



APEN mentoring scheme

A guide for mentors and mentees



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The mentor's poem

I am a mentor. I am here to listen... not to work miracles.

I am here to help you discover what you are feeling... not make the feelings go away.

I am here to help you identify your options... not to decide for you.

I am here to discuss steps you can take... not to take the steps for you.

I am here to help you develop your own strengths... not to rescue or cure you.

I am here to assist you with helping yourself... not to take responsibility for you.

I am here to provide support, understanding and acceptance.

(Written by Kathleen Meadows, accessed at the Mentor Question Archives, Peer Resources, Canada)

Background

APEN is the leading professional association for people whose job involves facilitating change in regional communities. Our members come from diverse backgrounds, often working in agricultural production or natural resource management. We are spread across Australia, New Zealand and beyond, but we all have one thing in common – we were once all new to this discipline we call extension. We probably all felt overwhelmed when we started in our first extension role.

The “Leading the future: nurturing young people in extension” national workshop in Melbourne (15, 16 June 2005) identified the lack of mentoring as one of the major obstacles facing young extension professionals. A survey of APEN members was undertaken in late 2005 to ascertain their views and whether the provision of mentoring was a potentially useful service for our members. The response was overwhelmingly positive. In early 2006 APEN applied for funding from DAFF to instigate a mentoring scheme for our members, but were informed in mid 2006 that our application was unsuccessful. Therefore, we then set about developing it ourselves, using volunteers to drive it. The scheme was officially launched in December 2006, and commenced in early 2007.

APEN gratefully acknowledges the time and effort that John James has taken in driving this project forwards. He was responsible for initiating the mentoring survey, instigating the application for funds and now the development and implementation of the scheme.

The APEN approach to mentoring

The word ‘mentor’ comes from Greek mythology. Before Odysseus, the king of Ithaca, left his family to fight in the Trojan War, he asked an old and trusted friend, Mentor, to raise his son to succeed him as a wise and good ruler. To do so, Mentor had to become a father figure, teacher, role model, trusted adviser, challenger, encourager, and counsellor.

Mentoring is “an alliance of two people that creates a space for dialogue which results in reflection, action and learning for both” (Rolfe, 2006). A mentor is seen as a “wise guide” who can ask questions and give advice when asked by the mentee. Therefore, mentoring becomes a beneficial learning partnership for both parties.

Mentoring allows one professional (mentor) to provide support and feedback to another professional (mentee). Normally the mentor will be more experienced (overall or in a particular area of expertise) than the mentee, but this is not necessary. Nor does the mentor need to be older than the mentee. For example, an older person may seek the guidance of a younger person to better understand contemporary computing technologies (such as wikis, blogs and pod broadcasts). The APEN mentoring system is a peer mentoring system; where the mentor doesn’t have to be an expert in the field of interest, but rather able to ask useful questions.

Mentoring differs from coaching, in that coaching comes from the sporting background where an individual is seeking specific advice on how to attain a particular ambition. Business coaches tend to give more advice than ask leading questions, so it doesn’t necessarily build the capacity of the mentee to deal with new challenges. Mentoring on the other hand, helps the mentee approach situations with confidence, having talked through

the various options and possible consequences. It is more about asking the right questions, rather than giving the right answers.

We suggest that the mentor and mentee agree on a minimum of six one hour sessions spread throughout the year. The first meeting should be face-to-face, but subsequent ones can be by telephone. Email and short phone calls can be used to supplement the meetings.

Matching is a critical part of any mentoring scheme, and we will do our best to create workable pairings based on the information given to us. We offer a “no blame” exit clause, where if either party is not satisfied, we will create a new pairing. All you need to do is politely inform the other person and the APEN Secretariat who will then create the new pairing. It is important to us that this scheme works well for all involved.

The benefits of mentoring

Mentoring schemes offer the following benefits to mentees, mentors and the employing organisations.

Mentees will benefit from:

- the disciplined approach of reflection and planning to achieve outcomes
- increased knowledge and skills in a particular area of interest
- increased confidence in undertaking your daily work
- improved understanding of what is expected in your work role
- a supportive environment where you are encouraged to take risks and learn constructively from failure
- increased potential for career mobility and promotion
- improved understanding of the extension system
- getting to know other APEN members
- access to a “sounding board” to try out new concepts and ideas.

