

MENTOR PROGRAM HANDBOOK

for the OSU Extension Service

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Mentor Program Handbook

It is a cliché to state that the world is changing rapidly. Computers and technology are driving change, as are the changing demographics and a changing economy. Change makes the world complex and requires all employees be life-long learners. The person or organization that does not continue to learn becomes obsolete.

The Oregon State University (OSU) Extension Service wants new employees to be successful. Professional development is a proven way to provide the in-service training that helps people succeed. Mentoring is one of several strategies to promote professional development.

Mentoring is an ancient concept that has been rediscovered in the past two decades. Mentoring offers a way for the mentor, the protégé, and the organization to benefit through dialogue about what is and what is not possible.

This handbook strives to achieve three goals and is divided into three sections. The sections may be read in any order, but each provides an element essential to a successful mentor/protégé relationship. The three sections are:

- Perspective—on mentoring and its value to Extension
- Guidelines and Resources—for the mentor and protégé
- Process—of selection, interaction, and evaluation

In this handbook, the term protégé will be used when speaking of the person being mentored. Other authors have chosen to use terms such as mentee, learning partner, and new employee.

In the OSU Extension Service, several program areas and academic departments have implemented mentoring for new faculty and staff. This handbook is not designed to replace or change existing programs, but it is offered as a resource for programs, departments, and offices that do not have mentoring programs.

Mentoring is a professional relationship that provides one-on-one coaching for a new employee, or a person in a new position, as support in the process of career growth and development. The mentor and protégé enter a dialogue where both learn from each other, for their own benefit and that of Extension.

— Idaho Mentorship Program

The OSU Perspective

In Homer's *Odyssey*, before Odysseus departs for the Trojan War, he appoints Mentor to be the sage guardian of his son. The term "mentor" comes from the Greek language through Latin to be the English word for "a wise and trusted teacher or guide."

A modern image of the mentor is a seasoned employee who passes on advice, often the secrets of the organization—the unspoken rules, the myths and heroes—to the benefit of the new employee. There are at least three models of mentoring, with each producing different benefits.

Assimilation model

In the assimilation model, the mentor helps the protégé understand the culture of the organization—its basic values, beliefs, norms and acceptable behaviors, and other cultural artifacts such as myths, heroes, and rituals. The focus and benefits of this model are on helping the protégé learn formal and informal rules and systems that determine how basic organizational functions such as leadership, decision-making, communication, motivation, and control are expressed.

If used alone, however, this model tends to encourage the protégé to subordinate his or her uniqueness to that of the organization. Mentoring for assimilation can have the positive benefit of permitting the protégé to progress quickly in the system. On the other hand, it can have the potentially negative outcome of preserving the status quo of the organization by denying the expression of the unique knowledge and skills of the protégé.

Education model

In the education model, the mentor helps the protégé benefit from learning something better, more accurately, and more timely, than he or she would have learned alone. Many new mentoring programs follow this model where the mentor is a teacher or learning coach. The focus is on the protégé's learning curve.

When used well, this model recognizes that "When the student is ready, the teacher will come." The protégé takes responsibility for raising questions and the mentor provides answers and guidance on request. This type of mentoring engages the protégé in active learning, increasing his or her potential to be of value to the organization. When

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combined with the assimilation model, the protégé benefits from learning about both the more subtle culture of the organization and the more visible, factual information about how it works.

Dialogue model

The dialogue model partners a mentor with a protégé in a discussion about how to bring the new employee's knowledge and skills to the service of the organization. Dialogue is becoming the dominant model in organizational management (Bell 2000) because the mentor becomes a learning partner with the protégé and shares ideas about the organization. Together they strive to learn how to better serve Extension clientele.

The benefits of mentoring may come from changing the protégé and from changing the mentor and the organization. When combined with the assimilation and education models, the dialogue model creates a new level of understanding and opportunity for the individuals involved and the organization.

The dialogue model provides at least three benefits to Extension:

1. Extension hires people with knowledge and skills to contribute to the organization. Each new employee is

considered a resource that can help the organization achieve its mission. Although new employees bring different levels of education and experience to their positions, the fundamental principle remains to elicit the resources of the individual.

2. Employees are motivated to action and to take leadership roles when their knowledge, experience, and skills are recognized, even if they are not directly and immediately used. To be encouraged to "tell one's story" indicates the respect and recognition of the individual. This is a fundamental part of motivating people.
3. New employees and their individual growth bring a richness of ideas to the organization and create positive change.

A combination of the models—assimilation, education, and dialogue—creates a balance of mentoring objectives that provide the protégé a clear perspective of what "is," while it encourages the protégé, mentor, and organization to consider what "can be."

