



Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Mentoring Programs, But Didn't Know Whom to Ask

by Ann Rolfe

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Introduction

Mentoring programs are popular, but easy to get wrong. A poor mentoring program may be worse than no program at all.

I've been helping organizations design and implement mentoring programs since 1994. I have worked with mentors and those who are mentored, in Australia and overseas. I have reviewed many mentoring programs and seen what works and what doesn't.

In this e-book, I'm going to share with you the 15 most common questions that clients ask me.



Handwritten signature of Ann Rolfe in grey ink.

Question 1

"How do I get the budget I need to adequately resource a mentoring program?"

Answer: *Create a compelling business case for mentoring.*

Organizations need to show a return on investment. If spending money this way will improve the bottom line, they'll fund the program.

Show sound, business reasons that convince decision-makers that spending this money will help achieve strategic objectives.

Find out where your organization hurts. Provide solutions to pain. Is retention an issue? Which staff leave? Why? What does it cost? Write a budget showing the cost of the program recouped in less than 3 years (the life span and planning horizon of most CEO's). Add the "nice" benefits or "politically correct" rhetoric and buzz words. But lead with your best punch – dollars.

Question 2

"How do I make my program a success?"

Answer: *Thoroughly pre-plan your program.*

Most obstacles to success can be identified and avoided with some forethought.

Define "success" in terms of specific outcomes and develop a detailed plan to achieve them. Identify potential problem areas and determine how to prevent or deal with them.

Decide what, how and when actions will be taken. Determine the resources (money, information, knowledge, skills and people) required. If you lack expertise, get specialist assistance. You may want to read my article: "Seven Fatal Flaws of Mentoring Programs and How to Avoid Them". It's available free. Just email requesting "Free 7" and I'll send it to you:

support@mentoring-works.com

Question 3

"How do I get senior management buy in?"

Answer: *Get your Chief Executive Officer's imprimatur. Written approval supported by words, actions and dollars.*

Senior managers take their direction from the top. If the CEO is on-board, and they know it, they'll fall in line.

Make sure your business case has sign-off from the CEO and that you have active support from him or her. Ensure that the message from the top is continually communicated to senior management.

Have mentoring on the agenda of every executive meeting. Keep the CEO briefed on actions and results. Remind him/her of the business imperatives associated with mentoring in your organization. Keep talking dollars and tangible benefits at the strategic level.

Question 4

"How do I get participants who are willing to participate in training?"

Answer: *Select volunteers who have something personally to gain.*

People who opt in and believe it has value are enthusiastic about committing time.

Like employee recruitment, a mentoring program needs a nomination and selection process that allows you to attract and choose the best candidates. Have a process for sensitive management of those not selected.

Have participants self-nominate. Use selection criteria, including demonstrated willingness to learn and/or commitment to personal development. Personally speak with those you do not select. Tell them why they were unsuccessful, this time, and what they need to do about it. If you're not that skilled or brave, give them a plausible excuse.

Question 5

"How do I ensure a workable match between mentor and mentee?"

Answer: Train both in relationship skills

It is skill, the ability to relate and communicate, not "chemistry" personality or technical expertise that makes mentoring work.

Help both parties understand that the mentoring process is about using decision-making, problem-solving or goal-setting and action planning techniques. Build their skills in these techniques and mentoring will work.

Run workshops to explore expectations and boundaries and develop skills. Train mentors in the mentoring process, to use listening skills and facilitative as well as authoritative communication. Teach mentorees how to get the most out of the relationship. Then provide regular follow-up.

Question 6

"How do I get managers to give mentoring a priority in their busy work schedule?"

Answer: *Ensure the CEO communicates that mentoring is a priority.*

While CEO's remain committed and communicate their expectations, managers get the message.

You will have to reinforce your CEO's commitment by constantly providing evidence of both the need for and the positive results of mentoring. You'll also have to ensure his/her desire for manager involvement gets airplay.