Mentors will benefit from:

- refreshing and honing your own professional skills
- the satisfaction of helping another person grow and further develop
- being challenged to think about your perspectives and viewpoints
- getting to know other APEN members
- helping the extension discipline to grow and mature
- contributing to the future of APEN
- the public recognition of your knowledge and talents
- giving back to others and the organisation
- the challenge of having to explain often complex principles which then improves your own understanding
- being more aware of recent trends and developments in your area of expertise
- the discipline of reflecting on your own career and where you are headed.

Employing organisations will benefit from:

- shorter time for new staff to “come up to speed” and be highly productive
- improved delivery of services through better informed and skilled staff
- reduced employee turnover due to higher employee satisfaction

- staff having greater people management skills and being able to effectively talk through problems
- reduced “silo” effect by staff interacting with people outside their own section
- informal support networks for employees in time of organisational change.

Objectives of the APEN mentoring system

APEN is delivering this mentoring program to achieve the following objectives:

- increase the knowledge and skills of new extension officers
- increase the confidence of new extension officers
- improve the job clarity of recently appointed extension officers
- reduce the feeling of isolation and disconnect of members
- increase the understanding of the role of extension
- increase the amount of knowledge sharing between members
- improve the value associated with APEN membership.

APEN aims to deliver this by providing:

- a high quality matching service
- separate training for mentors and mentees through a teleconference
- good support through the process to both mentors and mentees.

The investment

The APEN mentoring scheme is an additional service available to members only. Of course interested non-members may join and gain immediate access to it.

The investment for mentees is \$140 (plus \$14 GST for Australian residents) for the year-long program. You will only be asked to pay once we have successfully paired you with a mentor. You will need to attend a one hour tele-meeting to ensure you get the most out of the scheme. You will then need to set aside at least six one-hour sessions to meet with your mentor.

There is no direct financial cost for mentors. You will need to attend a one hour tele-meeting which will provide you with valuable information regarding mentoring. You will need to set aside at least six one-hour sessions to meet with your mentee.

The mentoring process

The mentoring process is a professional relationship between two people that aims to be rewarding for both parties. It gives both parties the opportunity to share their skills and experiences, so both grow and develop in the process.

The relationship is based on:

- mutual trust and respect
- willingness to learn and share knowledge
- openness and supportiveness
- constructive feedback
- commitment to life long learning.

Mentors are encouraged to use the Mentoring conversation (Rolfe, 2006), which itself is based on Kolb’s learning cycle. This tool assists in moving mentees from where they are now to where they would like to be in the future, as depicted in Figure 1.

In stage one, the mentor asks thought provoking questions of the mentee to help them determine where they are now and where they might like to be. This self assessment helps the mentee examine their past and present and map out possibilities for the future.

The second stage helps the mentee decide where they want to be by gathering information, exploring options and then setting goals.

Stage three is all about planning, where the mentee works out how to get where they want to be. They develop plans, consider strategies and gain the required support.

The fourth and final stage focuses on ongoing performance, where the mentor checks to see how the implementation is proceeding. The mentee reflects on how they have gone and what they can learn as a result.

This cycle can then be repeated to identify new challenges and ways to successfully achieve them.

The Mentoring Conversation

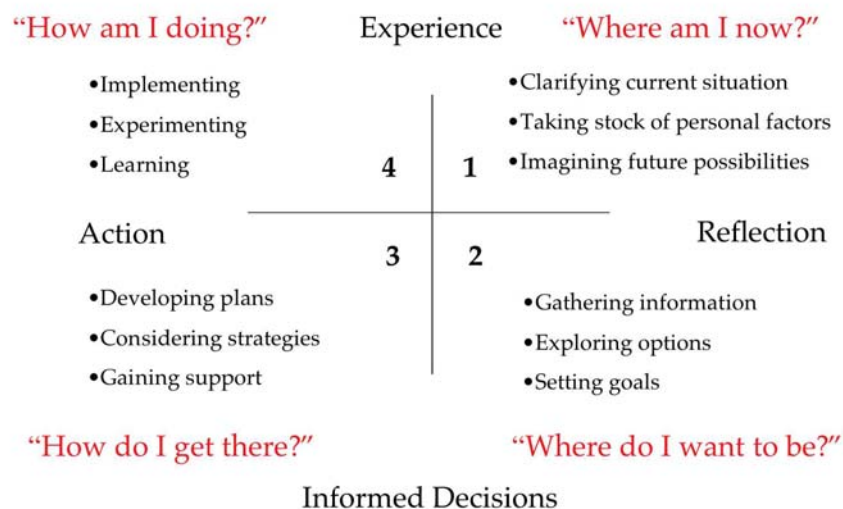


Figure 1: The mentoring conversation (Rolfe, 2006)

