# Mentoring Programs

**Lesson Objective:** This lesson seeks to explain the value and diversity of options in mentoring programs that strategic level leaders can employ.

**Desired Learning Outcomes (DLO)**:

1. Reflect on the value of sharing knowledge, the benefits of mentoring, and the importance of building the bench.
2. Review fundamental aspects of mentoring to include the mentoring relationship.
3. Employ the fundamentals of performance monitoring and improvement.
4. Ensure the effective use of mentoring improves the organization.

**Reading:** Student Guide and resources

**Scheduled Lesson Time:** 60 minutes

Introduction

Mentoring is a valuable tool a leader uses to grow others and organizations. This lesson reviews some fundamental mentoring concepts and helps the leader see the value of mentoring as a performance improvement tool. Effective mentoring programs grow future generations of leaders and ensure the future of the organization.

## 1. Reflect on the value of sharing knowledge, the benefits of mentoring, and the importance of building the bench.

Reflect on your life. Is there a mentor who helped you find success? If there is and you can do so, reach out and thank them for making a difference in your life. Send them a volunteer paycheck and let them know how they helped you find success. Did you smile a little when you thought about that relationship? Mentoring is powerful. We hear about it a lot. We talk about it being important. You just reflected on it. What is it?

Mentoring is not a new concept. The apprentice system of ancient times incorporated mentoring in that apprentices studied with a master to gain skills. At a basic level, mentoring is the transfer of skills and knowledge between individuals. It is a helping capacity. John Cross would tell us it is informal learning. Sharing knowledge is critical in personal development. Regulations and pamphlets can only take our members so far without the knowledge of how things work. If we fail to harness the power of mentors, we lose institutional information at an alarming rate. Some leaders do not like to share knowledge. Maxwell would call these leaders reservoirs. These leaders absorb knowledge and hold it as power. Maxwell would tell us that good leaders are like rivers. They are not rivers that rampage and flood or cause devastation; rather they are rivers that provide a constant flow of enriching information to grow others. We are more powerful when we share what we know and our organizations are more successful.

What are the benefits of mentoring? Studies show that mentoring is a useful strategy for performance improvement. Most, if not all, organizations can benefit from mentoring programs.

Mentoring can build competence, confidence, and loyalty in mentees. Sources tell us that 77% of Top 100 companies have formal mentoring programs. Those who are mentored are 20% more likely to get a raise and five times more likely to get a promotion. Mentoring is a great way to transfer knowledge and skills from members who are leaving an organization (moving up or retiring). Those who are mentored often have a greater understanding of the objectives of the organization. Mentoring enables focused development that allows mentees to grow or overcome a specific challenge. This is better than trial and error in teaching relevant skills because it is less time consuming, less frustrating, and less costly. Mentoring is a safe environment to admit a mistake or a weakness. We must teach followers to admit mistakes, learn from them, and move on. Performance and productivity are often improved with the extra attention (the Hawthorne effect). Mentoring can also enhance or accelerate advancement. Who would not want to have multiple, well-prepared candidates to follow them in command? Mentoring can help build those candidates. As members learn more, they are more likely to take on greater responsibility and be more satisfied in their work. Members who understand the bigger picture and are more developed often are more understanding when issues occur as well. They respond with more grace and less growl. Mentoring can make individuals feel more powerful and confident because they understand better how the organization works. Mentoring can also enhance teambuilding efforts. Mentoring can also help with diversity and inclusion. When we pair people who are different, both can gain a greater understanding and appreciation for the other. The strength that diversity brings is often more apparent in the pairing then it would be in a training session. Pairing diverse members has also been shown to improve communication skills. Mentoring is particularly valuable in a multi-generational organization like CAP.

Mentors also benefit from mentoring in many ways. Mentors are respected for what they give and gain influence in organizations. Mentors are six times more likely to get promoted than those who do not mentor. Mentees often bring skills to mentors and provide mentors with greater perspective. There is no better way to enhance your skills than to teach them to others. The process of teaching requires one to synthesize knowledge at a higher level to be able to explain concepts to others. Input from mentees on projects and processes is invaluable. It is inspiring to work with motivated mentees. Mentors may find the process recharges their batteries and motivates them to continue! Finally, mentees often ask us why we do things. Leadership author Simon Sinek would encourage us to do the same. When we evaluate why we do things, we sometimes learn it is time to change how we do them.

