

# Mentoring

## The Origin of Mentoring

Mentoring is a powerful and popular way for people to learn a variety of personal and professional skills. In fact, mentoring is one of the oldest forms of influence. Popular mentoring literature attributes the origin of the term mentoring to Homer, one of the ancient Greek storytellers. In his classic tale Homer tells of the King of Ithaca, who asked his friend Mentor to look after his son Telemachus while he fought to win the Trojan War. However, scholars familiar with the original work believe that the model of mentoring portrayed by Homer would make most relationships fizzle rather than sizzle. In fact [the true origin](#) of the modern use of the term mentoring more likely comes from the work of 18th century French writer Fenelon who was also an educator. African scholars have noted that mentors were commonplace in Africa, long before the ancient Greek civilization.

Regardless of the origins of the term and although not everyone takes the place of a king, most adults can identify a person who, at some time in their life, had a significant and positive impact on them. Mentors can be friends, relatives, co-workers, teachers, as well as historic or contemporary personalities. Most often, a mentor is a more experienced or older person who acts as a role model, compatriot, challenger, guide or cheerleader.

Mentoring has become an effective method for businesses to help employees with orientation, career advancement, problem solving, coaching, and support. In addition, mentors can assist employees to deal with the challenges associated with successful, productive, meaningful work life. Peer Resources is Canada's leading organization for mentor research, training, consultation, and program development.

## Some General Examples of Mentoring

- Women executives assist other women to break the "glass ceiling"
- Senior citizens demonstrate hobbies to elementary students
- Business managers take new employees "under their wings"
- Volunteers partner with students at risk of dropping out of school
- People managing life challenges provide support and wisdom to others
- Older students help younger students cope with peer pressure
- University alumni provide guidance to students seeking business careers
- Experienced faculty members assist their newer colleagues
- Successful business people help new entrepreneurs starting out

While the professional and popular literature is fairly consistent about a definition of mentoring, for the purposes of these program listings, formal mentorship have the following characteristics:

- a deliberate, conscious, voluntary relationship;
- that may or may not have a specific time limit;
- that is sanctioned or supported by the corporation, organization, or

- association (by time, acknowledgement of supervisors or administrators, or is in alignment with the mission or vision of the organization);
- that occurs between an experienced, employed, or retired person (the mentor) and one or more other persons (the partners);
  - and typically takes place between members of an organization, corporation, or association, or between members of such entities and individuals external to or temporarily associated with such entities;
  - who are generally not in a direct, hierarchical or supervisory chain-of-command;
  - where the outcome of the relationship is expected to benefit all parties in the relationship (albeit at different times) for personal growth, career development, lifestyle enhancement, spiritual fulfillment, goal achievement, and other areas mutually designated by the mentor and partner;
  - with benefit to the community within which the mentoring takes place;
  - and such activities taking place on a one-to-one, small group, or by electronic or telecommunication means; and
  - Typically focused on interpersonal support, guidance, mutual exchange, sharing of wisdom, coaching, and role modelling