

COMPONENT 1

EXCERPTS FROM THE FLORIDA SUPERINTENDENT'S MENTORING PROGRAM

This Component is included with permission from the Florida Association of School Superintendents. It was developed specifically for Superintendents in the completion of their Chief Executive Officer Leadership Development Program (CEOLDP). Inasmuch as several districts are developing peer assistance programs, it was believed that several of the major concepts include in this component would be helpful. Be advised that this does not constitute the total document, but rather an abbreviation for purposes served in an appraisal system.

Introduction

Learning is a process which transcends all boundaries; the lessons learned in one field are often readily applicable to another. Strategies which address issues in the field of business, for example, may assist those in the field of education. The world of private business and industry has long recognized mentoring as an important activity which has enhanced the career success and personal fulfillment of organizational members. The area of teacher education has embraced this concept as a means of helping classroom teachers in becoming more effective and successful with its inclusion in the program for beginning teachers.

Beyond teacher education, however, the field of education, within more recent years, has only begun to test and witness the value of formal mentoring programs for educational administrators. Educational leadership has become increasingly difficult and complex, causing increased frustrations felt even by the experienced administrator. This phenomenon has called for a strategy which assists in the professional development of all educational leaders. In light of this, several states and numerous school districts are turning to mentoring programs for administrators to improve their chances of success.

The State of Florida is one of those states which capitalized on the potential value of mentoring for educational leaders by implementing such a program for school district superintendents in 1992.

The primary purpose of this document is to discuss the superintendent mentoring program in the State of Florida. However, the reader must first gain a thorough understanding of the definition and concept of mentoring, its underlying assumptions, and its applications to business and education, particularly for administrators. Topics to be discussed will include the models of mentoring, the potential problems encountered in a mentoring relationship, the characteristics and responsibilities of the participants in the mentoring program as well as the benefits procured and the costs incurred. In addition, mentor training will be discussed and a proposal of a model for training mentors will be considered. The literature that is referred to throughout this document is based primarily on research which focuses on mentoring in the field of business and mentoring as it applies to the field of education, particularly in the area of educational leadership. A thorough discussion of the superintendent mentoring program in the State of Florida will follow a review of the fundamental concepts of mentoring. Additionally, a list of references and recommended readings on the subject of mentoring is appended for further study.

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A Review of Literature on Mentoring

Mentoring Defined

Derived from the Greek word meaning "to endure," the concept of mentoring refers to a sustained relationship which can be traced back to Homer's *Odyssey*: "Mentor was the teacher entrusted by Odysseus to tutor his son, Telemachus. Based on this literary description, we have been provided over the centuries with a lasting image of the wise and patient counselor serving to shape and guide the lives of younger, less experienced colleagues" (Daresh & Playko, 1989). Furthermore, it is revealed that the original Mentor was actually a woman, the goddess Athene in disguise. And, even though being a goddess gave her access to formidable power in Homer's world, Athene/Mentor was judicious about how she employed it. In what might have been a glorious denouement for her, when Odysseus and Telemachus confront their usurpers at the close of "The Odyssey, Athene did not "...throw all her powers in, to give him victory, but continued to put the strength and courage of both Odysseus and Telemachus on trial, while she herself withdrew, taking the shape of a swallow and darting aloft to perch on the smoky beam of the hall" (Homer, 1946).

According to Gibb and Megginson (1993), "While we would not suggest that modern mentors attempt similar feats, the story clearly places the mentor where we would want her - looking on and encouraging the protégé." This image of the mentor serving as a wise guide to a younger protégé permeates the literature on mentoring. Definitions range from "a mixture of parent and peer" (Levinson) to "a non-parental role model who actively provides guidance, support, and opportunities for the protégé" (Sheehy, 1976). This notion of the mentor serving as a guide to adult development connotes a "form of 'torch passing' from one generation to the next" (Daresh & Playko, 1989).

