



**MEDLINE
UNIVERSITY**

**LEADERSHIP:
MENTORING**



MENTORING

Coming into a new workforce environment can be daunting, whether it's a first job out of nursing school, or simply a new facility. Incoming staff can sometimes feel a lack of support or recognition by their new colleagues, resulting in feelings of isolation that can be negative enough to cause the individual to seek a new job elsewhere.

What can you do at your facility to help freshly-hired staff learn the ropes and get integrated into the work flow and culture of your environment?

Creating a mentoring program at your facility can help mitigate the phenomenon of "nurses eating their young," and fosters a positive environment where new staff can grow and flourish. Mentoring is an integral and direct part of an individual's success, and in turn, the success of the facility in which they work. Employees with mentors are twice as likely to stay; mentoring proves itself as a way to transfer crucial skills and knowledge as well as inspire loyalty in new employees.¹

What Is Mentoring?

Mentoring is an ongoing, collaborative relationship between individuals, one of whom is usually more senior than the other, where the more experienced partner helps the new individual grow in his or her field, and not only benefits from helping the new partner, but also gains fresh perspective from him or her.²

Mentoring is not a new concept. In fact, ever since the days of Florence Nightingale, nurses have been taking novices under their wings and helping them learn. But mentoring does not have to be solely between seasoned and new employees. Mentoring can also take collaborative forms, such as peer mentoring and co-mentoring. New faculty members can band together to share their information and expertise and offer support to each other in peer mentoring. Co-mentoring goes both ways between the involved individuals, involving reciprocity: listening and being listened to, teaching and learning from each other.³

Mentoring can also be conducted on a formal or an informal basis. Formal mentoring is a structured context, involving both a defined purpose and

timeframe for the partnership. On the other end of the spectrum, informal mentoring is more unstructured, generally comprised of a casual agreement between mentor and mentee of an established relationship based on the realization of the mentee's career goals.⁴

Developing mentoring relationships based on the characteristics of teaching, counseling, confirmation, accepting, friendship, protection, coaching and sponsorship will help both mentor and mentee nurses in developing safe and competent practice.⁴ Not only that, but while mentoring strengthens the nursing workforce, it also improves the quality of care and patient outcomes.²

What Does a Mentor Do?

What precisely does a mentor do? A simple mnemonic device can help guide your actions:

- **Model** Be aware of your own role modeling, and point out others who are good role models for your people
- **Encourage** Support your people in the risk-taking that is essential to their growth.
- **Nurture** Get to know your people's unique skills and capabilities. Work with them to do the most with their talents.
- **Teach Organizational Reality¹** Tell it like it is. Help them avoid those organizational minefields that are never written about in any policy manual.

Model

The best characteristic of a mentor is to "be real." People make mistakes and missteps, especially when learning the ropes of a new job. Therefore, they are far more likely to put their trust in "copers" rather than "masters." Those who cope don't always get it right the first time, and sometimes they are not successful. If instead of proclaiming unattainable perfection, a mentor is able to show how they coped during a situation, it gives others permission to do the same.¹ Additionally, learning and development gained from identifying mistakes—both of seasoned and of new staff—is essential for implementing new and improved practices, ideas, and initiatives.⁴

Encourage

Encouragement can be a good form of impromptu mentoring, as it can easily be slipped into casual

conversation or remarked upon in a meeting. Three steps that will help you offer encouragement are:

1. **Recognize:** Notice something.
2. **Verbalize:** Say something.
3. **Mobilize:** Do something.¹

Remember that attention and retention go hand in hand.¹ A simple act of encouragement can go a long way to show employees that they matter.

Nurture

In the busy atmosphere of the healthcare facility, it is often hard to remember to pause and interact with staff beyond the usual demands of the workday. Mentoring does not have to take an exorbitant amount of time. Sometimes it is as simple as taking a few moments to show a coworker or mentee that you really do care.

It is important to not only nurture relationships with staff and coworkers, but to also nurture ideas. Recognize that all employees have valuable contributions. Labeling a staff member as “new” could negate the fact that they bring with them experiences, insights, and fresh perspectives from previous experiences.³ Thus, new staff will have valuable knowledge to share that ought to be acknowledged and considered. Resist the urge to stifle new ideas and commit to gathering more information and thoroughly investigating possibilities before deciding whether or not to dismiss them.

Teach Organizational Reality

Mentors must also help look out for the organizational well-being of their mentees. New employees need to know the realities of their new environment, including the unwritten rules and particular biases. They truly desire frank conversation. As much as possible, tell it like it is. Invite the entire team to discuss topics such as:

- What counts in this particular organization
- How individual and team failures and successes have grown staff members
- What has been most surprising to incoming staff about the culture
- What seasoned staff know now that they wish they had known when they started.¹

By opening up this dialog, you allow employees the freedom to raise the pressing questions on their

minds and truly express what they think and feel.

Continue to check in with mentees using the MENTOR mnemonic throughout their tenure, not just during initial orientation, as many may still leave the organization at the 1-year or 3-year mark if they are not receiving continued support from colleagues. Talking to mentors and mentees on a regular basis is a function of creating an organizational culture that respects and cares about staff.⁴

Tips for Bringing Mentoring into Your Facility

Establishing a mentoring program at your facility will take some work. Fortunately, many resources exist to assist in planning and implementation of a mentoring program. Begin with training staff to become mentors. Important skills include active listening, goal setting, emotional intelligence, learning styles, managing job stress, and handling difficult behaviors.

The National League for Nursing suggests these tips for nursing faculty who want to engage mentoring at their facility:

- Contribute to the development of a mentoring program by identifying the needs of new staff and the resources required to meet those needs.
- Actively participate in mentoring relationships.
- Make the teaching done by experienced staff more visible to new hires.
- Be open and friendly to new staff and identify opportunities to mentor through brief, supportive interactions.
- Become sensitive to existing and potential community practices that exclude new staff.
- Spend time together as a community, talking and listening to one another, including the newer staff.
- Attend professional development workshops and seminars on mentoring.
- Collaborate with leadership to establish a mentoring program.³

Mentoring is a powerful tool for enhancing staff satisfaction and reducing feelings of deprecation, discrimination, and disempowerment. Any facility that can create and maintain a culture that fosters successful mentoring will experience increased job satisfaction among its staff, more effective nursing care, and the promotion of quality healthcare outcomes.⁴



References

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