Mentoring

Introduction/Definition

Within the professions, mentoring is the process of continuing education and enrichment that takes place in the professional relationship between a seasoned or more senior expert, and one who is new or relatively more junior in a particular professional culture, trade, or craft. It is a cross-cultural phenomenon and is not limited to any one professional pathway. It parallels and arises from the dynamics of personal formation and enculturation. In the West, the original images of mentoring can be found in Greek mythology. In the Odyssey, the teacher Mentor is engaged by Odysseus to care for this son, Telemachus, while Odysseus is away at the Trojan War. In the story, the goddess of wisdom, Athena, takes on the form of Mentor to teach Telemachus to defend his mother against unwanted suitors, and to explore into the world to discover his father's gifts. This metaphor from mythology offers a rich understanding of the purpose of mentoring. In the mentoring relationship, the "protégé" learns to defend and define boundaries within the profession while being encouraged to explore and discover responsibly for the purpose of personal and professional enrichment for one's self, for the profession, and for those the profession benefits.

Core Points

1. Mentoring is a complex and multi-varied relationship for personal and/or professional development. The mentoring experience and its processes differ depending on context, purpose, discipline, and culture. The ultimate aim of mentoring is the professional development of an individual through interaction with a seasoned and usually more senior individual or individuals.

2. While mentoring can begin with or include elements of academic program assistance, it is not academic advisement per se. Mentoring can also occur within and include supervision for professional activities. However, mentoring itself goes far beyond the experience of supervision. In fact, there can be a point where supervision and authoritative professional relationships might be inconsistent or even pose a potential conflict of interest with mentoring.

3. Many institutions have programs of mentoring for students, residents, fellows, and post-doctoral professionals. However, the mentoring experience is far deeper than an institutional program.

4. Within institutions, one might identify three different types of mentoring programs or experiences: professional orientation, professional practice, and professional formation.

5. For professional orientation, institutions and various professions might establish programs that give new members a sound introduction to the profession itself and/or the institution. Mentoring-as-orientation utilizes already existing members to provide initial guidance to new members or "apprentices" regarding aims, purposes, parameters,

expectations, boundaries, goals, and procedural norms. Orientation is usually a short-lived experience. In a mentoring-as-orientation program, mentors and protégés are initially paired. The interaction ends when goals are met.

6. For professional practice, protégés work carefully with experts to increase proficiency in knowledge, skills, abilities, technical expertise, craft, and procedural norms. Mentoring-for-practice engages protégés with mentors for longer periods of time to ensure that the protégé is expertly able to practice the profession itself, thereby increasing proficiency. In many cases, the experience of mentoring-as-practice is carried out by mentors and protégés who deliberately choose to work with each other. However, this is not always the case. In some cases, this stage of mentoring will allow for some experience of professional supervision or academic advisement. The period would draw to a close when needed levels of expertise are reached and the protégé can "graduate" from the experience to practice the profession as a peer.

7. For professional formation, mentors/protégés freely choose each other. The relationship tends to be long-lived. While it includes continuing refinement of knowledge, skills and abilities, the professional formation experience changes significantly. The goal is the deepening of the experience of the profession such that professional leadership makes an impact on the values, attitudes, and worldview of the protégé. Very often, mentors find that their formative leadership with their protégés impacts themselves. Mentoring-as-formation is a long term, even life-long, experience. In the most powerful examples, mentoring-as-formation deepens the experience of professional excellence such that it affects personal horizons. It is a process of ongoing maturation representing an evolution from acquisition of information to embodiment of knowledge, even wisdom.

8. For any of the above to occur, there is a need to engage in sound pedagogies. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching often speaks of four signature pedagogies in professional development that are especially valuable: a) Ongoing **interpretation** of the profession's body of knowledge; b) Ongoing reshaping of one's personal horizons to serve within specific **contextualization**; c) Continuing quality improvement through evaluating **performance**; and, d) Continuing embodiment of the profession's values through personal and professional **ethical formation**.

9. To teach the value of mentoring best, programs of education in the Responsible Conduct of Research must clearly articulate the public and societal benefits of the profession. This entails a commitment to going beyond the economic benefits of the profession or the personal achievements that the profession can bring to the individual or the institution. Authentic mentoring programs must address the ethics, values, morals, and responsibilities that are enjoined upon the members of the profession not only to others but also to the self.

Points for Reflection

1. Does the institution have in place or support regular programs of mentoring? If so, discuss and define.

2. Characterize local mentoring experiences. Do they seem to focus only upon supervision or academic advisement? Are they more for orientation, or practice, or formation?

3. Discuss and identify those elements in various institutions of your profession that might not be beneficial to the formative nature of mentoring, both personal and professional. Conjecture as to what factors contribute to this. How might a mentor or protégé go beyond this and deepen their personal and professional mentoring benefits?

Resources

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Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. *Preparation for the Professions Program*. Retrieved May 25, 2010 at http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/previous-work/professional-graduate-education. (Note: This program publishes a series of research studies regarding education for diverse professions such as medicine, nursing, law etc).

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