More recent definitions emphasize the didactic, interactive nature of the mentoring process, "a dynamic, reciprocal relationship in a work environment between an advanced career incumbent (mentor) and a beginner (protégé) aimed at promoting the career development of both" (Healy & Wilchert). This definition, as illustrated below, clearly has implications when applied to mentoring for educational administrators (Wasden):

The mentor is a master at providing opportunities for the growth of others, by identifying situations and events which contribute knowledge and experience to the life of the steward. Opportunities are not happen-stance; they must be thoughtfully designed and organized into logical sequence. Sometimes hazards are attached to opportunity. The mentor takes great pains to help the steward recognize and negotiate dangerous situations. In doing all this, the mentor has an opportunity for growth through service, which is the highest form of leadership.

Most of the research on mentoring, however, concludes that definitional issues demand more attention: "The phenomenon of mentoring is not clearly conceptualized...mentoring appears to mean one thing to developmental psychologists, another thing to business people, and a third thing to those in academic settings" (Merriam, 1983). In fact, one literature review cited "at least 15 significantly different definitions from these three fields" (Gibb & Megginson). Despite the numerous definitions, what sets

mentoring apart from other developmental practices? Gibb and Megginson (1993) contend "Confidentiality clearly makes the mentoring relationship quite different from typical management or learning relationships." The mentoring relationship involves counseling which in turn requires a degree of respect for certain professional and personal issues on the part of both parties.

The mentoring process then is a mutually enhancing growth experience for both the mentor and the protégé. It is a learning process which combines the traditional modes of occupational learning - formal education, apprenticeship, and "learning-while-doing" or learning from experience (Dunlap) and, in a sense, moves one step beyond them. Where the business world has long used the term "mentor" to conjure "such diverse images as 'teacher, coach, trainer, positive role model, developer of talent, opener of doors, protector, sponsor, or successful leader...the current literature suggests that mentoring needs to be understood as a combination of most, if not all, of these individual role descriptors" (Daresh & Playko, 1989). The implication, then, is to foster a relationship which moves along a type of advisory continuum from one end - from peer pal to guide to sponsor to patron - to the other, the true mentor (Daresh & Playko, 1989).

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The Matching Process

One of the ways to avoid these potential problems is to take precautions in the early stages of the program. As previously stated, the matching process in a formal relationship ranges considerably and may promote varying chances of success. Chao, Walz, and Gardner (1992) state that the "current practice of random assignment of protégés to mentors is analogous to blind dates; there would be a small probability that the match would be successful." One article in particular, "Take My Mentor, Please!" (Kizilos) clearly illustrates this possibility with several instances of unsuccessful mentoring relationships. Assignment, matching, or selection may set the tone for the relationship and significantly affect its direction and, thus, its chances for success. Therefore, careful consideration must be given to this process. A district office of the Internal Revenue Service in Missouri attempted to heed this advice (Kizilos). In instituting its formal mentoring program –

The matchmaking process at the IRS recognizes the importance of personal chemistry in pairing protégés with mentors. After interviewing new managers and studying their preferences and personalities, a career adviser assigns protégés to one of the 31 senior managers in the mentor pool. The two then meet. If they like each other, there's a match. Managers are never asked to mentor against their will..

In addition to taking personal chemistry into consideration, it is suggested that *"research examining how mentors and protégés are attracted to each other could be applied to identify critical matching factors in formal mentorship programs"* (Chao, et al).

Gender in Mentoring

A discussion of the matching process naturally involves the consideration of the gender composition of the mentoring dyad. Recent sensitivity to gender-related problems in the work force and the recognition of stylistic differences between men and women have sparked an interest in this area: "Women may manage conflict differently from the way men typically do. They may delegate authority and make group decisions differently. They often define the whole notion of teamwork differently" (Kizilos). Several studies have been conducted to examine the influence of gender composition on the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship contrasting same-sex relationships (either male-male or female-female) with cross-gender relationships, focusing primarily on the male mentor-female protégé relationship. One such study hypothesized that heterogeneous gender mentoring dyads would spend less time together and protégés would obtain fewer benefits from the relationship compared to homogeneous gender mentoring dyads based on indications that –

"...the development of successful cross-gender mentorships may be inhibited by perceptions that women lack managerial skills and are unsuitable for challenging positions, preferences for interaction with members of the same gender in the work environment, and concerns that peers may perceive the mentoring relationships as sexual in nature, leading to resentment and malicious gossip." (Noe)

Similar issues are raised by other researchers who identify potential barriers to the establishment of cross-gender relationships and observations about female protégés in general (Burke et al):

- A developmental dilemma exists for the management of both internal relationships (closeness/distance of the participants) and external relationships (perceptions of the relationship by outsiders)
- Women bring unique competencies and needs to the relationship.
- Women protégés were seen as needing more encouragement and having to be "sold" more actively than were their male colleagues.
- Women were more likely than men to stress caring, nurturing and teaching when describing the mentorship.

