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CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON

Political Mentoring Toolkit

Prof. Jo Silvester & Dr Christine Menges

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ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL

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Political mentoring

Introduction

Political roles have become increasingly complex and demanding. Over the past decade this has led to many efforts to support elected members in their efforts to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to perform their roles. One of the most successful of these initiatives is the national Political Mentoring Programme. This was launched in 2006 and is hosted by the Local Government Group (LG Group). To date it has brokered more than 400 mentoring arrangements between elected members in local authorities across England and Wales.

This Political Mentoring Toolkit has been produced from the findings of a project, co-sponsored by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the LG Group. Undertaken by Professor Jo Silvester and Dr Christine Menges at City University London the aims of the project were to:

- Understand how political mentoring is used and share this information via a freely available resource, and
- Foster greater awareness of best practice in member development.

The project involved interviews with 62 politicians who were mentors or mentees, and a survey of 215 elected members and officers. We asked them about how mentoring is structured, what works and doesn't work, different types of mentoring arrangements, and the impact mentoring has had, both on those involved and council functioning more widely. The information gathered has been used to create this Political Mentoring Toolkit, which is freely available to anyone interested in getting involved in political mentoring – either as a mentor or a mentee - or for those looking to establish or support political mentoring arrangements.

Professor Jo Silvester & Dr Christine Menges

How to use this toolkit

"Politics is perhaps the only profession for which no preparation is deemed necessary."

Robert Louis Stephenson (1882)

More than a century has passed since Robert Louis Stephenson made this famous comment. While its essence remains true – politicians don't require training or qualifications to become elected representatives – there is now much greater recognition of the need to support elected representatives who take on multiple and varying responsibilities in government.

This toolkit is aimed at those people with an interest in receiving mentoring, becoming mentors or establishing mentoring arrangements.

It toolkit can be read as a whole, or sections for mentors and mentees can be read separately.

Free to anyone with an interest in political development, we hope that it will also provide a greater understanding of the unique nature of learning and development in politics.

Acknowledgements

This toolkit would not be possible without the help of all the mentors and mentees who shared their experienced with us, and the many hundreds of members and officers who provided their thoughts and ideas in our survey. We thank all of those people who have taken the time to share their experiences and tell their stories to help explain what political mentoring involves, the benefits for participants, and their ideas about running successful mentoring arrangements.

We would particularly like to thank the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) for funding this project, and the Local Government Group for all of their support in providing information about the national mentoring programme and comments on earlier drafts of the toolkit.

"I wish I had something like this when I started out mentoring."

Cllr Isobel McCall

"This is a practical Toolkit easy to read, which will aid new mentors and, more importantly, remind experienced mentors of the fundamentals of the task. It is one of the few documents I have read which sets out the mentee's expectations."

Cllr Michael Gage

Political mentoring

What is mentoring?

Mentoring is an ancient activity. The first recorded report of mentoring can be found in Homer's epic poem The Odyssey. Writing 3000 years ago Homer describes Odysseus entrusting his son Telemachus into the care of a friend and advisor while he leaves to pursue his 'odyssey'. In Greek 'mentor' means advisor and, despite considerable debate about the exact nature of mentoring, the role played by Telemachus as a friend and advisor remains a good description of most modern mentoring relationships.

Today, mentoring is used extensively in work and non-work settings to support learning and development. For example, in education peer mentoring is used to enhance student learning. In the workplace mentoring is used to improve inclusivity, providing support for people from minority groups who often have less access to opportunities or information. It is also used to help new employees learn about their roles and the organisation, for more experienced workers mentoring provides access to senior people and helps develop skills for leadership.

Because so little is known about political mentoring, we asked those who have been involved as mentees or mentors to tell us about their experiences. The information in this toolkit summarises their thoughts and stories.

Defining mentoring
Mentoring has been described as an 'exchange between an experienced person (a mentor) and a less experienced person (a mentee), where the mentor provides support, direction, and feedback to help the mentee in relation to their career plans and personal development ' (Kram, 1985). Mentoring therefore usually has several defining features:

- It involves a two-way relationship (or partnership).
- There is a two-way exchange of information and learning
- The more experienced mentor usually listens and provides feedback and direction
- Mentoring focuses on the mentee's needs in their role.

Until now little has been known about how mentoring can be used to help support and develop politicians.

What is political mentoring?
Political mentoring is a form of peer mentoring. It usually involves two politicians – a mentor who is more experienced in an area of politics (although not necessarily more experienced as a politician) who mentors a mentee, who is typically (but not always) a politician from the same political party. Political mentoring can involve mentors and mentees from the same or different local authorities.

