards. When Susan came on board, Thomas was assigned as her mentor. He had heard Susan was a recent university graduate from his alma mater, and the same top financial program in the country. Thomas assumed Susan needed no guidance beyond informal meetings about company politics. He was brusque with Susan, and reminded her of her academic preparation. Susan had specific goals she wanted to achieve, but was hesitant in how to share those goals with Thomas. Thomas, who felt her background gave Susan sufficient knowledge to achieve those goals, was surprised when the president of the firm called Thomas into his office. It was clear that Susan was floundering due to Thomas' lack of considering Susan's learning needs. Susan was the first person in her family to attend college, and came from an urban environment with its own many challenges. Her family struggled financially all her life, and while Susan worked from adolescence, she had never had a workplace mentor. Susan felt a huge disconnect between her life journey and that of Thomas. As such, she became dispirited, wanting to leave the company.

*Reflection: Had Thomas taken time in self-reflection and self-directed investigation, he would have discovered that Susan's background and experiences were very different from his. Their relationship would have started on a more positive note had he made the effort to self-reflect upon his mentoring journey, and learned about Susan's own journey. Further, Thomas took neither inventory of why he was entering into a mentor-mentee relationship, nor any consideration of cross-cultural dynamics. How can you work to avoid setting up a similar experience for you and your mentee?*

The following exercises may help individuals realize how mentoring has had an impact on their personal and professional lives. The first exercise consists of identifying seminal events that had an impact on life development. The second exercise consists of thinking of mentoring experiences and those individuals that were there to guide, strengthen, and support you. The third exercise causes you to think about what you needed as a mentee, and what you want from a mentee. Once the exercises are completed, the mentor may then be enlightened as to analyzing differences and similarities, and considering implications for furthering mentee learning. All of the exercises are adapted and adaptable, just as mentoring should be (Bell, 1996; Daloz, 1999; Zachary, 2000).

### **Exercise 2.1 Constructing a Mentoring Journey Timeline**

This exercise on plotting a personal and professional mentoring journey timeline that would help you as mentor see how individuals have helped along your life journey. Do the following:

1. Draw a vertical line on a piece of paper.
2. On the left side of the line write dates, and describe, place, or sketch events, milestones, and transitions (positive and negative) that have influenced you.
3. On the right side of the line, describe: a) instances that made a positive difference in your life and helped you grow and develop, b) barriers or obstacles that got in your way, c) unplanned events and experiences that brought you joy or success.
4. Write the name of people who contributed to your personal and professional development along the timeline.

### **Exercise 2.2. Timeline Reflection**

This exercise on timeline reflection will drive you as mentor to think about the personal and professional mentoring experiences, and those who guided, supported, and strengthened you. Write down the following:

1. Who your mentors were.
2. The relationship your mentors had with you (family member, friend, professional colleague, workplace colleague)

3. When along the timeline these mentors came into your life.
4. A description of those mentoring experiences.
5. The wisdom gained from each mentor.
6. What you learned from each mentor about being a mentor.
7. What you learned that might contribute to your own development as a mentor.
8. What you learned about being a mentee.

### **Exercise 2.3. The Mentee Journey**

This exercise will help you as mentor test assumptions and recognize factors that may affect the learning relationship between mentor and mentee. Write down the following:

1. What was your journey as mentee like?
2. How can you learn about your mentee about his or her life journey, events, experiences and milestones?
3. What more do you need to know about your mentee in order to have a better sense of his or her life journey?
4. What perceptions does your mentee's journey create for you about your mentee's readiness to learn?
5. Are there concerns and issues in comparing the mentoring journey between you and your mentee, and how do you address them?
6. What concerns and issues does the mentoring journey comparison raise for you about your mentee's goals and learning needs?
7. Are there specific actions or approaches that could potentially have a positive impact on the learning relationship between you and your mentee?
8. Are there specific actions or approaches that could potentially have a negative impact on the learning relationship between you and your mentee?

*Reflection: Before the preceding Exercises, what had you assumed about a mentor-mentee relationship? Can you think of any examples or situations where biases/judgments may have been made? Can you describe some real differences between your journey as mentor and that of your mentee? How will you put yourselves on the same page? Are you able to demonstrate that you are able and willing to be open to effective communication? What have you learned from the successes of your own mentors, as well as from their mistakes? What did you learn about yourself in asking and reflecting upon these questions?*

The next section of the Handbook focuses on helping to describe mentor and mentee characteristics, ideal expectations of mentors and mentees, benefits and challenges of becoming a mentor, and checklists to streamline the mentoring process.

Draft