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To : Seafarers                      Our Ref : Mentoring Letter 10 – Mentoring Tips  
From : Marine Mentor              Date : 9<sup>th</sup> March 2020

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I'm sure that you would agree that if we are going to do something, we need to make sure we do it well – isn't that what we all want? What is the point, if otherwise? So, here are some pointers:

### 1. Time and place

There are many opportunities aboard ships, for mentoring. The monthly Safety Meeting is not one of them, that's reserved for safety matters. It needs to be an informal period, so smoko / teatimes on the Bridge or Engine Room Control Room are fertile times. I'll use the Bridge as an example. Say a Circular about an aspect of navigation has just arrived, or you've just read an interesting article on MARS or CHIRP. Print it, and place it on the chart table at tea time. If your OOW has been taught well, (and isn't in the middle of taking avoiding action!) he'll have started brewing a cup of tea or coffee for you already, giving you the opportunity to sit an open a conversation – the material is right there in front of you. Same goes for the CEO in the ECR – I'm sure that you read articles on a daily basis about something which is of professional interest to you. Similarly, after hours in the lounge. You could even start holding "Training Meetings" using the monthly CBT performance results and experience with specific modules (assuming no cheating) as a conversation opener. It all starts with an open, **honest** discussion, and there are many opportunities available to you to have these.

### 2. Credibility

None of us have all the answers. We cannot be experts in everything. However, most of us know where to find the right information, or even person. Our networks and experience banks grow with us as we get older, so rather tap into this than try to bullshit our way through. Your mentee will learn more from their own thinking rather than your opinions, so try to help them *form* their thinking by pointing them towards the right person, publication etc, if you don't have the knowledge and experience they are needing.

### 3. Be a positive role model

Think back for a moment on how you learnt from others, and their behaviours. The same applies to your mentees, they are watching how you behave, ALL the time. Remember that they will have greater respect for a mentor who puts his ego aside and not only admits that he made mistakes, but importantly, corrects them.

Keep your eyes and ears open for experiences which will benefit your mentee. I personally invite my mentees to various functions where I believe that they may meet others who may be beneficial to them in one way or another – perhaps by being inspired by somebody, or by developing their own network. Perhaps they will pick up on something said or done, which gets them thinking creatively. They always appreciate this, and it helps us to build relationships which encourage both of us in the mentoring process. Of course, I also need to be aware of my own behaviours, so perhaps this makes me a better person at the end of the day.

### 4. Be genuinely interested in your mentee as an individual

A mentoring relationship is a very personal one, which is often very important to the mentee, so, as a mentor, you need to get to know your mentee personally, about their hopes and dreams, so you can help them in a way that meets their personal best interest. The mentoring relationship may well take you down roads which have very little to do with their career, and more about their personal lives.

For this reason, a parent is often not a good mentor for their child, as their parenting relationship and emotional connection will influence their guidance. That's not to say that a parent can never provide a mentoring moment for their child - they can - however, a parent can't be as objective as a person who's independent of the parenting role.

This of course can lead us into an area of possible conflict aboard a ship, as a master for example must always act in the best interests (for this, read "safety") of the vessel and all her crew, and not favour any one individual. However, the Master of a vessel in particular, is in a unique position of leadership - which is why they are looked up to by so many – and this gives him or her an opportunity to develop his/her leadership skills in the way that no manager ashore is able to. (*Please do review mentoring letter 4 – Becoming a Leader...*)

#### **4. Share your experiences and insights**

Some of our experiences are uncomfortable to share – it means admitting our mistakes or failures. However, although our Mentees may admire our successes, the lessons we have learnt in life are just as and sometimes even more useful to our Mentee. This is not about our ego, in fact, ego can destroy the mentoring relationship if we allow it to, so swallowing our pride, and explaining how we put this down to "school fees" will benefit the mentee more, and will usually gain more respect in any case. I have learnt how to share my mistakes objectively, as well as how I learnt from that situation and was able to make a "comeback" in such a way that they too will learn how to deal with the mistakes which they will inevitably make. It also helps them to build resilience, which is especially important at sea as we all know.

#### **5. Ask open questions**

Asking your mentee open questions will help you as a mentor to identify their real needs, values and passions. It's also a great way to get your mentee to think through situations themselves and draw out the consequences of the various choices or courses of action they can take. During these conversations, you can share your wisdom, without making decisions for your mentee. That's their job.

#### **6. Act as a sounding board**

Listening to a Mentee is almost always more beneficial to them, than being lectured to. Allow them to explore their thoughts and ideas openly with you. This will often help them unravel their thinking and gain insights about a situation as they share their concerns with you. Mentees benefit greatly from the opportunity of having a good mentor listen to them. Now go back to (5) and ask open questions !

#### **7. Provide a fresh perspective**

One of the benefits of working with a mentor is that a good mentor will often provide their mentee with a fresh perspective on an issue. A good mentor will often have the clarity of distance from an issue or problem that's needed to provide objective feedback to their mentee. They can also hold up a 'mirror' to the mentee to, for example, let the mentee see what their behaviour looks like to others. Of course, this also follows listening, and is part of the open questions process also. As Robert Burns said on spotting a louse roving around a woman's bonnet, unnoticed by her, in church one Sunday: "O would some power the giftie gie us to see ourselves as others see us." (O would some power the gift to give us to see ourselves as others see us.) "*To a Louse*" 1786 {*Incidentally, how many are aware that Robert Burns was inspired by a sea-Captain, Richard Brown?*}

#### **8. Provide helpful feedback**

Not all feedback is helpful. A good mentor knows this and will deliver feedback in a way that will help their mentee gain insight to further develop specific qualities or skills. For example, a good mentor will always ask for permission to give feedback before doing so. Giving unwelcome feedback can be detrimental to any mentoring relationship. Instead, explain what you'd like to talk about first and highlight the benefits of doing this. Please remember also that there is a fine line between constructive feedback and criticism. The easy way to distinguish them is that the latter implies judgement and blame. Neither of these is helpful, they usually only result in defensiveness which creates new problems.

## **9. Acknowledge achievements**

Affirmation is important for each and every human being. It lets them know that they are on the right track, and are appreciated. It builds confidence. So, tell somebody that they have done a good job when they did so. Remember to celebrate their successes on your mentoring journey too.

## **10. Offer your advice, but only if your mentee asks for it**

It can be very tempting for a mentor to just jump in and offer advice before a mentee has actually asked for it, especially when you've dealt with a similar situation yourself. Being a sounding board for your mentee, allowing them to discuss the situation with you, then helping them to think through the situation by asking them questions to draw out the consequences of various actions, is always more empowering for a mentee than advising them what to do. It helps them work through the issue and come to their own conclusions. By doing so, you ultimately help them to learn to think through issues themselves and trust their own judgement, both valuable life skills.

Kind regards,

*Mike Melly*

[http://www.blueskycoaching.com.au/pdf/v4i10\\_mentor.pdf](http://www.blueskycoaching.com.au/pdf/v4i10_mentor.pdf)

NEXT: Mentoring Letter 11 - Tips for Mentees