Political mentors provide information and support for mentees, but the exact nature of that support can vary widely. In the case of newly elected politicians, or politicians appointed or elected to a new political role like Leader or Executive Member, mentoring may involve providing information about what a role entails and ideas about how the role has been performed by others. Mentors also provide access to information and ideas about how things are done in other places. Whilst mentors challenge as well as support mentees, political mentoring like other forms of mentoring is usually defined by the needs of the mentee.

How is political mentoring different from other types of mentoring?
Although political mentoring is similar to other types of mentoring, the political context introduces important challenges that are important in shaping how mentoring is best structured. As elected representatives, members must decide how to serve the needs of their electorate. There is no management-defined way to perform their roles and, although they need to know certain rules, regulations and procedures, there is little prescribed knowledge they must acquire. This means that, while elected members are likely to have diverse learning needs, they have the democratic right to decide for themselves what they want to learn and act.

As a less structured, and more learner-driven activity mentoring is suited to the political environment, because allows mentees more control over the topics covered during mentoring sessions. It also recognises a more equal status between the individuals involved. While a politician may have more experience he or she does not have the right to determine what another politician should learn. For this reason the term mentee is used rather than protégé – the preferred term in business mentoring.

For similar reasons, establishing a successful mentoring arrangement in politics depends on being aware of the political nature of learning and development activities. This is particularly important when considering who controls mentoring. In politics it is difficult and probably not advisable to impose a mentor or mentoring upon a mentee. Politicians are more able than employees to refuse to engage in learning activities and, as a consequence, more emphasis must be placed on demonstrating the advantages of mentoring and allowing control to remain with the politicians involved. Similarly, mentees need to have some control over their choice of mentor.

Mentoring or coaching?

"There's a very hazy line between mentoring and coaching, I find it very difficult to distinguish between the two."

Mentoring and coaching are often seen as distinct and competing camps, but there are many overlaps between the two activities and the terms 'mentoring' and 'coaching' are often used interchangeably.

So what are the differences? According to pioneering work on mentoring by Kathy Kram (1985), coaching is just one of a broader set of roles performed by a mentor. But the most common difference between mentoring and coaching, is that mentors usually have some experience of the role being undertaken by their mentee. Coaches are not expected to have this experience (though of course some do). The shared experience between mentor and mentee allows mentors a better understanding of the needs of their mentee, and enables them to exchange stories about their own successes and failures.

PROFESSOR JO SILVESTER - CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON

Political mentoring

Where does political mentoring happen?

Mentoring can be informal or formal. In politics informal mentoring is quite common – it usually involves a person seeking out another person who is more experienced or knowledgeable in an area and can help them understand a new role, a situation, or how they might navigate the political environment more successfully. It might also involve more experienced politicians volunteering to act as mentors for newer colleagues. As one group leader commented,

"A large part of what I do as the group leader is to be an informal mentor... any leader should devote 20% of their time to being a mentor to their group. I make a point of meeting all my spokespersons regularly, that's mentoring which actually works both ways in that circumstance."

However, our focus has been predominantly on formal mentoring arrangements. These involve mentoring brokered by a person or agent other than the mentor or mentee. We have focused on these because they reflect efforts to support member development within and between local authorities.

Mentoring between members from different authorities is particularly useful for more senior political roles, because there may be no suitable mentor in the same authority. This type of mentoring also helps to foster inter-organisational learning that can have impact beyond that on the mentor and mentee involved.

Our interviews with mentors and mentees revealed four common types of formal mentoring arrangements, those for new politicians, new executive members, new Leaders and group mentoring:

1. Mentoring for new politicians

"I don't think any group should take in new members without mentoring them, even if it's only 'shall I sit next to you in your first council meeting?' It can be as simple as that."

Mentoring for new politicians, organised by officers working with political groups, has become common in the period following an election. Newly elected politicians are usually paired with an experienced political 'buddy', who can help them to understand their role, the local authority and who to go to for relevant information and support. These mentoring arrangements are often linked to induction. There are several advantages to this, including the opportunity to ensure that everyone receives the information they need and similar levels of support. The involvement of everyone in mentoring also helps to build broader awareness of the importance of learning and development within the authority.

"You know, when I first became a councillor you spent the first year just trying to find your way around. I think there is now more support, but having the support of an experienced member is an important thing in those first few months."

2. Mentoring for executive members

A second common use of mentoring is to provide support for more experienced politicians taking on new roles, like executive member or chair of scrutiny. These roles can require a lot of technical as well as political knowledge, and mentors who have experience in these roles can usually provide mentees with a better idea of what may be expected, and how to manage their time and achieve their aims and objectives. As one mentor described it:

"we spent a lot of time going through his (mentee's) budget .... just to talk through the mechanics of how it worked, what efficiencies he might look for, where he might look, and how he might tease the right answers out of the officers who were not always being as forthcoming as they might have been."