Helpful hints for making the relationship work

Mentees

- ❖ Have clear goals that you want to achieve, including areas in which you want to grow and develop. The more specific you can be, the greater value this journey will be for you.
- ❖ You should initiate contact with the mentor and drive the process. The mentor is volunteering their time, so it should be treated as a precious resource. So if the meeting is face-to-face, it is usually at a time and place that most suits the mentor. If it is by telephone, then you should phone the mentor at the nominated time.

- ❖ It is your role to ensure the meetings are productive by documenting the discussions and recording action items. These are then reviewed at the start of the next meeting. You may find a separate notebook a good way of keeping this material together. It can become your professional development journal.
- ❖ Be prepared to consider all ideas from your mentor, even if they don't seem appropriate. Don't dismiss them out of hand, but be willing to take time to consider them. If you choose not to follow a suggestion, give feedback as to why not. This helps your mentor better understand you and your decision making process.
- ❖ All discussions with your mentor should be treated as confidential. This will help them to be honest and upfront with you. Don't embarrass them by bragging to others about your mentor, or speaking poorly of them. If you have an issue, raise it with the mentor and if unresolved, contact the APEN Secretariat.

Mentors

- ❖ The mentor's role is to listen, ask probing questions and give constructive feedback. This is an action learning program for your mentee, so while it is tempting to jump in and tell them what they should do, it is a far better learning experience for them if they can get there themselves. This isn't to say you aren't ever to give advice; just give it sparingly!
- ❖ The key to mentoring comes back to good active listening skills. This includes clarifying, paraphrasing, perception checking and summarising. Above all you need to be fully present (focusing on your mentee and not being distracted by other things).
- ❖ Ask insightful questions that help your mentee on their journey. These are open ended and help the mentee think beyond the box. They show genuine curiosity and explore both stated and unstated items.
- ❖ Be prepared to walk a while in the other person's shoes. Seek first to truly understand their situation before leaping in with ideas. Consider being mentored yourself, as that will help you see your role through new eyes.

Both mentees and mentors

- ❖ This is a relationship, so be prepared to share your thoughts and feelings openly. Take time to get to know each other, as this lays a good foundation for other conversations.
- ❖ Seek feedback from the other as to how the relationship is working. Focus on both what is working well and what isn't working so well.
- ❖ The relationship will develop over time. At first, it may appear artificial but over time it will become more natural. Like any relationship, it will go through phases. These phases include:
 1. **Preparation.** Both parties work through whether they want to commit to a mentoring relationship, and why it is important to them. They work through their personal motivation and the costs involved.
 2. **Commitment.** The parties sign up and wait to see how it will develop.

3. **Negotiation.** The parties discuss what they want to get out of the relationship and the best way to interact. Through negotiation comes agreement. A written agreement helps clarify this and gives greater commitment.
4. **Enabling.** The bulk of the time is spent in this phase, where learning and growth are enabled.
5. **Closure.** As the parties prepare to disengage, this is often a time for celebration and sadness. This phase involves acknowledging the journey together and celebrating the learning and growth for both parties.

Choosing a mentor

The only real prerequisite is that the mentor is not the mentee's supervisor. Otherwise it is difficult for the mentee to really share their feelings and future ambitions. As we are using a peer mentoring system, the mentor doesn't need to be a subject area specialist. In fact it is often useful for the mentor to ask "innocent questions" that a person familiar with the situation may not have asked.

While we will try to find mentors in your local area, it is likely that your mentor will be located some distance away. We hope that you can meet face-to-face for at least the first meeting, as that will then enable future telephone calls and emails to be far more effective. Once we have gathered the names of possible mentors and mentees, the APEN Secretariat will develop a draft pairing schedule. They will contact each mentee about the suggested mentor and discuss the options.

