

# MENTOR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Each mentoring connection is unique, and therefore, each person comes to the connection with his/her own style, values and expectations. One of the most critical things to do as a mentor is to try to get the mentee to feel at ease and feel valued. Generally, you can do this by showing genuine interest, kindness, appreciation, flexibility, and openness, setting boundaries and using good people-oriented manners.

The following are some guidelines and behaviors that help you do the right thing, develop good leadership habits and foster an environment that brings out the best in others.



## DASL CA MENTOR ROLES:



The roles you assume as a mentor depend on the needs of your mentee and on the relationship you have established with your mentee. Sometimes you may be performing in one role, other times you may be performing all roles. There are at least ten roles a mentor can assume.

1. **Teacher** – As a teacher, you may need to teach the mentee the skills and knowledge required to perform the job/task successfully. This role requires you to outline the "nuts and bolts" of the position/task and to share your experience. To teach the fundamentals of the position/task, you need to first determine what knowledge, skills and abilities are necessary to successfully perform the requirements of the position/task. Once you have identified the requirements required for the position/task, you then need to identify what skills the mentee already has and what needs further development. Your focus becomes helping the mentee develop needed knowledge and skills.

Provide examples, when possible, for your mentee to follow. It's important to answer questions raised by your mentee. Keep in mind that you are not required to be the expert on everything. A good mentor knows when to direct a mentee to a knowledgeable source. Share your wisdom and past mistakes. A mentee can learn from your past trials and can realize that no one is perfect. Sharing information is key and sharing learning experiences, unique or special anecdotes and stories are effective, interesting ways to impart valuable lessons.

2. **Guide** – As a guide, you help navigate through the inner workings of the organization and decipher the "unwritten office rules" for your mentee. This information is usually the nuggets of knowledge that one only acquires over time. The inner workings of the organization are simply the "behind the scenes" dynamics, or politics, that are not always apparent, but are crucial to know. The "unwritten rules" can include the special procedures your programs or meetings follow, the guidelines that are not always documented, and policies under consideration.

As a mentor, it is important that you explain the inner workings and "unwritten rules" to your mentee. Brief your mentee on who does what, the critical responsibilities they perform, and reviewing handouts & websites that provide insight to the group/organizational structure and goals.

3. **Counselor** – The role of counselor requires you to establish a trusting and open relationship. In order to create a trusting relationship, you need to stress confidentiality and show respect for the mentee. This means not disclosing personal information that the mentee shares with you, with others. Listen carefully and attentively to the mentee by not interrupting while the mentee is talking. In order to establish trust and openness, you need to make the mentee feel comfortable. If you mentor long distance, tone of voice is important, but the following would not apply. The following non-verbal gestures can help create an acceptable comfort level:

**a. Eye contact:** Use appropriate eye contact. Be sensitive to cultural and communicative tendencies as to what is considered appropriate eye contact. For example, in some cultures, direct eye contact is considered appropriate during listening and speaking. Whereas in other cultures, dropping the eyes or averting the eyes during listening shows respect and direct eye contact during speaking is appropriate. (If in doubt, ask you mentee directly about cultural issues, so you minimize misunderstanding).

**b. Gestures:** Some examples of showing approval and enthusiasm is by nodding, smiling or shaking hands.

**c. Open body posture:** Keep an open body posture (arms at sides) and lean slightly forward.

**d. Appropriate space:** Consider how space can relate to power. Remove furniture barriers if you have in person contact. Be respectful of personal space, many people prefer you stand at least one and one half feet from another person, however this varies by culture.

The counselor role also encourages a mentee to develop problem solving skills. A mentee must be able to think through problems rather than always depending on you to provide the solution. You can develop a mentee's problem solving skills by advising the mentee to first attempt to solve the problem before seeking assistance. Ask questions like, "How would you solve the problem?" or "What do you think the solution is?"

4. **Motivator** – As a motivator, you may at times need to generate motivation within your mentee. Motivation is an inner drive that compels a person to succeed. It's not often you will find an unmotivated mentee. Generally most mentees are enthusiastic about their role. After all, mentees tend to be characterized as highly motivated individuals with a thirst for success. A word of note: Mentoring a less motivated person may be more of a challenge and equally necessary in the process of unleashing individual potential.