3. Mentoring for new leaders

Unlike chief executives and business leaders, new political Leaders usually have very little preparation for their role. So at the very time they need to appear strong and in control, they often know least about what is expected of them or how to deliver it. This vulnerability also makes it difficult to ask for help. Mentors can provide valuable support by creating a confidential space to discuss needs and problems and help them through this initial period:

"People in leadership positions find it very difficult to find space to talk, because they are expected to be all-powerful, all-knowing, omniscient and omnipotent. So just the opportunity to talk through things with someone else is a unique opportunity.... they're talking to someone who's neutral, who's not judgmental, and a lot of our work as a mentor is providing the space for that to happen."

4. Group mentoring

Although most mentoring involves two people, we found that political mentoring was also being used to help political groups in transition. This was usually just after an election when there had been a change of political control within the authority. As one mentor commented

"The party came into power and, not only was the Leader a new Leader, half of the cabinet were new councillors"

In such cases there can be tremendous change, both for members and officers. Mentors were working with political groups to help them understand what was required of them now they were in power or in opposition, to rebuild the group, form new relationships with officers, and re-focus political objectives. In these situations more than one mentor might work with each political group.

Benefits of mentoring

Functions of mentors

Much has been written about mentoring in settings like employment and education, and there is broad agreement that mentoring serves two main functions: **development** and **support**. Development usually involves mentors helping their mentees to progress within an organisation by providing activities like challenging assignments, sponsorship, and coaching. Mentors can also help mentees gain exposure to senior people and improve their visibility in regards to decision makers. The support role played by mentors also involves providing counselling and friendship to mentees, and reassurance about actions or decisions.

"I think it's about being able to go to somebody who's outside of your sphere and share experiences, talk through development issues. An opportunity to have somebody work through with you from a reflective, an experiential perspective, the issues that you're dealing with or might deal with in the future."

Political mentors provide similar activities, but tailored to the needs of political environments. We asked the question **what are the most important functions served by a good political mentor?** Our survey of 215 members and officers identified five key roles:

1. Serving as a trusted advisor

A good mentor listens and acts as a sounding board for their mentee - providing a space to talk in confidence and helping them to see problems from different perspectives. Mentors also helped mentees identify and address strengths and weaknesses.

"They know I'm there to help. They know I'm not going to catch them out. I'm not a challenger, I'm not on the council, I'm not from the area, I've come from outside, I've done it before myself, I've sat in their chair."

2. Sharing knowledge

Good mentors also share information and ideas, and provide insight into how things are done by other people in different places

"I tend to share good ideas that I've come across or things we've tried within our authority that I know have worked."

Mentors also discuss their own learning from previous successes and failures. Sometimes they point mentees towards other people to contact who might have the information they need:

"I didn't have up-to-date expertise in that area, so I gave her names of one or two other people who were actually performing that role in other authorities who she could contact if she wanted to."

3. Providing direction

Mentors sometimes provide more direction by discussing problems with mentees and offering suggestions about how they might act or deal with a situation. They might also suggest how a mentee would be expected to act, or encourage them to reflect on different options.

"If you're looking at your work from your own perspective, you might come to the conclusion - yes what we are doing is fine. If you look at it from another perspective you think – oh maybe we can tweak that there or there is another way that we can enhance it."

4. Being a critical friend

By acting as a critical friend a mentor can ask the difficult questions and provide mentees with the time and space to discuss these before they might encounter them in a more public arena.

"Sometimes just talking to someone else is helpful - getting feedback from somebody who says 'yeah it sounds like you're thinking of the right things here' or 'you've approached this in the right way' or 'you've thought about these different angles' is really useful."

Mentors also challenge mentees to consider how well they are performing

"...if someone's saying something and you, the mentor, think it's wrong then you've got to have the good sense and the timeliness to be able to say whoa, hang on a second, I can see why people were upset with that."

5. Mediating and protecting

A final way in which a good political mentor can help their mentee is by acting as a mediator or protector. They might sometimes help mentees deal with a difficult political situation by mediating with others on their behalf, or by acting as a broker between different individuals or groups. By doing so mentors also help mentees understand how they can work indirectly to achieve outcomes and deal with difficult political issues while protecting their reputation:

"Mentoring can involve your mentor actively lobbying on your behalf or liaising with people if they're being difficult."

Benefits of mentoring

For mentees

1. Political identity

- Clearer political aims
- Better knowledge of the political context
- Improved political identity
- More awareness of how to achieve political advantage
- Better able to communicate clear political vision.

2. Political confidence

- Improved confidence in performing their political role
- Knowledge of strengths and weaknesses
- Better awareness of their impact on others
- Clearer understanding of political expectations
- Improved ability to influence others and build alliances
- Ability to think more broadly about problems and issues.

