

# Tips for a successful mentoring relationship

Mentoring is one of the cornerstones of the Crossing Thresholds programme. Over the years we have seen that participants who fully engage in the mentoring aspect gain greatest benefit from the programme.

There is no blueprint for a successful mentor-mentee relationship, but some things can help you get the best from it.

## Choosing a mentor

Everyone listed in the mentor pool would make a good mentor. The role of your mentor is to support you in your learning journey throughout the year, root for your success, help you evaluate your career plan and challenge your assumptions. A common mistake is to select a mentor on the basis on them having similar circumstances to you, or being in your 'dream job'.

## Spot Mentoring

If you want some advice on a certain aspect of work (for example, work-life balance issues from someone who works part-time or to find out what is it like to work in a particular department) Spot Mentoring is ideal for this. This involves a one-off mentoring session, either in person or by phone where you 'pick the brains' of the mentor about a particular topic. You will find a link to the list of Spot Mentors on your personal Crossing Thresholds page.

## The mentoring relationship lasts for one year

We have asked mentors to commit to supporting their mentee for the twelve months of the Crossing Thresholds programme. At the end of twelve months we ask mentors to take on a new mentee. If you have found mentoring helpful we will suggest that you approach someone new to be your mentor.

## Mentees must drive the relationship

This means being proactive in putting dates for sessions in the diary and rescheduling immediately if a session has to be cancelled. It is helpful to advise your mentor what you want to discuss prior to each mentoring session. As the mentoring relationship should support your learning throughout the programme, reminding your mentor what you have covered in your last module/sending them information prior to your meeting will help them prepare for the session and help you both get the best

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from the meeting.

When requesting a mentor, it is useful to describe what you are aiming to achieve from the programme (for example, I want a mentor who will challenge my assumptions, help me to think about ways to raise my profile or help me improve my communications skills).

In order to ensure we make maximum use of individuals who have volunteered their time to support women on this programme, we expect mentees to make contact within a month of their Module 1. If a mentee does not respond to contact from their mentor within 3 months of pairing, that mentor may be paired with someone else.

It is important to 'unpair' if the mentoring relationship ceases for any reason. This can be done in a single click within the Mentoring tab on your Crossing Thresholds personal page. This will allow us to make the mentor available to other women on the programme.

#### Mentors are responsive

Mentees only get 12 months on this programme and the mentoring sessions are key to them getting benefit from it.

If a mentor does not respond to repeated communication attempts from a mentee (i.e. at least 2 emails and a phone call) then please choose another mentor.

#### Partnerships can continue through changing circumstances

If either the mentee or mentor leaves their current department or leaves the Civil Service altogether this does not necessarily mean they must end the relationship.

If a mentor ends the relationship for any reason within the first 6 months of the programme then the mentee can choose a new mentor.

#### Unusual pairings can be very successful!

Do not dismiss the possibility of a mentoring relationship working just because you don't immediately 'click'. Some of the most constructive partnerships are those where mentor and mentee have very different perspectives and challenge each other's ideas and approaches. Please don't change mentors because of personality differences.

#### In advance of your first meeting:

- When you receive confirmation of your mentor pairing, give your mentor a call or send an email to arrange the first meeting; it makes sense to capitalise on the momentum built by the first module of the programme. Remember, it is down to you, the mentee, to drive the mentoring relationship.
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- It is useful to send your new mentor your career plan (whatever stage it's at) before meeting up. You may also want to share your CV or other information about yourself.

#### At the first meeting:

- Take some time to get to know each other: share your backgrounds and aspirations, and whatever else you feel comfortable with, such as family situation and interests outside work
- It is useful to agree mutual expectations at the outset and have these as a written record of your commitment to the partnership
- Explore your action plan together. Explain to your mentor what stage you are at, for example are you still exploring which direction you want to pursue or are you clear about your goal and ready to devise a strategy? Your mentor will help you develop milestones and look at some actions you can take in the coming year. It's likely you will need to spend at least one full session clarifying this.

#### Things that work well:

- Agree at the outset your goals for the mentor partnership, and the frequency, length, structure and logistics for the sessions (we recommend one hour monthly but 30 minutes once a fortnight or 90 minutes every 6 weeks might work better for some)
  - Take responsibility for suggesting dates and making sure they get in both your diaries. Block-booking a number of sessions or setting up a recurring Outlook event can work well. Decide between you what you will do if a session gets cancelled.
  - Prepare in advance for each session and send a reminder/agenda/update to your mentor a couple of days beforehand. Don't be put off if a session gets cancelled – take the initiative and get a new date arranged asap. It's really useful to take time to reflect on previous discussions before you go into a session, which allows discussions to build on each other.
  - Take responsibility for what you want from the sessions. It helps to approach mentoring sessions in the 'learning mode', rather than 'performing mode'. You have unique aspirations, skills and experience and the context is constantly shifting, therefore it is vital to keep an open mind about what will work and continue to review this along the way.
  - Decide how you will evaluate the relationship along the way. Build in time for giving and receiving feedback at the end of each session, so you know that the sessions are serving their purpose or what else you need to do. For example, this might include encouraging your mentor to challenge and stretch your thinking.
  - Write up the plans you agree and send them to your mentor as a record of your mutual commitment. Take thorough notes of each session and send your mentor a typed-up record of your discussion afterwards, with action
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points highlighted. Take action between sessions. Inform your mentor about your successes along the way.

- Use your career action plan as a focus of your work together. You may also want to make a list of relevant topics to look at, for example as you work through the modules, make their themes the topic of your discussions. This approach will help to keep your sessions both fresh and inspiring, and preparation for each module with subsequent evaluation will help you get the best from your programme as well as your mentoring. Be prepared to ask for specific help if appropriate, for example looking over an application form.
- Be honest and open. Show your appreciation for your mentor's support.

Some possible pitfalls:

- Looking to your mentor for the 'right' answers or strategy
- Asking your mentor to champion you (although by all means ask for strategic contacts)
- Overly focussing on apparent problems, constraints and obstacles – instead look for creative alternative ways to achieve your goals
- Cancelling or postponing sessions because you 'can't find the time'
- Expecting the mentor to come to each session with a plan or structure for it
- Just turning up at a session without thinking about how you want to use it
- Pulling back from the relationship if it seems not to be fulfilling your needs – instead make sure you are asking for what you want and give feedback about what is / is not working for you
- Postponing sessions because you have 'nothing to report' – there is always something to work on (including why you are finding it hard to focus on yourself / your career!)

**We expect this to be a richly rewarding experience for both parties and hope you enjoy it!**

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