

Understanding Mentorship and Challenges to Develop a Mentoring Philosophy

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Abstract: ***Purpose:** This paper presents the proceedings of the workshop which was conducted for the faculty members to help them form and refine their mentoring philosophy. A one day workshop on mentoring was conducted at our college for the faculty members across the engineering disciplines. The primary objective of this workshop was to help faculty members understand the importance of student mentoring, roles and responsibilities of a mentor, essential communication skills, challenges involved and how to improve the mentor-mentee relationship. They also learnt how to develop a friendly, trusting relationship to enhance social skills and emotional wellbeing of the mentees. **Methodology:** The workshop focused on understanding mentoring as a multi-disciplinary knowledge system and the complexities that underpin this concept. Teachers need to come out of the limitations of regular practices and interrogate themselves, without which it is just impossible to professionalize the mentoring processes. A set of 8 worksheets were used to help faculty reflect on the various aspects of mentoring and reorient themselves towards a positive mentoring profile. **Findings:** Teaching and mentoring should go hand in hand. Mentoring is now considered as close to parenting. Mentors are also expected to possess some qualities. Mentoring philosophy is a reflection of a mentor's personality. Empathy towards student's issues and perspectives is pivotal to mentoring. **Originality:** This paper is a report of the workshop conducted for the faculty. Samples of the opinions presented in the feedback sheet form the basis of the findings.*

Keywords: Mentoring Scale, Personality Test, Empathy, Mentoring & Learning Styles

1. Introduction

Mentoring is important, not only because of the knowledge and skills mentees can acquire from mentors, but also because it provides professional socialization and personal support to facilitate success in graduation and beyond. Faculty mentors play a crucial role in the success of graduate students in academics and career. Like any interpersonal relationship, the one between mentor and mentee will evolve over time. Mentoring, at its core, guarantees mentees that there is someone who cares about them, assures them they are not alone in dealing with day-to-day challenges and makes them feel like they matter. Mentors can help mentees set and reach goals, thereby modifying and improving their social skills, attitudes, attendance and behaviour. Mentoring is a process of building supportive relationships, a scaffolding process, a reflective process, a career development process, a teaching-learning process and a combination of coaching counselling and assessment.

2. Methodology

A set of eight worksheets were used in this workshop. Psychological concepts like Johari's Window and Maslow's Pyramid were presented in the context of mentoring. Whereas Johari's Window helped to reflect upon one's personality, Maslow's Pyramid was a tool to understand self-actualization. With the help of such tools, teachers can become effective mentors employing structure and clarity, motivation, questioning, and dialogue in the mentoring process.

- The first worksheet was called 'Developing a Mentoring Philosophy'. Participants were given clues in the form of a checklist and asked to describe their approach to mentoring and provide a specific example of effective

mentoring based on their understanding and personal approach.

- The second worksheet was called 'Assessing your Mentoring Talents-A Self-check Scale' which attempts to determine what personal attributes are brought in by the mentor in a mentoring relationship. The objective of this worksheet was to get a picture of one's gifts and potential blind spots. The mentor scale has 39 sentence stems each with two possible options A & B. This activity saw participants categorizing themselves under labels like Sociability, Dominance, and Openness based on their responses, each with 13 statements at random.

Interpretation of Scores

Quality	High scores of A	High scores of B
Sociability	Reservedness	Outgoing nature
Dominance	High Control	Moderate Control
Openness	Cautious	Expressive

- The third worksheet was called 'Listening Skills Self-Assessment Audit'. It contained 15 statements related to listening which aim to check whether one is a good listener and focuses on what others speak. In this activity participants responded to a series of sub questions under the head-question "Are You Paying Attention?" There are two options to each question YES or NO. For each option scoring range is -1, 0 or 1. A maximum score of 9-10 indicates that the person is a good listener and minus 9 to minus 10 indicates that he is a poor listener.
- The fourth worksheet was a questionnaire on 'Mentoring Styles'. It aims to raise awareness on the style that an individual uses in mentoring conversations. This tool gives a clue to the different styles of mentoring such as Letting go, Active listening, Advisory, Prescribing and Cooperative styles. It contains 25 descriptive questions. After answering these, mentors can reflect on the style of

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mentoring adapted by them which reflects their personality and beliefs.

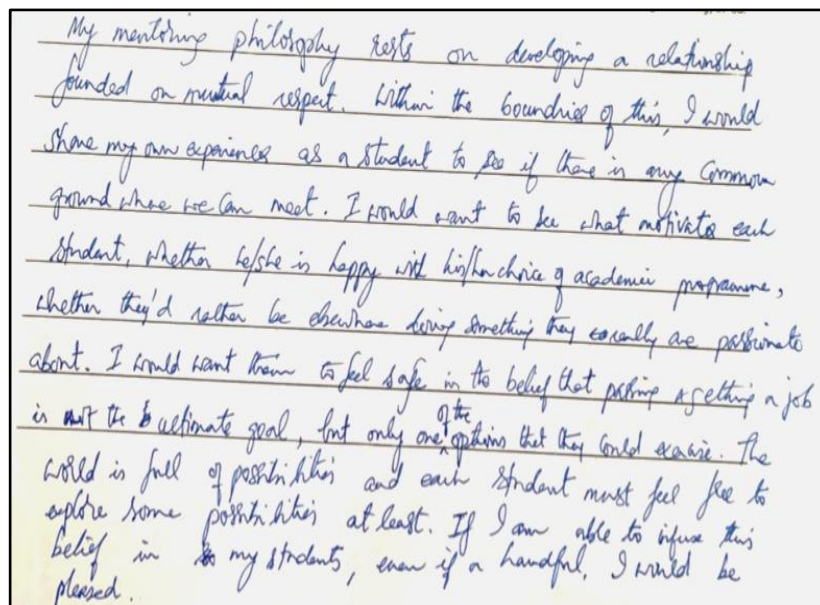
- The fifth worksheet was called 'Mentoring Competence Self-assessment'. (Created by Barrie Smale & Andrew Gibbons of inspired2learn). It has 49 statements describing the competencies necessary in different situations. After filling in the options the mentors can list key areas for personal development to improve their mentoring competences. They can set targets identify obstacles and think of ways to overcome them.
- The sixth worksheet was called Mentor Competencies Questionnaire. This questionnaire aims to help in assessment of existing abilities and behaviours that will support mentors in their roles. Questions have options on a scale of 1 (not like me) to 5 (very like me). The items in sections 1 to 10 each focus on a specific aspect of effective mentor behaviours. Section 11 covers a number of general qualities and behaviours associated with effective mentors. There is no "pass" or "fail" for the scores. However, it would be normal for an effective mentor to score above 50% in most sections.
- The seventh worksheet was called 'The Big Five Personality Test'. It aims to help one understand why one acts the way they do and how one's personality is structured. There are 50 statements describing personality traits. The options should be marked on a scale of 1-5 ranging between agree to disagree. The scoring pattern

