Mentoring - building relationships that build careers

A MENTOR GUIDEBOOK

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Mentoring for Professional Development

Planned career development is essential for all practising professional engineers and technicians. The main responsibility must lie with the individual but the active support of a wise colleague in the role of a mentor can be extremely helpful, especially during the early stages of a career or in times of change.

As a mentor you can help the mentee assess his or her needs and establish a development plan with goals that can be achieved during a relatively short time period. Regular review meetings can then be arranged to consider progress and propose changes to the plan. The mere prospect of a forthcoming meeting helps the mentee to focus on achieving targets. The mentor might also give the mentee the opportunity to try-out, in confidence, a range of ideas and methods of working before having to make final decisions on their implementation.

Most engineers will, at some stage, wish to focus their development on gaining registration with the Engineering Council. To achieve this they will need to satisfy a number of requirements.

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Obtaining help and guidance from someone who is knowledgeable about the requirements and the level of achievement that is expected is strongly recommended for this stage of development to ensure that the broad range of requirements is satisfied.

Whatever stage of their career, and whatever the particular needs of the individual at the time, the role of the mentor should be clearly defined and understood by both parties at the outset of the relationship. The boundaries of the mentor’s involvement and influence should be agreed, taking the interests of all concerned fully into account.

The relationship between the mentor and the person seeking guidance should be personal and confidential, quite distinct from the relationship between superior and subordinate. The mentor should challenge and support, but should neither tell the mentee what to do, nor provide assessments on the mentee’s performance to others.

A good mentor will want to ensure that the mentee gains confidence and independence as a result of mentoring and is enabled to take full and effective responsibility for his or her own development over the next career stage. Long-term dependence on one influential person is not helpful, although some mentoring, partnerships have led to lifelong friendships.

The structure and frequency of meetings can be decided between the individuals concerned. However, it is good practice to always arrange a subsequent date before the close of a meeting to make sure that a regular review of progress is maintained. It is also helpful for the mentor to be available for consultation earlier than planned if an unexpected need should arise and we would recommend that you keep in contact by e-mail between meetings.

My mentors helped me develop my professional career by creating an environment for constructive critique and encouragement.

Eric McKinnon
BA BSc(Hons) CEng MIET Mentor and former mentee – Berkshire
Enrich your own career and help others develop theirs

The following criteria are for our volunteer mentors so they can understand what is expected of them as an IET mentor and what knowledge/experience/attributes are required to achieve a successful professional relationship with a mentee.

A mentor is a suitably experienced person who acts as a confidential colleague and a guide who encourages professional development.

A mentor volunteering through the mentoring service must be a member of the IET and will be professionally registered.

Whilst there is no minimum qualification requirement to be an IET mentor, the following attributes are expected of those wishing to volunteer:

- Good people and communication skills
- Have an open and honest approach and the time and patience to work with a mentee
- Able to give constructive feedback and in return receive constructive feedback
- Be able to empathise with the mentee and offer re-assurance
- Have relevant experience as a professionally registered engineer at the level that your mentee is working towards
- Have the time to commit to regular meetings with your mentee(s)
- Be able to keep in regular contact with your mentee as much as possible
- Provide guidance and support to your mentee whilst understanding this cannot constitute careers advice
- Willingness to participate in mentor training for the role
- Be able to question and find out what is important to the mentee by exploring their skills, aptitudes and aspirations
- Be able to keep information confidential and adhere with the Data Protection Act

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**Mentoring towards Professional Registration**

As a mentor you can record CPD hours for mentoring – we expect mentors to act as a role model to their mentees and encourage them also to opt-in to the CPD monitoring scheme.

To encourage mentees to use Career Manager we expect our mentors to have a working knowledge of the system and to keep up to date with any new procedures.

All mentors who are supporting mentees towards professional registration should not only be professionally registered (at the same level or higher) themselves but to keep up to date with the registration process. We will keep you up to date if there any amendments to the process and we will also provide additional training for any significant changes.
The IET Volunteer Mentoring Service is facilitated by IET staff and pairings are made centrally but it is expected that relationships will be managed by the individual mentor and mentee. This allows them to adapt the relationship according to the mentee’s needs and mentor’s commitments.

The following guidelines should be read by mentors and mentees. They do not constitute a formal agreement, but they need to be understood by both parties.

- The mentoring relationship is entirely voluntary for both parties. The IET does not reimburse any expenses incurred in this role.
- At the outset, the roles of mentor and mentee should be agreed so that both parties have a clear understanding of their role.

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As a mentor, you are there to respond to the mentee’s development needs, not impose your own agenda. The mentor should not act on behalf of the mentee or give specific advice. The mentor’s role is to challenge and support the mentee and provide constructive feedback.

- Mutually agree a location, time and date for meetings ensuring both parties are happy with regards to safety, security, travel arrangements and mutual well being.

- Mutual respect is required as either or both parties may be busy with workloads or other responsibilities. Be reasonable with each other and both take responsibility for the mentoring relationship.

- Both aim to keep the relationship working well and to keep in regular contact with each other as much as possible. Remember to keep each other updated and be aware that any matters discussed need to be treated as confidential.

- Both parties to mutually agree a relevant time period for the mentoring relationship – this can be terminated at any time but has to be discussed first ensuring mutual respect and understanding. Once the relationship has ended you need to inform us at the IET by completing an end of pairing form. This form can be found in the mentoring toolkit and needs to be completed by both, the mentee and mentor.

E-Mentoring

When face-to-face mentoring is not possible for individuals (distance difficulties, no local mentor/mentee availability, etc.), e-mentoring may be suggested and co-ordinated by the IET.

- Whilst e-mentoring may be convenient for some, it needs to be recognised that it can have its limitations:
  - It can take longer to build a good mentoring relationship
  - Benefits of a face-to-face meeting such as facial expressions and body language can be lost

E-mentoring is best suited for individuals who have an open mind and are keen to make the mentoring relationship work when there can be obstacles in their way or for people with specific needs that cannot be met locally.

Contact the mentoring team:
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