For mentors

We might expect mentoring to benefit mentees, but every political mentor we interviewed said that they probably gained as much from mentoring as mentees. Mentors for politicians in other local authorities described how they learnt about how things worked in different places, and how they were able to gather new ideas to share with members and officers in their own authority.

There was a consensus among mentors that mentoring was an **"enriching experience"** that involved just as much learning for them as it did for mentees: successful political mentoring involved engaging in a partnership where information was shared and exchanged. Mentoring helped to maintain a broader perspective by seeing different ways of doing things.

"I'm in the best of both worlds. I get huge learning out of where I go, and all the people I mentor, and the councils I go into - and I bring it back to my own council and I ask questions. Or I say 'hey I was in so and so the other day, they do this great thing with community engagement, why don't we do that?' So I gain really for the people that I represent here."

Organising mentoring

How to attract mentors and mentees

People will inevitably have their own reasons for engaging in mentoring and it is important to be sensitive to these when seeking to engage mentees and mentors. First and foremost, however, there needs to be clear information about mentoring that is easy to access. This can be reinforced by providing introductory sessions to explain what might be involved. Better still, find an experienced, respected politician who has been involved in mentoring who can share their experiences of how it has worked (and not worked). Equally important is the need to identify where people can go to for more information about how to get started, and receive support and advice if required during on-going mentoring relationships.

Creating and nurturing a mentoring culture

One of the most important factors when organising mentoring is to acquire support from senior figures. The utility of mentoring needs to be publicly endorsed by Leaders, group Leaders and chief executives.

Mentoring new politicians

Buckinghamshire County Council

Katherine Woods, Group Manager for Policy and Organisational Development explains how internal mentoring is used as part of the induction programme for new councillors at Buckinghamshire County Council. As part of the programme every new councillor is mentored by both an experienced councillor and an officer for their first six to nine months in office. Katherine attributes the mentoring scheme's success to six factors:

1. Having an embedded strategy, where individual member development plans are linked to delivery of the council implementation plan.

2. Establishing a learning culture, where mentoring is one among many tools of member development.

3. Ensuring that member development is undertaken by members for members. Members design member development activities. Recognition that elected members need specific, tailor-made training and development activities.

4. Having support from Leaders: Support and commitment from Leader, Deputy Leader, and the council as a whole.

5. Establishing clear guidelines for mentoring.

6. Providing training for mentors and mentees.

Mentoring new politicians

Setting up mentoring arrangements

1. First steps

If you are considering setting up a mentoring programme within your authority it is worth giving some thought to why you are doing so and what you hope to achieve. Is the mentoring aimed at supporting induction for new politicians, or building skills and abilities among existing councillors, or to provide councillors with an insight into different roles? It may be some or all of these, but just as mentors and mentees need to consider what their objectives are (even if these change as mentoring evolves) it is important to be clear about the broader purpose of mentoring. Encourage input from many different sources on how mentoring could work and, if you would like to evaluate mentoring, give some thought at this early stage to how this might happen.

2. Who will be responsible?

Another important question to address at this stage is how mentoring arrangements will be co-ordinated and what resources will be available to support this? Orientation sessions for new mentors and mentees are a useful way to introduce them to how mentoring can occur, and to clarify their roles and responsibilities. In the case of mentors this may also include organising training to improve mentoring skills.

3. Matching mentors and mentees

Mentoring is normally arranged between mentors and mentees from the same political party. As one mentee commented

> "I'm not saying that it isn't useful to get different political perspectives, but most politicians will be less open when dealing with someone from a different political party than when dealing with someone from the same party."

However, we found that cross-party mentoring could be used to develop technical skills. Officer-member mentoring (like that mentioned in the example of Buckinghamshire County Council) can also been used to provide new members with a better understanding of how the local authority works from officers' perspective.

Perhaps the most important factor in matching mentors and mentees is to allow the mentee to have a final choice over who will mentor them. Unless the mentee trusts and 'buys into' the mentoring arrangement it will not work. In cross-authority mentoring arrangements brokered by the LG Group all mentees are offered a choice of mentor.

4. A mentoring contract

Another important feature of mentoring relationships is confidentiality and agreeing a mentoring contract can help with this. This doesn't need to be formal, too detailed or prescriptive; its aim is to help mentees and mentors articulate their goals and intended outcomes, and to agree how they expect the other to act in relation to accessibility, confidentiality and level of engagement. For example, the contract might refer to how mentoring sessions will be conducted, how often they will take place, or even some statement about mentors being trained. In broad terms, this contract helps to avoid unmet expectations, by allowing mentors and mentees to agree their respective roles and responsibilities

5. Monitoring and ending mentoring relationships

Mentoring relationships vary in length. Some last for several years, whereas others that exist to tackle a specific need may last for just a few months. However, mentors and mentees need to be aware that they can withdraw from mentoring at any time without negative consequences. There is also no point persisting with a relationship where the mentor and mentee feel that there is little more for the mentee to gain. Therefore it is important to reflect continually on whether goals have been achieved, whether new goals can be set, or whether the mentoring relationship can usefully come to an end.

