



## Mentoring Defined

**mentor:** (*noun*) an experienced and trusted adviser.

Broadly speaking the Oxford Dictionary offers an adequate definition of mentoring. But in practice Australian organisations employ a broad spectrum of mentoring approaches.

At one end of the spectrum are mentoring relationships that focus on the extensive experience of the mentor. The expectation is that the knowledge, power and influence of the mentor will assist the mentee in achieving their career objectives. These relationships are often long term and sometimes confused with line management roles.

At the opposite end of the spectrum the focus shifts to the mentee. The emphasis is on the personal insights and intellectual challenge to be gained through interaction with a mentor. It is expected that the mentee will lead the relationship, inviting the mentor into their own inner dialogue to assist in working through complex career decisions. These types of relationships are more often than not fostered through formal programs that tend to be short term, and designed not to be tangled into hierarchical roles.

### DEVELOPMENTAL MENTORING

Developmental Mentoring, supported by consultancies such as Horizons Unlimited, tends toward the latter end of the spectrum. The focus is on the personal development of the mentee. The hierarchical status of mentor is not as significant as the learning potential he or she has to offer.

This approach opens the door to new formats such as peer-mentoring and reverse-mentoring.

Peer-Mentoring usually takes place between people at the same hierarchical level where one person (mentor) has experience that the other (mentee) has not.

**mentoring:** (*verb*) advise and train someone.

In Reverse-Mentoring (Upward-Mentoring) the mentor is lower down the organizational hierarchy than the mentee, but has experience and knowledge that the mentee lacks. This may be a generational perspective or technological savvy.

### HOW DOES MENTORING DIFFER FROM COACHING

Mentoring is a learning relationship, generally focused on long term career development. The primary purpose is to drive personal growth; building skills, knowledge and understanding. Mentors may use coaching skills in their conversations, but usually the mentor role is wider than that of a coach and may include opening doors, making connections and sharing experiences.

Coaching in a business environment is primarily focused on assisting people with their current performance. Rather than the long term, career development focus of mentoring, coaching seeks to enable executives to "get fit" for their current role, or perhaps prepare them for the next.

### WHEN TO USE MENTORING

Mentoring is particularly appropriate for increasing employee retention (See Retaining Staff Through Mentoring), facilitating cultural shifts and encouraging organisational diversity (see Diversity Mentoring). It is often used to support talent programs, so that participants get the most they can from their involvement, using a mentor to help them embed learning. Mentoring can also be used to encourage ethical behaviour within an organisation (see Ethical Mentoring).