This raises the question of whether OSU Extension should focus on the dialogue method and surmise that the other two methods will occur spontaneously between mentor and

New employees have the potential to become the new life and energy of the organization. Nurturing this energy is important if organizations want to keep new employees from being overwhelmed. New employees enter Extension with novel ideas and a vision of improved programs.

— Zimmer and Smith, 1992

protégé. One factor to consider is that if OSU Extension does *not* create an exciting culture around mentoring, the concept will have only a minimal impact. If seasoned personnel recognize that mentoring will help them and their protégé, then the organization may see a change in its culture.

Mentoring in Extension

Compared to many institutions, agencies, and businesses, the Extension Service is a complex organization. At OSU, it is more complex because Extension faculty academic homes reside in departments within 10 different colleges. Leadership and authority are dispersed among administrative units, program leaders, staff chairs, and department heads, with reporting authority distributed around the state and across campus.

Extension is what educators call “loose coupled,” meaning that it often is difficult to understand relationships and pathways. Mentoring is one way to increase a new employee’s understanding of the system and to develop skills to work within such a system. The mentor plays an important role in helping the protégé make sense of the organization and to positively influence its growth.

This is especially true in Oregon because the structure and process of leadership, decision-making, communication, motivation, and control are dispersed and vary in character from department to office to county. For example, the department takes the lead for promotion and tenure review. However, each department has different processes and standards that result in an increased need for mentoring because of the expectation for faculty to engage in scholarly activities. Several departments already have implemented mentoring programs to help new faculty through the promotion and tenure process.

In general, the challenge for new hires within Extension relates in part to the history of the organization. OSU Extension has strong traditions dating to 1911 when the first Extension agents were hired. Today, OSU Extension continues to develop new directions with the goal to promote organizational change that honors the past, sustains what is good about the present, and ensures change to better serve its clients.

In this process, there is a necessary and desirable tension about what to keep and what to change. New employees can be a primary source of that tension.

A capable mentor will be open to the challenge of creating the safe environment for a challenging dialogue. In this dialogue, the new employee will have the chance to more fully understand why the current culture exists, how it serves the organization and its clients, and how to make productive, not reactive, changes.

A common solution of new employees is to introduce elements of another culture to the organization. While new employees may become frustrated when their ideas are not immediately well received, it is important to remember that the perspectives of new employees may be what the organization needs to effectively change. Because of this tension, and the potential for both positive and negative outcomes, the dialogue between mentor and protégé is crucial.

It is commonly believed that mentoring relationships between new and seasoned staff strengthen complex, loose-coupled, established organizations like the OSU Extension Service.

Benefits

Zimmer and Smith (1992) identified 10 benefits that new employees said they received from mentoring. In order of importance, with the most valuable first, they are:

1. developing program ideas
2. gaining knowledge of policy and procedures
3. gaining professional expertise
4. gaining a friend
5. becoming aware of available resources
6. increasing general knowledge
7. being able to discuss ideas and release frustrations
8. resolving technical difficulties
9. understanding and addressing office policies and procedures
10. managing time more effectively

Cooley (1993) describes how the protégé also benefits from increased self-esteem, from the development of a professional network, from greater visibility and recognition in the organization, and from a substantive addition to his or her dossier. Cooley proposes that the protégé also is more likely to be prepared for performance evaluation. Zey (1984) confirms that individuals who have been mentored are more likely to be

promoted. He also found that those who had been mentored took more risks because they have reviewed risky situations with their mentor and because they feel a greater sense of protection from consequences of mistakes. This is important as we strive to create a more dynamic organization.

In his 1984 study, Zey identified increased prestige as a major benefit to the mentor. He also reported that the dialogue with the protégé often revitalized the mentor's interest in his or her own work. Cooley noted that mentors benefit from being "recognized leaders in their field" and as they interact with or coach the protégé, they upgrade their own skills. As with the protégé, mentors benefit from listing their service in their promotion dossier. Mentoring also is one way to develop one's own leadership skills.

The organization benefits from a mentor program, too. Fox (2001) lists reduced turnover in early

career stages; preparation of talented people to replace those retiring, moving, or being promoted; assisting people trapped in the wrong jobs; and providing ways for senior staff to contribute to the organization until they retire. When mentoring creates job success for new employees, it also increases productivity, job satisfaction, and loyalty.

Cooley (1993) adds that a mentoring program improves the overall organizational climate, more quickly brings new employees into organizational decision-making, and develops future leaders who are prepared and motivated to take on difficult tasks and positions. He concludes that mentored employees are more likely to have a positive working relationship with management.

OSU Guidelines and Resources

Establishing the relationship

The relationship between a mentor and protégé primarily is sharing ideas and information. It should not be influenced by rank or power because this may influence the protégé's freedom to ask candid questions and challenge the existing system. The mentor should be outside of the employee's chain of command; specifically, not the person who conducts the performance appraisal.