The changing nature and focus of mentoring relationships often makes evaluation difficult – indeed, monitoring runs counter to the idea of confidentiality! Yet, it is usually possible to ask the mentoring partners to share information about what they have found useful and how learning from the mentoring sessions has been applied. This information is useful to reinforce mentoring and to support wider learning within the local authority.

Getting started

A few tips for mentees

What do you want to achieve from mentoring?
There are lots of different reasons for having a mentor, but if you are going to engage in mentoring, you should have some idea about what you want to get out of the process so that your mentor knows how to help you. Here's one Leader talking about how he worked with a mentor to improve the relationship with his chief executive after a change of political control:

"We talked some of the issues through. Some of it was about changing the relationship, which was a bit too formal. I thought I don't have to call him chief executive all the time, so we stopped all that nonsense. And after we'd done separate sessions (my mentor) said okay sit down here both of you, I want you to tell me two things that you respect most about the other person, and we built from that platform."

These are some of the reasons that mentees have given for starting a mentoring arrangement:

- To find out what's required of me
- To learn about how things are done in other places
- To have someone to listen, advise but not judge
- To expand my network and learn more about my party
- To learn how to be more effective politically.

Identify what your mentor needs from you
For a mentoring relationship to work, it is just as important for a mentee to know what their mentor needs from them. Mentoring is a partnership in all senses – both parties have to be willing to contribute and make an effort. Most mentors said that they needed mentees to be committed, motivated and open to learning. They also needed mentees to reflect and discuss their own needs. Here are the comments of three mentors:

"[A mentee is] someone who wants to learn and who is well motivated to undergo the process, someone who listens and is capable of building on the skills that are taught to achieve a better political objective."

"[A mentee is] somebody who will be receptive to ideas, who will be prepared to think about the subject, and perhaps acknowledge that any issue, any problem, any situation may have a number of different ways of being approached."

"He had the important thing that a mentee needs - he knew what he didn't know, and he knew he needed someone outside his group to talk to. If mentees have those creating a relationship is relatively easy. You can't go and force yourself on a mentee - the mentee has got to want you to be there."

Although political mentoring can provide mentees with more control over their learning, for this to work mentees need to be clear what they need from a mentor and discuss it with them.

The exercise 'Agreeing Objectives' can help here!

Choosing a Mentor
Mentoring is a **partnership** between mentees and mentors – where both parties learn from one another. There may be lots of reasons why you don't have complete choice over who your mentor is going to be – they may be busy, they may not want to mentor, or they may already have other mentees who take up their time. But, our interviewees told us that they often gained most from unexpected sources. For example, one mentee said:

"I'd been in local government for 40-odd years, actually longer than my mentor, but I still gained a lot from my mentor. I learned how my mentor's authority managed their cabinet meetings, and what sort of roles members take on in different meetings – it was really a knowledge exchange."

While you may have a legitimate objection to a particular person, and successful mentoring depends on trust, it is also important to be open-minded about who and what you can learn from. Choice of mentor is less important than being clear with your mentor what you need and deciding together how he or she might help you achieve this.

Remember, no two mentoring relationships are the same – they will depend on what you want to achieve, and how you and your mentor decide to work together. This freedom allows you to focus learning on your own needs, but it also means that as a mentee you need to take more responsibility for making sure the relationship works.

A few do's and dont's for mentees

Do...

1. **Make time for mentoring**
2. **Agree needs and objectives with your mentor**
3. **Be open to new ideas and willing to learn**
4. **Listen to advice and feedback with an open mind**
5. **Learn with and not just from your mentor**
6. **Commit to maintaining regular contact**

Don't...

1. **Expect your mentor to have the answers**
2. **Assume that mentoring always works**
3. **Rely on informal chats**
4. **Forget that mentors learn from mentees too**
5. **Expect your mentor to chase you**

Getting started

A mentoring plan

Here are some things to think about at different stages of mentoring.

1. Preparation for mentoring

- What would you like to achieve from mentoring
- What do you expect from your mentor
- How would you like your mentoring relationship to work
- What don't you want from your mentor?