Doing good work is important but sustaining it with good succession planning is critical also. Organizations without a bench experience painful transitions when a leader needs to move on to another role or leaves an organization. We see this in squadrons, groups, wings and regions when we do not have sufficient candidates for command. Mentoring helps us build the bench. Members who are mentored often have a variety of skills they can apply in more than one area to help the unit succeed. They bring flexibility to the table. Mentees can also help mentors complete projects that aid in development. Mentees with stronger skills are better able to produce effectively for the organization. They have increased motivation as well. Prospective members will also be attracted to a unit with opportunities for growth and development. Members are not attracted to stagnant organizations with no potential for personal growth. Term limits help with this issue. Retention is also higher among those who get some attention

and are developed to succeed. Finally, members who are competent and confident produce better results. What unit could not benefit from confident, competent members?

**2. Review fundamental aspects of mentoring to include the mentoring relationship.**

What is mentoring? Mentoring is when someone who is often older or more experienced provides advice, support, and fosters the progress of a younger or less experienced person. Mentoring can also occur between peers. Mentoring can also be formal or informal. Informal programs will provide some results. A purposeful program will provide better results. The return on the investment of time and effort can be substantial for the organization.

What personnel are needed for mentoring? We must have a mentor who is willing to help another person learn skills and processes. Mentors often coach, tutor, listen, counsel, teach, model, and provide feedback to mentees. Mentors might also demonstrate, guide, or facilitate a learning experience. What makes a good mentor? Mentors should be successful individuals with current knowledge to share. They must be willing to share their knowledge because they desire to help others rather than because they seek a formal reward. Mentors need to reflect openly and share success as well as failures they have experienced. Mentors need a growth mindset, curiosity, and a learning attitude. Mentors should be active listeners, good at asking open ended questions, self-reflective to make connections, and able to provide constructive feedback kindly.

We also need a mentee who is willing to learn. The mentee may bring skills to the relationship the mentor does not have, such as technology skills that an older member might not possess. Mentees need to be committed to expanding their capabilities and focused on growth. Mentees should know what they want from the relationship and their goals. Mentees must be willing to ask for help, show vulnerability, and explore different paths or perspectives. Mentees should be receptive to new things, able to accept feedback, and engaged.

A mentoring relationship is a managed, nurtured joint venture. What structures do we see in mentoring?

- One-to-one pairings can be an effective method of mentoring if the organization has enough depth to manage this type of program. The benefits include a personalized experience, a private experience that does not embarrass those building skills, effective use of time, meetings are easily scheduled, and results can be measured. On the negative side and the mentor may have limited time, it is a big investment in one person.
- Group mentoring is a second structure. This model works for organizations that have a shortage of mentors and a lot of personnel to grow. This method can work well because it is an efficient use of time, mentees can network, and the group provides a safe place to express thoughts and find support. On the negative side, it can turn competitive, it is hard to measure results, and some mentees may already have some of the skills.
- Circle mentoring is when peers come together in a group to share ideas and strategies. Successes and failures are often shared as stories in this model. This provides peers an opportunity to network and grow and the sharing of lessons learned and best practices. On the negative side, mentees are often uncomfortable expressing weaknesses or

deficiencies in a group setting, feedback is generalized, and it can be hard to measure results.

Mentoring can also occur in stretch assignments and through job rotation.

Mentoring usually quite a few tasks to consider. Matching expectations for the experience is critical. Who will contact who? How often? How often will you meet? Who will make the agenda? What is in and out of bounds? How will confidentiality be maintained? What does each person want from the experience? How often and in what way will feedback be shared? Mentoring often includes several phases or processes. It is important for mentors and mentees to get to know one another. An agenda should be set. The purpose should be clear to both parties. When the arrangement ends, both parties should reflect on what was most valuable, what was least valuable, what was learned, and what was most rewarding. This helps shape future efforts.

**3. Employ the fundamentals of performance monitoring and improvement.**

Many organizations that are flat or lean use mentoring to improve human performance. Why is mentoring popular in these organizations? Those who work for these organizations bring a wide variety of skills and backgrounds. This makes formal, classroom instruction inefficient and ineffective. Time is also a factor in lean organizations. An organization that has a facilitated mentoring program integrated into its culture is more likely to be characterized as a learning organization.

Mentoring works best when the key aspects of the performance-improvement process are incorporated in the plan or program. What are the key aspects of performance improvement?