Mincemoyer and Thomson (1998) found that a good mentor meets six additional criteria:

1. Program responsibility is similar to that of the protégé. All the mentors and protégés in their study believed similar program backgrounds and assignments were a positive factor to a successful dialogue.
2. Geographically located in the same region in order to facilitate frequent personal interaction.
3. Met frequently with the new employee (monthly was a desirable minimum).
4. Possessed a large amount of organizational and program knowledge.

5. Willing to share information and successful in initiating and sustaining the relationship with the new employee.
6. Held a mature sense of self and the organization so that he or she was open to discussion without defensiveness.

In this era of changing demographics, another issue to consider is assigning mentors in an increasingly diverse organization. When the mentor and protégé are of differing cultures—whether gender, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, or physical ability—it is important to carefully evaluate their needs. A mentor relationship thrives with open, nonjudgmental dialogue; if there are concerns regarding discrimination or privilege, the dialogue will not be optimally successful.

It is recommended that all new Extension faculty, staff, and administrators have a mentor. While mentoring often is viewed as more important for faculty, the need is as diverse as the many different position descriptions throughout the organization. It also is important that all new employees know they have the option to accept a proposed mentor or to request a different mentor.

Although a mentor is typically not one's supervisor, every supervisor needs to have the skills of a mentor. To effectively "grow" new employees, a supervisor needs to move beyond formal job descriptions, formal office policy, and critical performance appraisal to a mentoring style of management. A supervisor needs to be able to use the skills of the mentor to enter into a dialogue with the new employee about how his or her knowledge and skills can further the goals of the office.

Mentor and protégé roles

Mentors may wear many hats, depending on the protégé, the position, and the context. Mentors are encouraged to consider, at the least, the following roles:

- **Listener.** Listen to the protégé to genuinely learn new ideas, to understand the protégé's background and experience, and to help the protégé articulate his or her ideas.
- **Teacher.** Respond to questions, providing information that the protégé would take longer to learn alone.
- **Learning coach.** Assist in developing a learning strategy that creates knowledge and success.
- **Guide.** Provide directions and sometimes lead the protégé through the organizational system.
- **Advisor.** Offer sage advice (wisdom) on larger and often critical professional matters, such as relating to one's supervisor and developing career goals.
- **Counselor.** Help with issues, such as balancing work and family or dealing with conflict.

- **Sponsor.** Promote the protégé's knowledge and skills to special projects and committees that can use them. Note that this role does not include "pulling strings" or asking favors.
- **Role model.** Demonstrate through behavior, the values, beliefs, and norms that are effective in the organization.
- **Motivator.** Understand what motivates the protégé and strive to help him or her find that source of motivation within Extension.
- **Communicator.** Help the protégé understand effective internal and external communication, including the subtleties of when and how messages are best delivered, potential sensitive areas, and communicating in difficult situations.

Protégés do best when they are fully engaged in learning. This requires that they strive to understand the new position and organization and to use the mentor in one or more of the roles mentioned above. The effective protégé recognizes how the mentor can help create personal and professional success.

Challenges

There are risks in being a mentor. Advice may be misunderstood by protégés or it may harm them as a professional or an individual. Mentors can be more effective if they understand the protégé's leadership, communication, learning, and decision-making styles.

Protégés also face challenges as they enter into a mentoring relationship. They cannot become dependent on the mentor to make decisions for them. They cannot overuse or abuse the mentor's time and good will. The protégé must be prepared so that time is used well. A protégé must not withdraw and expect the mentor to take the initiative to develop a relationship and dialogue.

Out of respect for experience, age, or authority, some protégés defer to the mentor and wait for the mentor to take the lead. Both mentor and protégé must take equal responsibility for making the relationship work in a mentoring program.

Things to avoid

1. A mentor never tells the protégé what to do. He or she must not take over the role of the supervisor or suggest a specific course of action. Decisions about courses of action are always the responsibility of the protégé.
 2. A mentor must not demand that the protégé follow in his or her footsteps by accepting the mentor's values, beliefs, and norms. A good mentor recognizes the protégé's necessity to find and follow his or her own path.
 3. A mentor doesn't permit the protégé to develop dependency. The mentor must recognize signs of dependency—such as failure of the protégé to develop his or her own ideas—and use the dialogue model to open the issue to discussion and resolution.
 4. A mentor keeps the essential discussion of the relationship confidential. The mentor may talk with the protégé's supervisor, but this discussion must respect the private nature of the mentor/protégé relationship and the information shared.
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Dialogue topics

- Telling stories about career events, lessons, highs, and lows
 - Giving reasons for joining Extension
 - Discussing professional hopes and aspirations
 - Designing a plan for professional development
 - Examining formal and informal organizational structure
 - Reviewing high-level policy and strategy in the organization
 - Understanding one's own leadership strengths and weaknesses
 - Discussing the same book or article on a key subject
 - Reviewing job description and position activities
 - Talking about a typical day
 - Discussing how to balance work and family
 - Discussing stress—tension, fatigue, and burnout
 - Setting priorities and time management
 - Delegating
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Starting the dialogue

While many mentoring relationships develop spontaneously, those established by a third party may need support in getting started. Some mentors and protégés intuitively know how to start a dialogue; others will benefit from more specific topics that might “break the ice.” See a list of possible topics to the left.

