

# INTEGRAL DIGEST

## Mentoring Beyond Skill

The growing recognition for Mentor skills training appears to be on the rise over the last few years as organisations are confronted with the reality that position, experience and technical skill are, on their own, insufficient criteria towards the successful implementation of mentoring programs. The resultant impact of mentor, mentee and the organisation as a whole, are hugely influenced by the foundational philosophies and practices that underpin mentoring initiatives, programmes and mentor skills training.

The Coaching Centre rests on the premise that good mentors, and good mentoring systems, are those that engage coaching skills. This, together with a whole person, multi-perspective focus is proving to be a recipe for successful mentoring rollout.

Traditionally the focus of mentoring programmes has been on the mentee – their needs and their outcomes. As we work with organisations, they are becoming increasingly aware of the incredible impact on mentor skills training for the mentor. This opportunity for holistic development has surprisingly highlighted for many mentors their development gaps and opportunities irrespective of role, title or experience. ‘The Success of any intervention depends on the internal condition of the intervenor’ (Bill O’Brien - CEO of Hanover Insurance). We know and value this statement as a principle, yet to witness the realisation thereof in a room of accomplished professionals, has been a refreshing shift from traditional mentoring skills based workshops that have promoted skills based learning, often at the expense of personal and interpersonal dynamics.

We recently ran mentor skills training for nearly 20 senior Professors at a leading South African University. The experience in the room from books published, to articles written, to international keynote speaker engagement exceeded 476 years in total. What a privilege to be in the room and what an even greater privilege to witness the tangible consciousness raising moments when many of these esteemed professionals realised that experience and knowledge are merely part of the formula for personal and professional development success. There were many themes that emerged over our few days together but those from which we can draw affirming conclusions included:

- A vulnerability in recognising general lack of competence in how to initiate and manage conversations that did not relate to educational field, technical prowess or the efficiencies of systems and procedures.
- The realisation that the mentees with whom they work are whole persons beyond role and context. Care for the person beyond a brain who thinks or a writing hand that publishes opens up a dynamic that creates receptivity, ownership and motivation.
- Mentoring is first and foremost about the mentor – often the focus on the mentee has detracted from the leadership and growth opportunities inherent in good mentoring practice, for the mentor.
- A focus on developing qualities of both mentor and mentee is fundamental and foundational in developing mentoring skills and systems
- The basics of good coaching and mentoring skills – listening, questioning, empathy, challenge, feedback etc – are those that sound theoretically simple, yet in practice prove profoundly more complex and valuable than their superficial listing.

Similarly, we worked within an organisation where managers mentored interns within various contexts of

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organisational life. Through our engagement with the 60 mentors and 90 mentees, what again was reinforced was the importance of self and leadership development as a focus that informs professional development. The readiness for skills development follows an openness to engage the self and other – a meeting of humanities. The ownership learning principle becomes prominent in this holistic approach.

As we continue to work with the 4 Domains of Leadership and Experience, based on Ken Wilbur's Integral philosophy and adapted by Dr Paddy Pampallis Paisley's *Integral plus* methodology, we continue to recognise that taking any view, less than a holistic perspective is insufficient for sustainable best practice.

Mentoring systems that focus on the matching process, structured sessions, reporting procedures and general programme design is only a dimension of mentoring best practice.

Mentoring systems that focus on transference of technical skills, training in tools and models, and general information conveyance is only a dimension of mentoring best practice.

Mentoring systems that work closely with interpersonal dynamics, conflict resolution processes, and communications skills are essential yet only a dimension of mentoring best practice.

And mentoring systems that focus alone on personal development, values and the growth of the mentee is only a dimension of mentoring best practice.

Mentoring, in order for it to be successful and sustainable needs to focus on all parts that make up the whole. And the whole in turn refers to the qualities, skills, practices and context and systems within which the mentor and mentee finds themselves. Partial mentoring systems of old, that rely exclusively on honing technical skills transfer address only a fraction of the interior and exterior dynamics at play and it is this realisation and engagement in practice that has proven to deliver results within organisations through the impact of change within both mentor and mentee.

So the work of the mentor remains in the development of those qualities that serve, that open up thinking through skilled questioning processes, that engages the whole person through service, challenge and feedback. And the work of the mentor remains in their openness to learn and engage, the integration of skills, qualities and practices and the ability to manage the transition from their current to desired realities.

The apparent 'upside-down' system where the mentor questions and the mentee thinks, where the mentor engages their own development, and the mentee benefits from the mentors own implicit growth, where the mentor provides perspective and the mentee engages holistic learning – this is both the challenge and reward for sustainable mentoring practice. And the Return on Investment for organisations will exceed the productivity, bottom line, quality, job satisfaction, organisational commitments and teamwork that they were hoping for. The ripple effect will show up in the organisation system, interpersonal relationships, individual and team behaviours, and the quality of being of those involved.



Sue Bakker is a coach and facilitator who holds the Marketing, Accreditation and Social Investment portfolios at The Coaching Centre. Having completed her Diploma in Practitioner Coaching at this same institution, and with a Masters Degree in the Human Sciences from Stellenbosch University, Sue's background in tertiary education as the Director of Student Affairs and Faculty Lecturer continue to inform her practice and her passion for quality training and development processes. She continues to invest in human development opportunities through coaching, training and facilitation with a passion to develop potential and enhance performance.