Generally, you usually perform the role of motivator only when you need to motivate your mentee to complete a difficult assignment, pursue an ambitious goal and sometimes to take care of themselves, by taking time to attend to important tasks. Through encouragement, support, and incentives, you can motivate your mentee to succeed.

One of the most effective ways to encourage your mentee is to frequently provide positive feedback during an assigned task or while the mentee strives toward a goal. Positive feedback is a great morale booster and builds self-confidence and self-esteem. Concentrate on what the mentee is doing well and relate these successes to your mentee.

You can also motivate your mentee by showing support. Ways to show support are by making yourself available, especially during stressful periods. Make provisions and find time to return calls, e-mails, etc. with consistency; this is the best way to demonstrate support. Creating incentives is another way to motivate your mentee. You need to explain what the mentee can gain from completing a task or fine tuning a skill.

5. **Sponsor** – A sponsor creates opportunities for the mentee- opportunities that may not otherwise be made available. The opportunities can relate directly to the organization/task work or indirectly to the mentee's overall development. The goal of the mentor is to provide as much exposure for the mentee as possible with a minimum of risks. Opportunities should be instructing and should not be set up for failure. New opportunities increase the visibility of your mentee, but care must be taken in selecting these opportunities. Only you know when your mentee is ready to take on new opportunities. It will be apparent to you when your mentee has mastered all required tasks and seeks new responsibilities. You can speak to people in other positions to procure projects for your mentee.

6. **Coach** – At times you may need to perform the role of coach – help a mentee overcome performance difficulties. Before you begin a coaching process, ask yourself:

Does the mentee have the capacity to do the task work? Is coaching likely to upgrade the mentee's skills? Is there sufficient time to coach? Coaching is not an easy skill to perform. Specifically, coaching involves feedback. Mentors need to give different kinds of feedback, as the situation demands. Behavior that you want to reinforce requires positive feedback. Behavior you wish to change requires constructive feedback. Both types of feedback are critical to your mentee's professional growth.

If you know how to provide feedback to your mentee, you can perform the role of coach more easily. There are four factors to consider when providing feedback:

- a. You need to give frequent feedback. By giving feedback often, your mentee will have a clear understanding of his/her progress.
- b. You need to give economical feedback. By offering quality feedback, your mentee will appreciate the feedback more.
- c. You need to give specific feedback. You should focus the feedback on how, when and why.
- d. You need to give direct feedback on what you have read or observed. You should not discuss matters you have heard secondhand.

Factors to consider when giving constructive feedback are: Be descriptive about the behavior. Don't use labels such as "immature" or "irresponsible". Don't exaggerate. Don't be judgmental. Phrase the issue as a statement, not a question. When giving feedback to your mentee, concentrate on the behavior that you would like your mentee to do more of, do less of, or continue performing.

7. **Advisor** – This role requires you to help the mentee develop professional interests and set realistic goals. It is the mentees responsibility to set goals, however, setting realistic goals as a process together is important. As the old saying goes, "If you don't know where you're going, you won't know how to get there." This saying couldn't be truer for a mentee's development. In the role of advisor, you need to think about where the mentee wants to go in life. If the mentee doesn't, chances are they will end up where you think they need to go. There are several factors to consider when setting career goals.

Goals should be specific. Goals need to be clearly explained, using details about what the mentee wants to achieve. Goals must be time-framed. You both need to plan an overall time frame for goals with interim deadlines to ensure that your mentee is moving toward these goals. It's important not to make goals too future oriented.

Goals should be results-oriented. You need to concentrate on the results of your efforts, not so much on the activities that are required to accomplish them. An activity provides a way of reaching the goal, but the end result (goal) should not be neglected. Goals must be relevant.

The goals must be appropriate and in tune with the organization while moving the mentee closer to the type of work that he/she finds challenging and enjoyable.

Goals must be reachable. The goals must be within the mentee's reach. The mentee needs to feel challenged, but not incapable of reaching the goals. You must consider the special talents of your mentee and weigh these talents with the requirements of the position for which the mentee strives. You need to create the right career "fit" for your mentee. You may want to create several goals to eliminate the possibility of your mentee feeling trapped. However, goals should be limited in number. You need to avoid setting too many goals at once. Concentrate first on setting goals that will help your mentee accomplish what needs to be done.

