



CMSI MENTORING SOLUTIONS

KEY MENTORING PRINCIPLES

Marilynne Miles Gray & William A. Gray

Below are 6 major insights about planned mentoring programs that still hold as true today as when we discovered them decades ago through practical experience and our academic research.

PRINCIPLE I

Do you conceptualize or define mentoring programs based on informal, it-just-happens mentoring? Let's hope not especially if you are part of a Mentoring Task Force.

If a sure fire recipe for failure is needed, this might be it.

Even today in the 21st Century, many definitions of mentoring are based on a few but influential studies of informal mentoring reported in the late 1970s that have managed to persist even though they are not appropriate for the purpose. It's akin to driving a Model T down the runway and hoping to fly.

From these writers came the view that mentoring lasts 8 to 15 or more years during which time mentors fulfil 8 to 10 main roles to help protégés achieve their personal dreams. Well, yes that part might be true. However, planned mentoring programs rarely last much beyond 12 months. While the mentor should and will fulfil more than one role, the comprehensive impact naturally has to be less (since less time is spent together). In light of this fact, it's time common sense takes hold and expectations are lowered to be in line with reality.

Thus, don't expect relationships in formal mentoring programs to be like Helen Keller's (for instance). Too often informal mentoring is viewed as "real" and anything other than that isn't. What an incredibly limiting perspective. So don't listen to those who would claim it's not "real" mentoring if it's not just like famous informal relationships. Here's why:

1 *A major benefit of formal mentoring is the intentional planning to equip and empower protégés to achieve their goals and dreams.*

While long-term informal mentoring does this incidentally in many cases by evolving over time, the negatives (that we don't want to copy) are:

- no identifiable starting point,
- no clearly intended direction,
- no predetermined outcomes, and
- no designated end-point.



Typically, protégés in informal relationships do not know they are being informally mentored – or how or why. Sometimes, the mentor-protége relationship breaks apart in bit-

terness or disillusionment as the protégé engages in a power struggle with the mentor to attain independence. Unless the relationship is redefined or transformed to take into account the protégé's developing maturity and competence, the mentor and the relationship over time is viewed negatively.

2 In sharp contrast, planned mentoring has a designated beginning and end point. Clearly this is beneficial for a number of reasons.

3 It begins for a specified utilitarian reason. This is not a bad thing either. It does not rule out the development of friendship or longer term relationship but there is no false expectation that is a necessary outcome. Again, harkening back to the early literature on mentoring, some "myths" have grown and permeated our culture often to the detriment of making the concept actually work in daily life.

If researchers of informal mentoring had reported only those mentoring roles actually utilized during short periods of time -- such as the first three months, the next six months and so on -- only a few mentoring roles would have been reported during each period of time because this was all that was needed. Keep in mind the fact that even with a limited number of roles being utilized (unconsciously for the most part), it is entirely possible that some would have been wrong roles. As all can admit, informal mentoring, by its very nature is going to be hit and miss. This is not to say informal mentoring is wrong. This comment is merely a reflection of what is, was or might be.

In a mentoring program, mentors fulfil only those roles essential to helping protégés achieve intended purposes and goals over a brief period of time (3 months to 3 years). Since a planned mentoring relationship is likely to be much shorter than an informal one, formalized mentoring will not (and cannot) have as broad an impact on protégés' personal and professional development. Thus, we should not expect to find the same kinds and number of benefits.

A dynamic mentor-protége relationship is essential in meeting the protege's needs and goals over any period of time. If either the mentor or the protege gets stuck utilizing an inflexible, inappropriate mentoring style, problems eventually result.

4 A formalized mentor-protégé relationship does not depend on a "special chemistry," but rather on a voluntary agreement to work together to achieve the program's utilitarian purpose and the protégé's specific goals. This happens to be one of the most challenging concepts for some to accept even in the face of mounting evidence.



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PRINCIPLE II

Mentoring programs must be custom designed to be successful.

A “canned” program taken off the shelf will not work very well because generic program components must be adapted to meet the needs/goals of the participants and the sponsoring organization (Gray, 1988, 1989). Sometimes, new components must be added, such as training to understand and appreciate diversity within cross-racial mentoring relationships or to understand women’s issues within cross-gender mentoring relationships. Each mentoring program must be designed and implemented to fit the organization’s mission, goals, strategies, and culture.

PRINCIPLE III

Formalized mentoring is not a panacea that will magically produce all desired outcomes by itself.

Another way of saying this is that a mentoring program works better in a larger context as a complement to other programs and services rather than as a stand-alone program. For example, formalized mentoring does enhance employee or student retention, but can do this even better when linked to other services. In the case of academic mentoring programs, success grows out linkage to services such as tutoring, academic advising, counseling. Mentors can help protégés access these services when first needed instead of waiting until major problems have developed.

PRINCIPLE IV

Mentoring programs work best when participants feel ownership of the program.

There is much research evidence confirming the famous Hawthorne Effect: people achieve better results when they are actively involved in deciding which solutions are to be implemented to solve problems that affect them. This grows out of a well-know concept that people do best when they feel some degree of control over their lives especially if they are adults.

Thus, instead of imposing a mentoring program on mentors and protégés who do not want to participate or do not see the value of participating, it is better to utilize a process which enables would-be participants and other key supporters to decide if they want and need a program. This process should allow them to help design it and give ongoing feedback on its implementation (Gray & Gray, 1990). Feeling included in this process motivates support for developing a successful program.

PRINCIPLE V

Begin with a pilot mentoring program that achieves early success.

While this sounds self-evident, it is actually very common for programs to be designed without factoring this in. Of course to do this means that designers have to draft a set of criteria of “what will constitute success in the pilot”. Did your program have such a list at its inception? And if not, why not?

In a pilot program, Co-ordinators learn how to fulfil their many progressive roles and understand the relative weighting of each. Mentors and protégés are taught how to work together to achieve intended goals -- not ad hoc but intentionally. The “good news of success” will be spread by word of mouth so that future recruitment of new participants will be easier.

Most people will support a carefully designed and evaluated pilot program because, if specific aspects of it do not work, these can systematically be worked on to improve. If enough elements or components work they way they are supposed to, it can be expanded.



PRINCIPLE VI

Mentoring programs work best when they are inclusive rather than exclusive.

Informal mentoring has tended to exclude certain groups of people, notably women and minorities, because extensive research shows mentors in positions of influence tend to be attracted to protégés much like themselves. According to the *Workforce 2000* Report, managing diversity will be crucial to the success of all organizations because the Report predicted that only 15% of new hires will be white males by the year 2000. Six years later, the situation has not improved.

This is why approximately 80% of the mentoring programs we at Mentoring Solutions are asked to develop target the diversified work force. Our recommendation is always to include every type of person who can benefit from formalized mentoring in order to develop *each* person’s potential to the fullest. This is the goal of managing diversity. Achieving it enables organizations to develop to their fullest instead of stagnating. ~

Note: This 2006 version is based on an earlier study in *Mentoring International* [Summer 1990 *Career Planning & Adult Development Journal* - Summer 1990] and updated in 1997.