Preparing to be a mentor and protégé

Most mentors benefit from thoughtful preparation for their role. This is particularly true of mentoring that is outside one's discipline, gender, or ethnic background. In these cases, the quality of the dialogue must be excellent or mid-process crisis may result. Three forms of recommended preparation are:

1. Talk with successful mentors. Take 30 to 60 minutes to talk about mentoring with a past mentor. Discuss both the positive and negative aspects of mentoring. Ask for a “reality check” on the time and energy required and potential issues that might develop.
2. Review the materials on effective communication developed by Paul Axtell, consultant to Oregon State University and the College of Agricultural Sciences.

3. Complete the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator assessment and consider how personality type influences individual learning style, leadership style, decision-making preferences, communication style, motivators, and best forms of supervision/control.

Protégés are more prepared if they take advantage of several programs designed to help them succeed within OSU Extension:

1. Attend Extension New Faculty and Staff Orientation for insight into the basic vision, structure, and operations of the organization.
2. Participate in Extension conferences to glean as much information as possible both from the formal presentations and informal conversations. Attend informational and training sessions and use breaks and meals to meet Extension peers, particularly those who have similar assignments.
3. Attend other opportunities when offered by the University (e.g., diversity training, grant writing workshops, new faculty events, promotion and tenure discussion groups).

OSU's Plan

The OSU Extension Service recommends each new employee have a mentor. In many cases, the person who handles the employee's performance evaluation usually initiates the mentoring program. In most situations, staff chairs work closely with off-campus faculty and staff, while department heads and administrative leaders work with on-campus faculty and staff to identify partnerships.

In some situations, it may be desirable to identify one or more mentors for a protégé. For example, a new, off-campus faculty member may have a mentor from the same discipline within the region and a mentor within his or her department who advises on scholarly activities.

Selecting mentor and protégé pairs

It's important to identify a mentor as soon as a new employee is hired. Those who jointly supervise off-campus faculty should discuss the pairing before selecting the mentor. This helps the mentor prepare for the role and ensures the pairing follows the guidelines noted earlier.

Introducing and reviewing

The mentor and protégé should meet each other shortly after the new employee is on the job. During this first visit, discuss the general intent and guidelines of the program. Both parties are responsible for clarifying expectations or agreeing on changes.

At this introduction, or soon after, the mentor will work with the protégé to develop the specifics of the relationship. Typically this might involve:

- **Duration.** Develop a schedule that lasts through the submittal of a promotion and tenure dossier, usually in the employee's sixth year (for non-professorial positions, the minimum mentor program is 1 year or lasting up to 2 or 3 years).
- **Number of mentors.** A typical mentoring relationship consists of one mentor and one protégé, but a three-person mentoring team has been successful. (The success was attributed to matching personalities and recognizing that one mentor does not have all the answers.) Typically, off-campus faculty teams include both on- and off-campus mentors.
- **Frequency of contact.** It's common to have monthly meetings for the first several months, but after 6 months or a year, less frequent meetings are the norm. Meetings often are scheduled when both individuals are at a shared event, such as Extension conferences, program or department meetings, or related activities.
- **Forum.** Meeting location is important and should allow both parties to hear and speak easily. It may be best to meet at a location away from phones and distractions, but it

isn't required that all mentor meetings be in an optimal setting. There may be other opportunities to talk such as on the phone or by e-mail. The key is that both parties agree on a protocol. Another decision is to identify how to communicate when there is a crisis.

- **Format.** The best format for interaction is dialogue. This format enables both parties to speak and listen equally, to be guided by questions asked by the protégé, and to address observations mentioned by the mentor. In most cases, major agenda items focus on issues and questions raised by the protégé.

Evaluating mid-course

After the introduction, follow an agreed-upon schedule. It's desirable to consider a mid-course review. If the schedule breaks down, the mentor should develop a new arrangement. If a problem develops between the mentor and protégé, identify another individual to serve as mediator. Either the protégé or the mentor may request that the partnership be dissolved.

Bringing closure

The final step is to "close" the mentor/protégé relationship in a productive and positive way. In many relationships, the mentor and protégé remain lifelong friends, but the mentor needs to "let go" and the protégé needs to move toward broader associations. We suggest ending the formal relationship with a symbolic event such as a special lunch or an announcement at a department meeting. Several months after the relationship is dissolved, the mentor should visit with the employee to see how she or he is doing.

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For more information

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