Keep in mind that set goals need to be flexible enough to accommodate changes in the organization and changes in your mentee's interests. Goals should not be set so rigid that adjustments cannot be made.

**8. Referral agent** – Once goals are set, you then are likely to assume the role of referral agent. As a referral agent, work with your mentee to develop an action plan that outlines what knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) a mentee needs to meet his/her goals. There are several steps that you and your mentee need to follow when developing an action plan.

a. Target the areas that require development. To target developmental areas, you need to know the requirements of the future position.

b. Select developmental activities. Choose or recommend activities (tasks) that your mentee can undertake to develop the critical knowledge, skills and abilities required of the future position.

c. Determine success indicators. Your mentee needs to have a clear vision of the desired results of a developmental activity. Your mentee needs to be able to answer the question "How will I know I have succeeded?" It is not important what indicators you use, except that these indicators must be measurable and meaningful to the mentee.

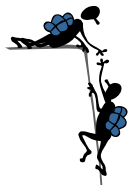
Once you have an action plan in place, you can then use the action plan as an "enabler" to move your mentee toward the career goals that you help to set under the role of advisor.

**9. Role Model** – As a role model, you are a living example of the values, ethics, and professional practices of the organization. Most mentees, in time, imitate their mentors. As the proverb goes, "imitation is the sincerest flattery." Learning by example may be your most effective teaching tool. Your mentee will learn also about you while he/she observes how you handle situations or interact with others. For this reason, you need to be careful of how you come across to your mentee. You must strive for high standards of professionalism, solid work ethics, and a positive attitude.

**10. Door Opener** – In this role a mentor opens up doors of opportunity. This role primarily involves helping the mentee establish a network of contacts within the organization, as well as outside the organization. A mentee needs a chance to meet other people to spur social development. As a door opener, you can introduce your mentee to many of your own contacts to help build the mentee's own network structure.

Stress to your mentee that networking is directly related to the number of people in the organization from whom you can seek assistance or provide advice. To increase your mentee's awareness of personal contacts, ask your mentee to consider the number of people who he/she knows within the organization. Your mentee may want to consider:

With whom do I talk frequently in the organization? With whom do I eat meals? With whom do I discuss my problems or concerns?  
As a door opener, you also open doors of information for your mentee by steering the mentee to resources that he/she may require.





## WHAT MENTORS DO:

1. Take the first step to make the mentoring connection. Take the initiative to invite your mentee to meet or discuss topics.
2. Be clear about your own needs and limits (i.e., time constraints, preferred method of communication, best times of the day to be reached). Set boundaries from the beginning.
3. Respect your mentee's time as much as your own.
4. Ask if you can give feedback, a suggestion or criticism instead of assuming the mentee is ready and willing to hear it. Feedback, both positive and negative are critical to helping others get beyond their "blind spots" and move toward their potential.
5. Know your own limitations. No one can possibly fulfill all expectations, and know everything. Knowing key references, people and operations helps you to show your mentee how he/she can get more information or navigate a situation. A good mentor teaches the mentee "how to fish", he/she does not fish for them.
6. Encourage your mentee to move toward his/her own goals, not your goals.
7. Recognize and appreciate your mentee when he/she has provided help to you or has taken steps toward goals you had discussed.
8. Invite discussion about differences with your mentee. Recognize and work through conflicts with care and respect. Ask for a neutral party to assist if necessary.
9. Maintain a professional role in the mentoring connection, especially in the beginning. Give careful consideration before encouraging a close friendship. Do not get romantically involved or give the appearance of being romantically involved.
10. Respect the confidence of your mentee. Your mentee will probably share many personal ideas and feelings because of your established trust. Breaking this trust can be very damaging to your mentee and to your working relationship.
11. Make only positive or neutral comments about your mentee to others.
12. If you disagree with your mentee's values, attitudes or behaviors, discuss your perceptions direction with the mentee; get help from a neutral party if necessary. If a troubling situation does not change, take steps to end the connection, and contact your supervisor as soon as possible.
13. Continually evaluate how well you are meeting the goals and purpose of the connection. Be prepared to end the connection once it has served its purposes. Discuss openly how and when you will be ready to end the connection and how you intend to continue your professional relationship outside of the mentor connection. Put positive closure on your work together as mentor/mentee.
14. Keep the door open for your mentee to return in the future.

