

Cadet Programs

MENTORING

WHAT IS MENTORING?

Mentoring is an essential ingredient in developing well-rounded, professional, and competent future leaders. The goal of mentoring in the Civil Air Patrol (CAP) Cadet Program is to help cadets reach their full potential, thereby enhancing the overall professionalism of CAP.

Mentor means a trusted counselor or guide, tutor, or coach. Mentors are helpers.

Mentoring is a relationship in which a person with greater experience and wisdom guides another person to develop both personally and professionally. Mentoring is one of the broadest methods we have available today to encourage human growth and develop the talent pool for today's and tomorrow's CAP!

Mentoring is an informal relationship because it fosters free communication by subordinates with superiors concerning their performance and duties, without fear of reprisal. It enhances morale and discipline and improves the operational environment while maintaining respect for authority.

CAP mentoring for cadets covers a wide range of areas, such as helping a cadet understand the progression steps through the program, guiding the cadet in his or her understanding of aerospace education, and setting an example of leadership. It also includes knowledge of the cadet program and an understanding of the Air Force's core values of integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do.

The key to mentoring is the direct involvement of the unit commander in the development of his or her cadets. The commander must create an environment that continuously challenges the cadets to excel. The commander must provide opportunities for clear performance feedback and provide guidance in helping the cadets to set realistic professional and personal goals.



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WHAT DOES BEING A MENTOR INVOLVE?

Mentoring relationships can take several forms. One relationship might be *highly structured* with *short-term* goals. Largely, this type of relationship is more formal with specific organizational ends; for example, a new cadet being paired with a more senior cadet.

We also might see *highly structured, long-term* mentoring. This could include examples of senior members investing a year or more with a cadet providing formal training and counsel.

Perhaps the relationship that will be most used in the cadet program is the *informal, short-term* mentoring, which tends to be spontaneous, ranging from one-time help to help as needed, but usually with no real ongoing relationship. An example may be an aerospace education mentor giving assistance as needed to a Phase I or Phase II cadet.

Finally, some mentoring takes the form of *informal, long-term* mentoring. This involves more of an as-needed helping relationship, but over more time. These relationships might possibly last for several years or over a cadet's career. Typically, these are fostered through the friendships that the cadets develop and carry with them for a number of years.

We probably have benefited from all of these types of relationships at some point in our lives. Mentoring can almost be unconscious. Without even realizing it, a person might say or do something that has a powerful effect on another person. These powerful life experiences can be a potent force in developing cadets within our organization.

Today's cadet program is becoming increasingly more complex, high tech and streamlined. Because of this, many cadets experience the need for understanding and information that are outside the channels of our normal training programs. Mentors can help fill the gaps in a cadet's ability to rightly handle the problems they may face.

WHO SHOULD BE A MENTOR?

To be an effective mentor we must, at a minimum, have a heightened awareness or sensitivity to the needs of others, and be willing to pause and listen. Formal mentoring requires much more. It may mean inconveniences, it may take our time away from other things, and it definitely will require commitment. We should carefully evaluate whether this type of activity will cause significant stress or loss in other areas and whether we are emotionally and psychologically prepared.

If the mentor's resources and the cadet's needs are low or only require occasional help, then short-term mentoring might be advisable. On the other hand, if the cadet's needs are high and exceed the capabilities, time, or resources of the mentor, then referral to a more appropriate resource is necessary.

This is a critical point: Once we determine that an individual's needs are beyond our capabilities or pose a potential risk to the safety of the cadet or others, the individual must be referred. Individuals at risk for suicidal or homicidal behavior should be brought to the immediate attention of the commander.

Finally, the cadet must also be a willing participant. If a capable mentor is trying to work with an unwilling cadet, or the needs of the cadet would overwhelm the mentor, mentoring is not advised.



APPROPRIATE MENTOR BEHAVIORS

1. Providing a Sense of Vision. It has been said that people perish for lack of vision. Occasionally, we need help seeing the big picture, along with goals and potential positive outcomes. Mentors can influence the behavior of the cadets in a positive way. If we build expectations for success and positive outcomes, it is a powerful force in helping the cadet to succeed.

Many people fail because of their own self-fulfilling prophecies of gloom and doom. Helping these individuals develop a concept of what success looks like, feels like, and tastes like often starts them on their way towards more positive outcomes.

2. Active Listening. Listening (without assuming their problem, giving them advice, or joining them in self-pity) often helps people gain emotional relief and potentially helps them to gain insight into their problem(s). This type of listening involves feeding back to them what we heard them say to clarify, understand, and provide opportunity for them to gain insight. Often, just the activity of talking things through is all they need.

3. Tactful Confrontation. Along with empathy and respect, confrontation is needed when we find it appropriate to challenge an attitude or behavior of a cadet. How we do this can make a world of difference. Criticism may often be viewed as an attack or threat. It tends to elicit retreat or defensiveness and, occasionally, counterattack from others. As part of the active listening process, confrontation should be done using "I" messages.