will be between zero and forty. The five types of personality traits are described here. Extroversion (E), Agreeableness (A), Conscientiousness (C), Neuroticism (N), Openness to Experience (O).

- The eighth worksheet was called 'The Learning Styles Questionnaire' designed by Peter Honey and Alan Mumford. This questionnaire helps to pinpoint one's learning preferences so that one is in a better position to select learning experiences that suits their style and having a greater understanding of those that suit the style of others. It contains 80 statements and there are four categories described. The statements are posted in random order. The categories are Activist, Reflector, Theorist and Pragmatist. The Questionnaire is scored by awarding one point for each ticked item. There are no points for crossed items. A detailed description about each learning style is provided in the questionnaire for reference.

3. Analysis

After answering the questionnaires 2-7 participants can frame their own philosophy of mentoring based on their reflections and views. This feeds into worksheet-I. We collected samples of this worksheet from many participants and analysed it. The summary is presented here.



My mentoring philosophy rests on developing a relationship founded on mutual respect. Within the boundaries of this, I would share my own experiences as a student to see if there is any common ground where we can meet. I would want to be what motivates each student, whether he/she is happy with hierarchy of academic programme, whether they'd rather be obsessive doing something they casually are passionate about. I would want them to feel safe in the belief that getting a job is not the ultimate goal, but only one of the options that they could exercise. The world is full of possibilities and each student must feel free to explore some possibilities at least. If I am able to inspire this belief in my students, even if a handful, I would be pleased.

How would you respond?

Entering Mentoring, 87-88.

I would meet them individually, and help them break the ice by getting them to talk uninhibitedly about themselves, what they feel strongly about, their likes and dislikes, their fears, etc. I would also motivate my mentees to do a SWOT Analysis so that they can build up on their strengths, chalk out strategies to overcome their weaknesses, cash in on opportunities that come their way and also learn to create them, and utilize their resources to meet challenges and threats. When they come on with their views and perspectives on various issues, I would try to adjust my wavelength to match theirs for a better empathetic understanding.

To mentor the mentee, the mentor should feel empathetic towards the mentee, so that all the problems of mentee can be seen clearly and the necessary solutions can be given & being friendly to the mentee makes the discussion of mentoring more fruitful fulfilling the purpose of mentoring.

- Analyzing present status of student in all aspects
- Getting more information from them to understand their character, hobbies, their approach towards any aspects.
- Giving suggestion (if require), otherwise making some modification in their day to day life to improve their abilities and skills.

4. Findings

Some key words that participants picked up from the workshop which project their philosophy of mentoring are mentioned here. They are - Listening, empathy, intuitive understanding, support, motivation, questioning, friendly relationship, scaffolding, integrity, interaction, encouragement, self-esteem, knowledge enhancement, belief and experience, self monitoring, controlling ego, creating awareness, dedication, self-actualization, introspection, reflection, inculcating moral values, sharing knowledge, discussion, negotiation, feelings, guidance, self assessment, continuity, plan of action, preparation, mutual respect, promoting accountability, building relationship, supportive relationship, career development, personality development, community of learners, student potential, communication, willingness and hand holding.

Many participants mentioned that they understood how empathy towards students' issues and perspectives is pivotal to mentoring. A mentor should understand the interests, ideas, talents and aspirations of the mentees. Mentor can make the mentees do a SWOT analysis. By understanding their strengths, mentees can use them to face challenges and threats they come across. A friendly, open atmosphere and positive feedback can accentuate positive interaction. Mentors can facilitate interaction by sharing their own experiences and compel the mentees to come out of their cocoon and share their inner feelings. Understanding the family background, personal problems, medical issues and hobbies of the mentees can develop a friendly bond between the mentor and the mentee. A mentor is not only the second parent to the mentee but he/she is the friend, philosopher and guide, all rolled into one. Mentees should be made aware of the fact that financial success like getting a job is not the ultimate goal of life. World is full of possibilities. If this awareness can be infused in the mentees, they will be ready to face problems of life with courage. Understanding the finer aspects of relationships will mould them to face the world with an open mind.

5. Conclusion

The workshop highlighted the point that teaching and mentoring should be integrated by self assessment of the mentor and understanding the challenges involved in mentoring. The fact that mentoring is now moving closer to parenting and teacher embracing the role of a friend, philosopher and guide is enroute. Discovering the talents in mentees and building upon these to motivate them will pave way for their success and achievement in academics as well as in personal life. If mentees open up with their problems, ideas and emotions through introspection, mentoring can help to develop a positive attitude in them. Mentors can document their mentoring stories, create a database and share it with other colleagues.

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