You will have "before" and "after" statistics in the business case for your mentoring program. Collect and report progress frequently. Never let up "selling" your program to all stakeholders. Constantly communicate through every available channel – talk, write, use visual aids – to keep in their face about mentoring's value and the CEO's commitment to it.

Question 7

"How do I ensure mentees remain committed?"

Answer: *Talk to them often.*

Two-way communication keeps people engaged. If they are ignored they easily fade away.

Have personal contact with each participant as well as mass communication with all participants. Find out what's going well and what's not. Be there for them and provide assistance where needed.

Use all available mechanisms to deliver information and obtain feedback, frequently. Get face to face if you can. Pick up the phone, email and send hard copy. Supplement personal contact with newsletters, articles and general circulars. Encourage networking. If you can, have social events. Celebrate successes and publicise them within and outside the organization. Run workshops or group meetings on topics they nominate.

Question 8

"How do I convince mentees that contacting their mentor is not 'bothering them'?"

Answer: *Provide evidence from mentors that they enjoy, value and welcome contact.*

If mentees are told, clearly and unequivocally that contact is welcome, expected and their responsibility, they will do it.

It may come as a surprise to those mentored that mentors do, in fact, get something out of mentoring. Your job is to act as a go-between to get this message across.

Collect testimonials or quotes from mentors in previous programs right from the beginning. Include quotes from current mentors in a regular newsletter or email to participants. Reiterate the message in your personal contact with each participant. Monitor the frequency of mentor-mentoree contact and discuss it with both parties.

Question 9

"How do I provide adequate support to mentors?"

Answer: *Build it into your plan and budget.*

Supporting mentors is vital to their effectiveness. It takes time, money and effort and needs to be factored into the mentoring program.

Personal contact, general communication and group sessions will help mentors do their job well.

Talk face-to-face, by phone or email. Contact every mentor, regularly. Have a general email circular periodically. Get them together for debriefing several times during the program. Invite them to activities and workshops provided for mentorees, where appropriate. You may also have "mentor the mentor" sessions, yourself or with an external specialist. Mentor Tip Sheets are available from: www.mentoring-works.com.

Question 10

"How do I establish and maintain mentoring relationships when people are geographically distant from each other?"

Answer: *Get them face-to-face at the start of the relationship.*

Distance relationships can be very productive. Breaking the ice and establishing rapport is so much easier, face-to-face.

Begin with a function that brings participants together. The investment outweighs the cost of a failed relationship.

If you cannot get together, video calls are better than telephone, which is better than email. Extra work is necessary to ensure the viability of the long-distance relationship. Extra contact and newsletters help. You may wish to provide participants with regular Mentoring Works Articles (available from my website).

Question 11

"How do I keep the momentum going?"

Answer: *Communicate. Communicate. Communicate.*

People stay engaged in any relationship when there is positive two-way communication.

Talk to them regularly as individuals and as a group.

Personally contact them by phone, fax and email. Send circulars, newsletters and articles related to mentoring. Run workshops, meetings, social events. Publicise success stories, testimonials and positive messages from the CEO.

Question 12

"How can I prevent the failure of mentees to complete their action steps – when good intentions are outweighed by other demands?"

Answer: *Get mentors to ensure mentees commit to just one small specific action in a short timeframe.*

Anything big is achieved in a number of small steps. Impending deadlines are great motivators for us all. Anyone can find five minutes to take a simple, specific action towards a larger goal - if they know they will be called to account quickly for not getting it done.

Train mentors to develop action plans with their mentees that are broken down into single, specific actions within an agreed, limited time.

Ensure this is covered in workshops. Provide pro forma guides for them to complete.

A "MAP" workshop, to follow-up the initial mentoring meeting. See website for details.

Question 13

"How do I get participants to contact me (the coordinator) at the first sign of trouble instead of letting the relationship 'fizzle out'?"