Try to remain in a neutral role. Restate what you thought you heard, along with potential consequences for the person's actions on him/herself or others, and the feelings or emotions you might be having about the person's plans. We must confront and challenge the negative behavior, not the person. For example:

CADET: "I'm going to tell the cadet commander to shove it! He can't tell me what to do. I'm a volunteer!"

MENTOR: "I hear the anger in your voice, John, and I'm concerned. That type of action could undermine your relationship with the cadet commander and could be counterproductive to your cause."

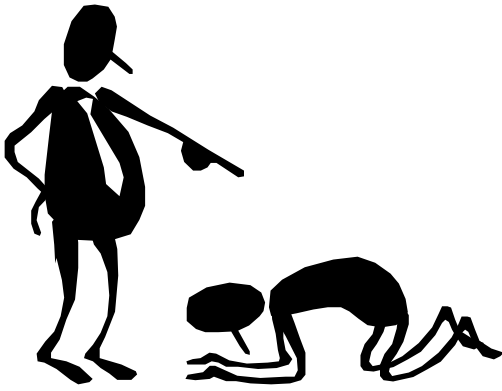
Once he or she is confronted, it is important to listen as the cadet works through the feelings.

4. Providing Information. Many times all that the cadet needs is information. Sharing this information when needed can be productive. Control of information is often viewed as a power tactic, and fear of the unknown due to a lack of information does create stress. Sharing accurate information regularly helps the cadet to get the big picture and greatly aids in decreasing stress due to uncertainty.

5. Empowering. Often the very act of empowering a cadet—the delegating of authority or giving of permission—is a valid form of mentoring assistance. This sends a validating type of message to the cadet that says, "I believe in your ability to handle this situation." In other words, to encourage the development of responsibility, we have to give it and all that goes with it, good and bad. This includes the authority, as well as the consequences.

CAUTION: We should set our cadets up for success, not failure. We must ensure they are appropriately equipped to handle a potential challenge before giving it to them.

6. Encouraging. Encouragement is an art. If used appropriately, it can be one of the most powerful forms of mentor assistance. "Encourage" literally means to inspire with courage or hope. A classic illustration of this comes from the *Wizard of Oz*. The cowardly lion's famous line, "What do they got that I ain't got? Courage!" was the basis for the wizard's miracle. He simply encouraged the lion to realize he had courage all along by awarding him a medal for bravery and valor. All of us need encouragement, and we certainly should practice it more with our cadets.



INAPPROPRIATE MENTOR BEHAVIORS

1. Criticism. Criticism, even when it is offered as “friendly” or “constructive,” is seldom taken in a positive way. It tends to be a form of judgmental behavior, which threatens self-esteem and often elicits defense mechanisms on the part of the person receiving it. This being the case, no matter how we sugarcoat it, we are undercut by its effect. Also, criticism tends to be interpreted by the one receiving it as meaning he or she has failed or done something bad or wrong.

2. Giving advice. The problem with giving advice, or telling someone what to do, is that we do not have to live with the consequences of our advice. Giving advice is almost always based on the supposition that we have superior knowledge, know what’s best, and have great wisdom or magical insight into someone else’s problems.

This may be true when we are dealing with a technical issue, but not with personal issues. With personal issues, we are much better off to engage in active listening. Listen, feed back what we thought we heard including the underlying feelings or emotions to validate our understanding, and, if asked for, provide information or possible ideas that could help the person develop his or her own solution.

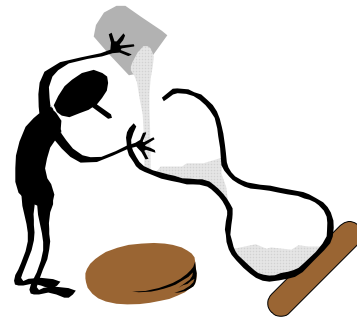
We should share, model, and teach, but not rescue or take over a person’s problems, unless there is a crisis requiring immediate action such as a suicidal threat. Our cadets will grow more by learning problem-solving skills with the mentor’s encouragement. But if the mentor does the work for the cadet, then helplessness is learned.

CAUTION: Many well-meaning people have been caught in the trap of giving advice to someone who cries for help in an effort to rescue that person. The advice giver offers “why don’t you...” advice and becomes frustrated when the person does not accept the advice, plays the “yes, but...” game, and continually offers excuses and rejects all other suggestions as well. Finally, the advice giver becomes frustrated and angry with the advice seeker and rejects and abandons him or her.

3. Rescuing. Some cadets may present themselves as victims and seem to perpetuate repetitive patterns of

failure, inadequacy, and crisis. When a cadet shows this behavior, rescuing the cadet or attempting to take over his or her problems will not be helpful in the long term.

Short-term crisis intervention as alluded to earlier is appropriate, but continual patterns of rescuing makes the mentor part of the problem. Many refer to this as “enabling.” By taking over for a cadet, we “enable” the person to continue to be helpless and not responsible for his/herself. This feeds the ideas, “Why should I worry, you’ll do it for me,” or “Why should I help myself, you’ll take care of it for me.” Again, this is not to minimize the legitimate need a cadet has for temporary help. But when this tends to be a repetitive pattern and the mentor begins to feel annoyed, anxious, suspicious, etc., these negative feelings serve as a warning that something is amiss. It is time to disengage and refer the cadet for professional help.