- Women considered the mentor's role of providing feedback about strengths and weaknesses to be more important than did men.
- The development of a close friendship was more likely in relationships involving a female protégé than those involving only men.

Interestingly, despite these issues and concerns, the research studies resulted in the following findings:

- Mentors matched with opposite-sex protégés reported that these protégés used the mentorship more effectively than same-sex protégés (Burke, et al)
- Female protégés established stronger emotional ties than male protégés with male mentors (Fagenson)
- In terms of career/job outcomes, mentoring worked equally well for women and men (Fagenson)
- Females reported receiving significantly more psycho-social benefits from the mentoring relationships than did males (Noe)
- No significant differences were found between men and women in mentoring experience, intentions to mentor, or the costs and benefits reported to be associated with mentoring relationships (Ragins & Scandura)

Two possible explanations are offered for these findings (Noe):

- *"Protégés in mentoring relationships with members of the opposite gender work harder to make the relationship successful because of an awareness of the possible negative outcomes that are believed to result from cross-gender relationships at work"*
- *"Women may be more motivated than men to utilize mentors who are provided via a formal program because of the general lack of mentors for women"*

Characteristics and Responsibilities of Participants

Part of the answer to the dilemma of appropriate matching or pairing resides in research which has been conducted on the ideal or desired characteristics and responsibilities of the participants, whether male or female, involved in the mentoring process. As previously mentioned, the mentoring process is a mutually enhancing one and, as such, it requires certain attributes and duties.

Mentors

Research indicates that the following list of characteristics may aid in the selection of those who would serve as effective mentors for educational leaders (Daresh & Playko, 1989):

- Mentors should have experience as practicing school administrators, and they should be generally regarded by their peers and others as being effective.
- Mentors should demonstrate generally accepted positive leadership qualities, such as (but not necessarily limited to):
 - intelligence
 - good (oral and written) communication skills
 - past, present, and future understanding with simultaneous orientation
 - acceptance of multiple alternative solutions to complex problems
 - clarity of vision and the ability to share that vision with others in the organization
 - well-developed interpersonal skills and sensitivities
- Mentors need to be able to ask the right questions of beginning administrators, and not just provide the “right” answers all the time.
- Mentors must accept “another way of doing things,” and avoid the tendency to tell beginners that the way to do something is “the way I used to do it.”
- Mentors should express the desire to see people go beyond their present levels of performance, even if it might mean that they are able to do some things better than the mentors might be able to do the same things.
- Mentors need to model the principles of continuous learning and reflection.
- Mentors should exhibit the awareness of the political and social realities of life in at least one school system; they must know the “real way” that things get done.

Furthermore, Haensly and Edlind (1986) suggest other characteristics which are recommended for the “ideal” mentor:

- Outstanding knowledge, skills, and expertise in a particular domain.

- Enthusiasm that is sincere, convincing, and most importantly, constantly conveyed to their protégés.
- The ability to communicate to others a clear picture of their personal attitudes, values, and ethical standards.
- The ability to communicate sensitively the type of feedback that is needed regarding their protégé's development and progress toward desirable standards and competence and professional behavior.
- Sensitive listening ability to their protégé's ideas, doubts, concerns, and enthusiastic outpourings.
- A caring attitude and a belief in their protégé's potential.
- Flexibility and a sense of humor.
- A restrained sense of guidance so that their protégé may develop as independently as possible.