- Identification of a need, goal, or opportunity
- Alignment with other performance support and improvement efforts (planning and design)
- Communication to stakeholders is clear and consistent
- Mentors and mentees are matched using criteria
- Participants are trained and oriented to the process
- Development plans are implemented
- Evaluation and continuous improvement are incorporated

Mentoring programs are most effective when they are systematic and scalable. Both can be challenges. Systematic programs include four aspects: analysis, design and production, implementation, and evaluation/continuous improvement. We can't just say we have a mentoring process. We have to build a process. Building a program begins with a needs assessment or readiness assessment to determine needs, goals, and opportunities mentoring provides. What are the goals (retention, leadership development, teaching skills, welcoming new people?)? What number can you manage? Will you work with individual or groups? What atmosphere do you need to build? What will the curriculum be? You can include stakeholders in building it. How will you find the right people (invite, recommendations, requests)? Scan the unit or entity to determine commitment and support as well as identify sources of resistance. In design and production, we determine what type of process fits the needs and culture of the organization. Who are the target populations? Once you have a plan, test it before you try to

implement it. The implementation portion includes a plan to communicate the program. When we evaluate for continuous improvement, we look at the impact on the organization, the results of the program, how to improve the design of the process, and the effectiveness of mentors. Once you have a process that tests well and produces results, you need to scale it up to meet the needs of your members. This can be challenging because you may not have enough mentors, mentors may volunteer who are not suitable, and popular mentors won't be able to keep up. Monitoring and evaluation tends to help with these issues.

**4. Ensure the effective use of mentoring improves the organization.**

Mentoring is not always a positive experience. Many things can make the relationship less fulfilling. A short list of problems that can arise in mentoring relationships includes:

- Mentors who take credit for mentee work or ideas
- Mentors who use mentees to accomplish projects
- Mentors who do not maintain confidentiality
- Mentors who refuse to let mentees move to other mentors when ready to do so
- Mentees who attach themselves to mentor coattails and expect to be carried
- Mentees or mentors who waste the time of the other by not engaging and keeping commitments

It can be hard to engage members in mentoring programs. How do we overcome those attitudes? What barriers should leaders watch for in mentoring programs and how can they be overcome?

- We tried that before.
- We don't have the resources.
- Mentees are not engaged/open/honest about their skills.
- Only the favorites are chosen for mentoring.
- We don't have enough mentors.
- It would be too hard to find the right match.
- We don't need any heirs apparent here!
- Mentors will counter what leaders tell members to do.
- It's too hard to get people to commit.
- I'm not doing it. It's just a passing idea. It won't stick.

It can be hard to address these criticisms of mentoring. The solution involves engaging members to build the program so it works. You can also show that rivals are using mentoring. Showing retention of members, benefits to our goals, and success stories can help. Celebrating mentors and successes is crucial. If members won't engage, we have to work with them to alleviate concerns using confidentiality agreements and other documents to make the experience comfortable. We have to provide resources for mentoring and communicate clearly what it is. We also have to train personnel to participate. We must value our mentors. We must also have matching expectations between mentors and mentees.

How can we measure the success of mentoring?

- Analysis of development plans
- Check point surveys
- Self-reports from participants
- Analysis of program outputs/member progress

**Lesson Summary and Closure**

Mentoring has great potential to help every echelon in CAP. It comes in many formats. It cannot be managed in a laisse faire manner. Mentoring programs that produce results are purposeful and planned. Your unit and your goals benefit from a good mentoring program. Mentoring allows us to build the bench and ensure better continuity through changes in leadership.

**EXERCISE:** Analyze your region, NCSA, or national staff area. Answer the following questions about mentoring for your area.

- Do you have a mentoring program?
    - If yes, analyze it. Is it effective? Why or why not? Make a plan to improve your mentoring program using knowledge from the lesson. Share your plan with your mentor or supervisor. Discuss the pros and cons of the plan. Implement the improvement plan for your program. Incorporate evaluation and continuous improvement into your plan. Document the plan in a background paper you turn in to your instructor for feedback. Use the proper template from the publications page on the national website for your background paper.
    - If not, analyze the organization. Use the information and the questions the lesson to design a mentoring program for your organization. Include implementation and communication plans. Document the plan in a background paper you turn in to your instructor for feedback. Use the proper template from the publications page on the national website for your background paper.