

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
Marine Corps University
User's Guide to Marine Corps Values

MENTORING

1. Introduction. Everybody is a mentor and everybody has mentors. Most of us just don't use the word. Think back to all those who have helped you throughout your life to achieve the successes you have had. Remember that teacher in high school who helped you understand math, or that coach who worked with you to be a better sports team player? Remember the times your parents helped you through tough periods and supported you? They were mentoring you, providing assistance in the form of counsel to help you perform better and to assist you in your personal and professional growth.

2. Overview. The purpose of this period of instruction is to outline and discuss the purposes and goals of a Mentoring Program and provide guidance on how to set up and participate in a Mentoring Program.

3. Reference

Commandant's White Letter No. 10-95 of 3 May 1995
"Another Leadership Tool".

4. Discussion Leader Notes. Not applicable.

5. Discussion. The following definitions will be used throughout this chapter.

a. Mentoring. Mentoring is a formal or informal program that links junior Marines with more experienced Marines for the purposes of career development and professional growth, through sharing knowledge and insights that have been learned through the years.

b. Mentor. A senior Marine who voluntarily undertakes to coach, advise, and guide a younger Marine in order to enhance technical/leadership skills and intellectual/professional development.

c. Mentee. A junior Marine who voluntarily accepts tutelage from a more senior Marine for the purpose of enhancing skills and professional development.

d. Mentoring Connection. A voluntary professional association between a Mentor and Mentee. It may be of long or

short duration, be conducted in person or by any form of communication.

6. Philosophy

a. Since its inception, the Marine Corps has emphasized the importance of passing on professional knowledge to those we are privileged to lead. General Lejeune described the imparting of that knowledge "as a teacher does to a scholar." By definition, a mentor is a trusted counselor or guide; although not specifically mentioned in General Lejeune's comments, the concept of mentoring as a leadership tool was surely applicable then and is certainly applicable now.

b. There are no set rules for a mentoring program, but general guidelines apply. The most important thing to remember is that mentoring is a professional association formed to enhance a junior Marine's professional and personal worth to him/herself and to the Corps. The rules and regulations that define the relationships between senior and junior Marines apply in total to mentoring.

c. Mentoring is usually an informal program, but can be command sponsored. The relationship between mentor and mentee is voluntary.

d. When there is no command sponsored program, "natural" mentoring may take place.

e. A mentoring connection is a professional career development association, whose success is solely the responsibility of the mentor and mentee.

f. General Carl E. Mundy, Jr., in his White Letter described mentoring as "another leadership tool that can benefit both the individual Marine and the organization." He stated "Further, the concept of mentoring is consistent with the strategies for achieving one of the goals outlined in our vision of the future--to utilize fully the talents of our people."

7. Marine Corps Policies

a. There is no Marine Corps Order that mandates or describes a Mentoring Program. Thus, the rules that govern a Mentoring Program are informal and established by individual commands within guidelines that describe the proper relationships between juniors and seniors. Where no command-sponsored program exists, mentors and mentees who establish their own "natural" mentoring relationships must adhere to all applicable standards of conduct

and regulations for junior/senior professional and personal relationships.

b. A mentoring program does not replace the chain of command nor is mentoring meant to interfere with command relationships, senior/subordinate relationships, or Request Mast. Mentor/mentee relationships are not to be used to influence fitness reports, pro-con marks, non-judicial punishment or other disciplinary actions.

c. The Commandant's White Letter 10-95 of 3 May 1995 requested commanding generals, commanding officers, and officers in charge "to take appropriate steps to develop and implement a voluntary, informal mentoring program that allows the opportunity for each officer to be involved throughout his or her career."

d. Mentoring should be a universal program. Mentoring is useful for all Marines, officer and enlisted, minority or majority, male and female. While it is useful for mentor and mentee to have some things in common, it is not necessary. All that is necessary, is a willingness on the part of both parties to make a genuine effort to improve the performance and professional prospects for success of the mentee and to follow guidelines set forth in Marine Corps rules and regulations that describe the proper relationships between seniors and juniors, officers and enlisted, male and female Marines.