Once these characteristics have been identified in potential mentors and they have been selected to serve as mentors, they must carry out certain responsibilities successfully in order for the programs to achieve the potential benefits. Daresh & Playko (1989) emphasize that the mentor must be willing to provide time for the protégé simply to talk: "perhaps the most important thing that anyone can do as a mentor is to be available when needed by the protégé, not to 'fix' problems, but rather, to indicate that someone cares about what the beginner is doing." In addition, they list what they consider to be the most important responsibilities of the mentor:

- **Advising** - In this way, the mentor responds to a protégé's need to gain additional information needed to carry out a job effectively.
- **Communicating** - Here, the mentor works consistently to ensure that open lines of communication are always available between himself/herself and the protégé.
- **Counseling** - The mentor provides needed emotional support to the protégé.
- **Guiding** - In this way, the mentor works to orient and acquaint the new administrator to the informal and formal norms of (the job).
- **Modeling** - The mentor serves as a true role model to the protégé by consistently demonstrating professional and competent performance on the job.
- **Skill Developing** - The mentor assists the protégé in learning skills needed to carry out the job effectively.

Rogus and Drury view the mentoring role as two-fold: "Helping with problems the mentee identifies is an essential part of the mentor's supportive function; helping the mentee identify problems he or she might otherwise not consider is part of the challenge function." Often during this survival stage, beginning administrators are concerned with maintenance. The mentor must encourage the protégé to push beyond that desire to simply make it through the day without a new crisis (Rogus & Drury):

In a sense, the mentor's task is to help the mentee keep a part of his or her mind focused on questions that transcend the urgencies which normally dominate first-year administrator thinking, to promote analysis of the organization's function, and to develop a clear vision of what the organization might become. This is the most demanding part of the mentoring role.

Protégés

The success of the mentoring relationship depends upon the protégé as well. According to Haensly and Edlind (1986), "ideal" protégés should possess the following characteristics:

- Enthusiasm about the domain in which they are working, and also about their personal involvement in the study of that domain.
- The ability to demonstrate initiative along with a conscientious effort to develop their own self-potential.
- A commitment to carry through on suggested plans and activities and a desire to go beyond any established minimal levels of performance.
- An open-minded, objective, and non-defensive attitude.
- A degree of insightfulness about self and others, often tempered by a good sense of humor.

In addition, they are expected to perform certain responsibilities to achieve the goals established by the mentoring process (Daresh & Playko, 1989):

- Learn from the many people who work in their school systems, in addition to their assigned mentors to decrease the likelihood that the mentoring arrangement becomes a dependency relationship.

- Come forward to their mentors to seek advice regarding specific issues and concerns and articulate them in an open and honest fashion because mentors cannot be expected to be "mind readers".
- Remain open to suggestions that are offered by their mentors; if people act as if they know all the answers before asking the question, mentors will likely lose much of their enthusiasm to work with protégés.

The Mentor/New Employee Relationship

The establishment of a mentoring relationship by a formalized arrangement does not necessarily guarantee its effectiveness and success. The development of a positive, strong, and trusting relationship takes time and commitment from both participants. Playko (1990) discusses certain ingredients which are necessary for a productive mentoring relationship:

- **Value** – "In general, the pairings must be valued by both participants. They must find the arrangement equally valuable and important that will serve as an opportunity for the mentor and protégé to participate in a supportive setting."
- **Mutuality** – "The relationship should indicate a mutuality that is warmly regarded by both parties in terms of trust and respect...This conceptualization emphasizes that true mentoring has the potential of being as helpful to the mentor as it is to the protégé."
- **Two-way, interactive activity** – "...both the mentor and the protégé are encouraged to express inner feelings, thoughts, and questions regarding their professional role or personal problems that they may wish to share. In essence, this can be viewed as a shared and expressive learning experience for both participants who sit, listen, and reflect on situations (past and present) to help each other in formulating available options or directions that can be pursued in resolving problems. All this is made possible through a variety of interactive collegial decision-making processes."
- **Ongoing collaboration** – "(A) mentoring relationship should serve as a form of motivation for both the mentor and the protégé in that it will stimulate a desire for both to grow personally and professionally. Within a caring and trusting relationship, both parties should be able to view each other as colleagues who can offer new insights and possible solutions to arising problems."

It was the responsibility of both parties to incorporate these elements into their relationship.

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