2. The first mentoring session

- Get to know each other a little better (e.g., interests, ideas experiences)
- Share your mentoring objectives, and explore how your mentor can help you to achieve them
- Discuss your mentor's expectations (do they match yours?)
- Decide how mentoring will work in practice (how often do you want to meet or talk by phone, and who contacts who?)
- Agree what your main focus and objectives will be for the next meeting
- Set a date, location and time for your second meeting.

3. Subsequent meetings

- Update each other on what's been happening and how this relates to your mentoring objectives
- Reflect on how you've used what you learnt from the last session or thought about how you might apply it
- Discuss current challenges and how your mentor might help
- Keep track of whether you are meeting your objectives and whether these need to change
- Be open about discussing a possible end date for mentoring
- Review how your mentoring relationship has progressed – what have you learned, how have you changed, what has not worked and what obstacles have you encountered?

Keeping on track

Mentoring arrangements can drift – meetings become chats, and the opportunity to focus learning where it is most needed is missed. It is therefore helpful to review the objectives you agreed when you began mentoring on an ongoing basis. Reflect on what you've achieved and whether you need to set new objectives. Mentoring relationships may last for short or very long periods of time, but they have to be of use to both parties. So try to review your progress and refocus your aims where necessary.

Getting started

Clarifying expectations

The following checklist can be used at the start of mentoring. Mentors and mentees should complete it separately then compare their responses, and discuss any differences. Are there any implications for how the mentoring relationship might work?

Getting started

A mentor should...

	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Help me clarify what my role entails	○	○	○
2. Let me know how I am performing relative to others	○	○	○
3. Discuss solutions to difficult issues	○	○	○
4. Challenge me by asking questions	○	○	○
5. Help me to meet people	○	○	○
6. Tell me how things are done elsewhere	○	○	○
7. Help me reduce risks to my reputation	○	○	○
8. Share their stories with me	○	○	○
9. Help me see things from different perspectives	○	○	○
10. Treat everything in confidence	○	○	○

	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
11. Ask me difficult questions	○	○	○
12. Listen to me and act as a sounding board for my ideas	○	○	○
13. Shield me from harmful situations	○	○	○
14. Mediate with others on my behalf	○	○	○
15. Tell me about their experiences	○	○	○
16. Identify my strengths and weaknesses	○	○	○
17. Share their knowledge with me	○	○	○
18. Act as a friend	○	○	○
19. Protect me from others	○	○	○
20. Act as a broker between me and others if required	○	○	○

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	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
21. Help me see how others see things	○	○	○
22. Suggest better ways to do things	○	○	○
23. Tell me how others perform my role	○	○	○
24. Suggest how I might act	○	○	○
25. Offer solutions to problems	○	○	○
26. Provide me with access to networks	○	○	○
27. Be willing to learn from me	○	○	○

Getting started

A few tips for mentors

There is no right or wrong way to be a good mentor – it all depends on your mentee's needs and what you think you can offer. That said, effective mentors are usually more aware of what mentoring involves and have some techniques and skills that they can use to help mentees. So what do mentees want from mentors? Here are some suggestions:

1. Suggest

"A mentor should never tell people what to do; they should say 'well that's quite interesting but what about if...?'"

2. Understand

"Your mentee needs to be confident that what you say you're going to do at the beginning you deliver on, so you can build trust and understanding. It's important to show that you've made the effort to understand the context where they're working."

3. Confidentiality and sharing

"If you learn things that are confidential, you keep them utterly confidential. If you want to share something you've learned from someone you're mentoring you make sure they're happy with you doing that."

4. Experience

"A mentor needs to be someone with more experience than you - or at least have something to give you that you haven't got."

Getting started

A few questions and answers

Here are a few frequently asked questions about mentoring and being a mentor that emerged from our interviews:

Have I got enough experience?

"...a good mentor has had a wealth of experience, good and bad."

Good mentoring is as much about attitude as it is about skill. Can you help others take responsibility for their own learning? A mentor doesn't always have to have direct experience of the mentee's role; they may have observed others handling similar situations and seen what worked and what didn't. One mentee commented that the most valuable thing for him was that his mentor:

"...was there supporting me in what I was doing and giving me advice on different ways of doing it. If I needed advice she was just there and I could pick up the phone any time."

Many people acting as informal mentors don't have any training. The emphasis is on sharing experience, so it is more important that mentors are reflective and aware of their own strengths and limitations. As such they can act as an advisor and critical friend rather than an expert or trainer. Remember, finding practical solutions can be just as important as offering sage political advice.

Do I have enough time?

"There's the issue of practical things, like being in fairly easy reach and being able to get hold of them... if they're too busy to see you when you need to see them it's not going to work."