Answer: *Don't wait for them to contact you. Talk to them – frequently!*

People often use avoidance or denial when dealing with problems in a relationship. Mentoring is no different.

Establish a relationship of trust and support with participants yourself. You are a mentor, too. Make sure you come across as "checking in" with them, not checking up on them.

Talk to them from the beginning, about what is going well, or not so well. Demonstrate your interest. Be a good listener and ask them what they think they might do about an issue before offering advice.

Question 14

"How do I get people to participate in a climate of restructuring, redundancies and having to do more with less?"

Answer: *You probably can't. Instead, provide resources to people interested in their own future. Be a beacon of support during uncertainty*

This climate fosters an attitude of self-interest. Cater to it and build your credibility as "human" resources.

Communicate the advantages of personal development, career planning and mentoring for professional resilience.

Provide information to enable people to take control of their own destiny. Circulate "How to" articles, a newsletter with practical tips and references and tip sheets. Promote self-help and mutual assistance. Do not criticise your employer or take on board employees woes. Look after your own wellbeing and remain positive.

Question 15

"How do I get people to accept mentoring when it is perceived as an extra task that is 'foisted upon' them?"

Answer: *Don't. Find positive volunteers and let them lead by example.*

It is difficult to change attitudes. You could waste time, money and energy on negative people. Instead, change the environment. Create the idea that people not involved are missing out!

Use a nomination and selection process that attracts a few positive people. Work to get positive results. Then, market their success to the rest of the organization.

Obtain testimonials from participants. Publish results and positive outcomes. If mentors volunteer for a subsequent program, communicate this. Soon others will start to wonder what they're missing and you can invite them aboard.

Conclusion

Mentoring is – and will continue to be – one of the most important organisational development strategies of the 21st century. The more you know how to use it effectively, the better it will serve you.

Find Out More ...

The ideas you've just read are taken from my book *Mentoring in Australia, a Practical Approach*, and my audio CD *Designing Mentoring Programs*.

Other resources, such as participant workbooks, Mentor Tip Sheets and Mentoring Works Articles are available. Find out more at: www.mentoring-works.com

Also sign up to my fortnightly newsletter, ***Mentoring News***. It's free and full of great ideas for developing people, retaining talent and contributing to the bottom line through mentoring.



About Ann Rolfe

Australia's most published author on mentoring, has over twenty-five years experience in learning and development. For the last fifteen years, Ann Rolfe has specialised in helping organisations and individuals enjoy the benefits of mentoring. Widely respected as a consultant and presenter, her training programs and resources are used internationally to develop and support mentoring.

Ann Rolfe is the founder of Mentoring Works where we help you create mentoring conversations, relationships and programs that work. We offer a comprehensive range of resources that provide clear, practical guidance based on extensive experience and expertise.

Ann Rolfe is the author of:

- *The Mentoring Conversation*
- *The Mentoring Guide*
- *The Mentoring Journal*
- *Take a Minute To Mentor*
- *How To Design and Run Your Own Mentoring Program*
- *Mentoring Demystified*
- *Mentoring Tips*
- *Mentoring Works Articles*



Need More Help To Implement Your Mentoring Program?

Buy the book: *How To Design And Run Your Own Mentoring Program*. Find out more here <http://mentoring-works.com/HOW2.html>

Online Course: *Designing Mentoring Programs*. Webinars, group chat and one-to-one support. Find out more here <http://mentoring-works.com/DMP.html>

Consulting http://mentoring-works.com/mentor_consulting.html

Public Programs: *Designing Mentoring Programs*. http://www.mentoring-works.com/public_programs

In-house Planning Workshops http://mentoring-works.com/inhouse_mentoring_planning.html

In-house Customised Training For Mentoring Participants http://mentoring-works.com/mentor_consulting.html#consult

One-to-one: *Mentoring On Your Mentoring Program* personal assistance by Ann Rolfe to find out more email ann@mentoring-works.com

Contact us for further information and discuss your needs.