8. Mentor-Mentee Associations. Mentoring shouldn't happen by chance. Both members of the mentoring connection have responsibilities.

a. Mentor Roles. The roles assumed by a mentor depend on the needs of the mentee and on the association established between the two. There are at least ten roles a mentor can assume:

(1) Teacher. As a teacher, the mentor teaches the mentee the skills and knowledge required to perform the job successfully.

(2) Guide. As a guide, the mentor helps the mentee to understand how to "navigate" and understand the inner workings of an organization. Sometimes this includes passing on information about the unwritten "rules" for success.

(3) Counselor. Requires establishment of trust in the mentoring association. A counselor listens to possible ethics situations and provides guidance to help the mentee find his or her own solutions and improve his/her own problem solving skills.

(4) Motivator. A mentor shows support to help a mentee through the tough times, keeping the mentee focused on developing job skills to improve performance, self respect, and a sense of self-worth.

(5) Sponsor. The mentor helps to create possibilities for the mentee that may otherwise not be available. Opportunities should be challenging and instructive, without being overwhelming. Do not set the Mentee up for failure.

(6) Coach. A coach observes performance, assesses capabilities, provides feedback to the mentee, and instructs with a view to improve performance. Then the loop repeats.

(7) Advisor. A mentor helps the mentee develop professional interests and set realistic career goals. Goals should be specific, have a time-frame and set deadlines, be results oriented, relevant, and reachable.

(8) Referral Agent. Once a career plan is developed, the mentor assists the mentee in approaching persons who can provide training, information, and assistance. The mentor also points the mentee to relevant career enhancing schools, correspondence courses, books, reading, professional organizations, and self improvement activities.

(9) Role Model. The mentor is a living example for the mentee to emulate. A mentor must lead and teach by example.

(10) Door Opener. The mentor opens doors of opportunity by helping the mentee establish a network of professional contacts both within and outside the Marine Corps. He/she helps the mentee understand the importance of staying in touch with seniors, peers, and juniors to exchange information, ideas, and concerns.

b. Mentee Roles

(1) Willing. The mentee must want to improve performance, contribute to the organization, and enhance professional prospects and be willing to work to reach his/her goals.

(2) Active. A mentee takes action based on career goals, suggestions of a mentor, job requirements, and educational opportunities.

(3) Accepting. A mentee is willing to accept responsibility for his/her actions, accept meaningful feedback

and criticism, and accept guidance and counseling from his/her mentor.

(4) Respectful. The mentee shows consideration and respect for the mentor's willingness to help and seriously considers all advice and suggestions from the mentor. He/she is open-minded; progress takes time and effort.

(5) Professional. The mentor/mentee relationship is professional at all times. Both parties should be respectful of privacy and each others personal lives.

(6) Prepared. The mentee is ready to move beyond the mentoring association, once the association has served its purpose.

c. Establishing a Mentoring Connection. There are six stages to developing, maintaining, and terminating a mentoring connection:

(1) Identification Stage. Most mentoring associations are formed haphazardly, except where a command-sponsored program is in place. Where no program exists, either a senior or junior may initiate the mentoring connection. Seniors look for Marines with potential for improvement who need guidance. Juniors recognize that they need assistance with some facet of their professional development and seek help to improve. There may be some common bond between mentor and mentee such as MOS, gender, race, hometown, hobbies, unit, etc.

(2) Preparation stage. Both Mentor and Mentee must want to establish the mentoring association. They should understand the purpose of the relationship, expectations, goals, risks, and rewards.

(3) Initiation stage. The mentor and mentee set the parameters, discuss and set goals, decide on time-frames, and write a plan with a time-frame.

(4) Cultivation stage. This is the stage where the mentor teaches job skills, provides guidance, lends psychological support, opens doors, and provides counsel. The mentee works to improve performance, learn new skills, follow guidance, and actively learn the organization, its goals and "ethos."

(5) Redefinition stage. A review and action phase where the mentor and mentee assess accomplishments, reorient the action plan, and redefine goals. During this stage one or both parties may decide to end the association.