Steps involved

1. Mentors volunteer and mentees subscribe to the mentoring scheme.
2. The APEN Secretariat matches mentors and mentees, contacting the mentee to confirm the pairing.
3. Training is provided to mentors and mentees separately through teleconferences.
4. Mentors and mentees meet face-to-face and formalise their relationship by completing the mentoring agreement (Appendix 1).
5. Mentors and mentees continue to meet and work together on a mutual learning journey.
6. Mid-term evaluation for participants to review their progress and satisfaction.
7. Concluding evaluation and end of formal relationship.

Timetable

This 12 month mentoring scheme will operate to the following timetable.

December	Call for mentors and mentees
Late January	Pairings completed
Early February	Training sessions conducted

Early June	Mid-term evaluation
Late November	Final mentoring meeting
Early December	Concluding evaluation and call for new mentors and mentees

Frequently asked questions

What is the difference between mentoring and coaching?

Coaching focuses on performance and specific short term goals. Mentoring is more about building the long-term capacity of the mentee by improving their problem solving and creative thinking abilities. It's the old story of the fish... you can give someone a fish and feed them for a day, or you can teach them how to fish and feed them for a lifetime (or teach them how to make a business of fishing and sustain their community for a lifetime!).

How long should a mentoring session last?

About one hour is good... this keeps the discussion focused and the number of action items is not overwhelming. If you are meeting by telephone, any more than this can get physically uncomfortable.

What if we can't meet in person?

Face-to-face is of course the most effective way. Telephone calls work well, especially if you have met face to face beforehand. Email is good for quick check-ins. If you both have webcams, you could even have a netmeeting.

Where is the best place to meet?

If you are meeting face-to-face, find a neutral area (avoid each other's office) where you can relax but still be business minded. Coffee shops often work well.

How confidential are the discussions?

Generally, everything discussed is confidential, unless you explicitly ask otherwise.

Do I have to like the other person?

It would be good if a natural friendship evolves, however you at least need to respect each other. Sometimes a person different from ourselves can identify potential growth areas that help us best develop in the long term. Personality clashes do happen, and are unhelpful, in which case talk with the other person about it and then ask the APEN Secretariat for a new pairing.

What can make it fail?

Generally a lack of commitment from either party (just like any relationship really). This is exhibited by not providing sufficient feedback in a timely manner, expecting too much from the other person, and not prioritising time for regular meetings.

Can we continue to meet after the year has finished?

It is better to have a clear sunset clause because that way everyone knows where they stand. We have invited the mentors to volunteer their time for one year only. They may be asked to mentor others the following year, so other informal arrangements may put greater pressure on them. Perhaps it is better to keep in touch as colleagues, sharing successes and learnings in an informal way, but not expecting any formal feedback or advice.

What if I want to be mentored for a second year?

That would be a good thing to do. A different mentor will help you identify and change other aspects of your work life that perhaps wasn't the specialty of the previous one. We all have our strengths and ways of approaching situations, so it is healthy to be mentored by a range of people over time.

Further resources

Anon (2004) Coaching and mentoring. Harvard Business School, USA.

Anon (2004) Mentoring. Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Australia.

Bierema, L.L. and Merriam S.B. (2002) E-mentoring: Using computer mediated communication to enhance the mentoring process. *Innovative Higher Education* 26(3): 211- 227.

McKenzie, B (1995) Friends in high places. Business and Professional Publishing, Australia.

Megginsopn, D and Clutterbuck, D (1995) Mentoring in action. Kogan Page UK.

Rolf, A (2006) How to design and run your own mentoring program. Synergistic Management Pty Ltd.

Useful websites

Australian Mentor Centre www.australianmentorcentre.com.au

Mentoring Works www.mentoring-works.com

International Mentoring Association www.mentoring-association.org

The Coaching & Mentoring Network www.coachingnetwork.org.uk

The Mentoring Group www.mentoringgroup.com

Who Mentored You www.whomentoredyou.com

Appendix 1: APEN mentoring agreement

APEN mentoring agreement	
Mentee:	Mentor:
What we are looking for (desired outcomes of the mentoring relationship)...	
Mentee:	Mentor:
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
How we will do this (mode of contact, frequency):	
Actions we will take if problems arise:	
I agree to enter this mentoring relationship as defined above and will maintain confidentiality.	
If I have a problem with the relationship, I will contact the other person and the APEN Secretariat.	
Mentee: _____	Mentor: _____
Date: _____	Date: _____