One of the most important questions anyone thinking of being a mentor must ask themselves is: do I have enough time? That said, the actual time you are likely to spend as a mentor will be very small compared to that spent on the many other responsibilities of being a councillor. There are also lots of ways to keep in touch. Some mentoring arrangements are conducted over the phone - although most people prefer face-to-face meetings, at least at the beginning of a mentoring arrangement. Be creative in thinking how you can arrange mentoring meetings, but be committed to setting aside the time that you and your mentee will need.

"... councillors are very busy people... so you need to find someone who's willing to be your mentor and who has the time to do it, because it may be you've got to meet in the evenings or at weekends or when family life and everything permits."

Do you need training?

Most mentors and mentees agree that having some training is helpful because it provides mentors with skills and techniques they can use in mentoring. For this reason most organisations with mentoring programmes encourage mentors, and in many cases mentees, to have some training before they begin. However, skills like listening and coaching can be useful in areas other than mentoring. Training can also provide helpful tips about how to structure mentoring sessions so that mentors have confidence to command trust and respect from mentees.

"Mentors need to be skilled in mentoring, they need to take it seriously and have an idea of how to encourage you to improve."

Getting started

Useful tactics for mentors

For you and your mentee to get most benefit from mentoring, try to keep in mind your responsibilities as a mentor. Our interviewees told us that effective mentors support mentees in many different ways including:

- Storytelling
- Explaining "unwritten rules"
- Providing information about other authorities
- Discussing how others perform the mentee's role
- Identifying learning opportunities
- Helping mentees understand what is required of them
- Providing new or different perspectives
- Playing devil's advocate when discussing decisions or new strategies
- Identifying possible solutions
- Offering a space to talk
- Understanding the mentee's needs
- Building trust and creating non-threatening environments
- Listening to ideas or concerns
- Providing advice and support
- Showing commitment to their personal learning and development
- Building mentee confidence
- Providing timely, honest and constructive feedback
- Initiating reflection.

A few do's and dont's for mentors

Do...

1. **Give sufficient time to the mentoring process**
2. **Take time to understand the mentee's needs**
3. **Listen to mentees and provide support**
4. **Share knowledge, ideas and experience**
5. **Maintain confidentiality and trust**
6. **Maintain regular contact.**

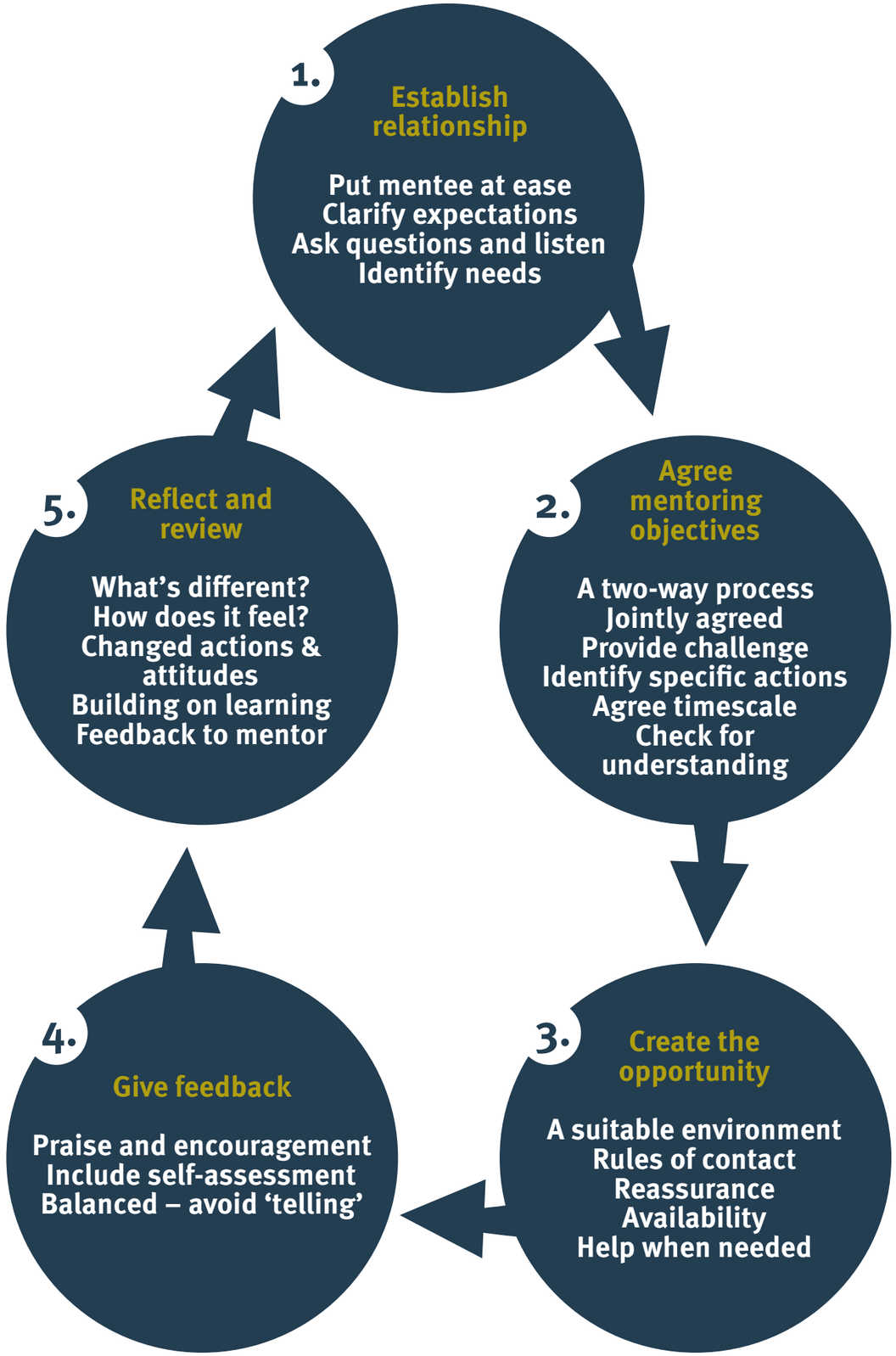
Don't...