(6) Termination stage. Parties may decide during the redefinition stage to terminate the association due to positive or negative factors. Mentor and mentee should discuss which goals were achieved and which were not. Both should endeavor to make a realistic assessment of strengths and weaknesses of the association. Sometimes mentoring associations continue indefinitely.

d. Tools for a Successful Mentoring Connection

(1) Effective Interpersonal Communication Skills. Both mentor and mentee must be able to adequately express to each other the messages they want to get across. Interpersonal communication is a dynamic, never-ending, two-way process that is oriented towards the receiver. Messages are written, spoken, verbal, and non-verbal. The receiver must listen, read, reflect, and respond. There are barriers to effective communication. In a mentoring connection, it is better for the mentor to avoid being authoritarian, admonishing, threatening, or too critical and negative. The mentor must strike the right balance between being overly harsh or coddling the mentee. Feedback is necessary for any communication loop to develop and operate properly. Encourage the mentee to discuss what is and isn't working for him or her. Mentor, ensure you understand and observe the mentee and his/her work so you can provide meaningful help and guidance.

(2) Personal Assessment. Each mentee with his/her mentor's assistance, must truthfully perform a self-assessment to identify both strengths and weaknesses. Look at past performance, performance reports, MOS school grades and other performance indicators. Examine the criteria for advancement. What schools, outside educational courses, Marine Corps Institute courses, and other improvement opportunities are important to the mentee's career advancement? Once strengths and weaknesses are examined, a listing is made of areas for improvement or enhancement.

(3) Make a Career Development Plan. The mentor and mentee look at the mentee's strengths and weaknesses and develop a plan to use educational and professional opportunities to develop necessary skills and professional attributes in the mentee. The plan can be based on both short and long term improvements. The mentee's first goal may be to attain the necessary cutting score for promotion. Maybe an improvement in the Physical Fitness Test Score, or another MCI course is all that is needed. Look at the long term. What professional schools should the mentee seek to attend to prepare for increased responsibility? Does the mentee need further formal education, or even a college degree to fully meet his/her goals? Of what professional organizations should the mentee be a member of? Follow the plan. The mentor can help attain goals by utilizing

formal and informal contacts, writing letters of introduction, helping prepare the mentee for formal schooling, etc.

Re-evaluate the plan. When a major goal is achieved, expectations may rise. Don't be afraid to set the "bar" a little higher. Conversely, some goals may not be achievable, therefore a reassessment of what is and isn't practical may be necessary.

e. The successful mentoring connection. How are mentoring connections formed?

(1) Command sponsorship. Some commands have established programs for mentoring. They keep a list of volunteers from among the more senior members and from among the interested juniors. Matches are made based on a number of elements like working relationships, shared interests such as MOS or background, and other natural factors. A command may establish mentoring relationships for all personnel. Some will work out; some will not. The Commanding Officer will set the parameters for the program, but should give considerable leeway to allow mentors and mentees the ability to design their programs based on individual preferences and goals.

(2) Natural mentoring associations. Most mentoring occurs "naturally." In other words, some shared experience, background, or other factor causes the connection to occur almost by itself. A mentee looking for help may want to emulate the success and style of a senior and asks for assistance. A senior may see the spark of potential in a junior and take responsibility to encourage and assist. Naturally formed mentoring connections should be encouraged. Both members of the connection should utilize the steps and stages to enhance the chances of success. Assess, make a plan, execute the plan, re-assess, adjust, and recognize the responsibility of each member of the mentoring connection.

f. Improper mentoring relationships

(1) The Marine Corps Manual (MCM) paragraph 1100.4 defines an "improper relationship as: "situations that invite or give the appearance of familiarity or undue informality among Marines of different grades."

(2) The sentence states that familiarity and undue informality between Marines of different grades is improper. Further, it states that perception is important because the relationship or situation must not invite or give the appearance of familiarity or undue informality.

(3) It is primarily the mentor's responsibility to ensure that the mentoring connection is kept on the proper professional level. The command should know that the mentor and mentee, if in the same unit, are working together to improve the mentee's performance. Don't hide the connection. Be open and above board in all actions. Strictly adhere to the guidelines contained in the MCM.

Transition. We have briefly discussed Mentoring and its effects on individuals and the Marine Corps. Mentoring can be a powerful tool to ensure that all Marines perform to the best of their abilities, have opportunities for advancement and self-improvement, and can contribute to the success of the Corps. "Another leadership tool" is how General Mundy put it. Mentoring is another arrow in the quiver of successful, concerned leaders to encourage and help their Marines.