HOW DO WE BEGIN?

Unit commanders are responsible for establishing a mentoring partnership in their squadron. ***This partnership is not a program!*** Indeed, it is better not to have a mentoring partnership if there is no one willing to invest of their time and energies to help guide and tutor the cadets. However, the most common style of mentoring, informal and short-term, is relatively easy to initiate. Below are some examples on establishing this type of mentoring.

1. The unit commander should begin with an awareness session with those that express interest in becoming a mentor. The unit commander may call upon an experienced adult, like the unit chaplain, to discuss this guide with the potential mentors. This could be a group effort or one-on-one. The purpose of the awareness meeting is to discuss the potential pitfalls and rewards of becoming a mentor.

CAP’s National Staff Chaplain has a free booklet entitled, *The Gift of Mentoring*, that may provide some additional practical tips on growing the mentoring relationships along with an excellent bibliography.

2. The unit commander should appoint a mature cadet to mentor a cadet recruit [see CAPR 52-16, *Cadet Program Management*, 2-2.a.(1)]. This authority may be delegated. The commander should allow as many cadets as possible to assist in this mentoring. The purpose here is to provide the cadet recruit with a person close to his or her own age that

would be available to answer any questions and to guide the recruit towards membership.

The mentor would assist the cadet recruit in understanding the program materials and our organization. This relationship should last longer than just one meeting; otherwise, this relationship is more like a “sponsor.” The mentor, in this example, will need to guide the cadet recruit through the initial stages of membership and should help the new cadet prepare for Phase I of the cadet program.

3. The unit commander should identify senior members, cadet sponsor members, and Phase III or Phase IV cadets to serve as aerospace education mentors [see CAPR 52-16, 1-3.d.(2)]. This authority may be delegated. The purpose here is to guide the cadets towards mastery of the aerospace education texts. This relationship should last longer than just one AE achievement; otherwise, this relationship is more like a “substitute teacher.”

The tutoring relationship should last for as long as the cadet takes to complete Phase I (about 6 months to 1 year) and/or Phase II (another 10 months to 2 years) of the cadet program. Mentoring the cadets, in this example, may be accomplished through a variety of methods, to include:

a. The mentor works with the cadet one-on-one in reviewing the AE chapter before the cadet tests.

b. The mentor works with the cadet to go over text sections of the questions missed on the AE achievement exam. The mentor will not have access to the test or answers. Rather, the testing officer will give the cadet the corresponding AE section areas of the questions missed. These section areas are listed next to the question answer on the answer key. The cadet should then work with the mentor on the section area(s) that needs review prior to the cadet re-testing to obtain the 100% score.

REMINDER: Cadets currently working towards completion of Achievement 8 through completion of the Earhart Award must satisfactorily serve as an aerospace education mentor.

4. The unit commander should appoint senior members serving in functional staff positions (like administrative officer, public affairs officer, aerospace education officer, etc.) to also act as mentors to the cadet officers studying these staff positions as part of their Staff Duty Analysis (SDA) requirements [see CAPR 52-16, 1-3.c.(4)]. The cadets studying their SDA should learn from their senior member counterparts the duties of the staff positions as they work together. This relationship should last for as long as the cadet is performing the job function or is actively reviewing the job area as part of the SDA requirements; otherwise, the relationship is simply “on-the-job training.”

Mentoring, in this example, involves a real desire to help the cadet master the position.

The successful mentor will have a good grasp of CAP’s norms, values, and procedures. This knowledge is helpful in guiding the cadet in meeting his or her objectives. But, there are also personal characteristics that contribute to being an effective mentor:

- ❖ Listen.
- ❖ Maintain confidentiality.
- ❖ Value the cadet as a person.
- ❖ Provide constructive feedback,
- ❖ Focus on the cadet’s needs.
- ❖ Help the cadet solve the problem for him/herself.



As a result of being under the tutoring of a good mentor, the cadet will be better able to

- ❖ grasp the materials of the cadet program,
- ❖ assume greater responsibility,
- ❖ be receptive to constructive feedback,
- ❖ make better decisions, and
- ❖ become a mentor to others.

CONCLUSION

When done appropriately, mentoring can be a positive experience for the mentor and cadet alike, and it makes a significant contribution toward the development of our most potent resource, our cadets. Leaders must have the vision to develop the mentoring relationships that will succeed.

Adapted from:

AETC Pamphlet 44-103, *Mentoring for Supervisors* (1 Nov 95)

AF Policy Directive 36-34, *Air Force Mentoring Program* (1 Nov 96)

AF Instruction 36-3401, *Air Force Mentoring* (1 Jul 97)

USAF Chaplain Service Institute, Resource Division, *The Gift of Mentoring* (no date)