1. **Tell mentees what to do**
2. **Assume that mentoring always works**
3. **Ignore limits of your own knowledge**
4. **Be closed to new ways of doing things**
5. **Assume there is just one best way.**

How to be an effective mentor

A mentoring model

This mentoring model summarises the main stages or phases of the mentoring relationship, and shows the main behaviours/questions the mentor should focus on in each. It is used by the LG Group when training peer mentors.



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How to be an effective mentor

Agreeing objectives

This exercise can help to clarify the mentee's objectives (or what they want from mentoring) and to monitor progress.

What I want to achieve

1. .....
2. .....
3. .....
4. .....
5. .....

Remember – try to be specific in deciding what you want to achieve. Don't include objectives that are too general or too big, break them down into something manageable.

By when?

1. .....
2. .....
3. .....
4. .....
5. .....

Remember – be realistic about how quickly you can achieve your objectives, but don't set dates that are too far ahead.

How to be an effective mentor

Agreeing objectives

This tool may be useful in helping to clarify the mentee's objectives (or what they want from mentoring) and to monitor progress.

Have I achieved my objectives?

1. .....
2. .....
3. .....
4. .....
5. .....

At each of your mentoring meetings look at the objectives you set and decide whether they have been met or whether these have changed. Take time to set new objectives as you progress.

What else have I learned?

1. .....
2. .....
3. .....
4. .....
5. .....

Planned learning is not the only learning in mentoring. Try to keep a note of all the unexpected things you learn from mentoring and keep a record of how you have applied the learning to discuss with your mentor.

Some final thoughts

Links

Our research demonstrated the practical value of mentoring for mentees, mentors and local government.

Just as there is no one way of organising mentoring, there are also different sources of support for those interested in setting up mentoring arrangements. Local Government Improvement & Development can help to broker mentoring relationships between different local authorities. More information can be found at:

The Councillor Mentoring Programme
www.lgid.gov.uk

There are also many organisations involved in mentoring in areas like education, the third sector and health where you can find resources that may be of use in political mentoring:

The Scottish Mentoring Network
www.scottishmentoringnetwork.co.uk

Operation Black Vote
www.obv.org.uk

The Mentoring & Befriending Foundation
www.mandbf.org

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Information about authors

Prof. Jo Silvester

Jo Silvester is a Professor of Organisational Psychology and Director of the Centre for Performance at Work, at City University London. She divides her time between Cass Business School and the Department of Psychology, where she undertakes research into political leadership, identifying political talent and political development.
Jo's past work has involved redesigning procedures for approving prospective parliamentary candidates for the Conservative Party and Liberal Democrat Party. She has also worked extensively in local government on cross-party projects including development of the Political Skills Framework, 360-feedback for the Next Generation Programme, and development centres for council executives. Her current work includes a study of predictors of electoral performance, and an internationally funded study of political integrity.

jo.silvester.1@city.ac.uk

Dr Christine Menges

Christine Menges worked as the researcher on the Political Mentoring project. Previously, she was head of the mentoring programme at the University of St. Gallen Business School and worked as mentoring consultant. Since completing the project she has worked as alumni manager for BPP University College where she was involved in initiating and designing an alumni-student mentoring programme. Her current role is Senior Lecturer in Organisational Behaviour at the Lord Ashcroft International Business School at Anglia Ruskin University. She has a MA in Public Policy and Management and a PhD in Management.

www.city.ac.uk/performanceatwork

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