

DOD Mentoring Resource Portal

BUILDING MENTORING SKILLS

Information for Supervisors Portfolio

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Purpose:

Mentoring is an essential leadership skill. This resource will help Experienced Supervisors to enhance their mentoring skills to help New Supervisors learn, grow and become more effective in their jobs.

Audience:

Experienced and New Supervisors

Context:

Each role a Mentor takes requires special skills. All roles require highly developed active listening skills and quality meeting settings. To establish trusting and open communications in the relationship, this resource provides information about the following topics: one-on-one meetings, interpersonal style, one-way listening, two-way listening, concentration, paraphrasing, coaching, feedback, counseling, guiding, career advising, motivating and role modeling.

How to Use:

- **Step 1:** Add additional information specific to your DOD Component/Agency.
- **Step 2:** Share this information with stakeholders involved in the Mentoring Program

Common Terms

The following are common terms associated with the DOD Mentoring Resource Portal:

Mentor, also known as Advisor, is a trusted counselor or guide who is involved in the development and support of one who is less experienced.

Mentee, also known as Protégé or Learner, is the more junior person being mentored.

Mentoring Program Coordinator, also known as Mentoring Program Manager, is responsible for the overall management of the Mentoring Program.

Information Source Disclaimer

Most of the information on this mentoring resource was obtained from the [Headquarters, Department of Army, DCS, G-1 ARMY MENTORSHIP HANDBOOK](#). All content is provided for informational purposes only.

BUILDING MENTORING SKILLS

Mentoring should be a rewarding experience. Experienced Supervisors serving as Mentors can improve leadership and communication skills, learn new perspectives and ways of thinking, and most importantly, gain a great sense of personal satisfaction. Each role a Mentor takes requires special skills. This resource will help Experienced Supervisors to enhance their mentoring skills to help New Supervisors learn, grow and become more effective in their jobs.

1.0 MEETINGS

Experienced Supervisors serving as Mentors should make New Supervisors feel comfortable in one-on-one mentoring meeting. Experienced Supervisors should be aware of the New Supervisor's reactions to the mentoring meeting settings. Experienced Supervisors should feel free to ask whether the meeting setting is comfortable.

LOCATION

Is the New Supervisor more comfortable in your office or at some other place? This could relate to a variety of issues such as confidentiality, formality of setting, and travel time. Consider the following:

- **Appropriate space:** Consider how space can relate to power and can create an intimidating atmosphere. A large desk may be seen as a barrier between you and the New Supervisor. However, most people feel their personal space is invaded if you are positioned too near them while speaking. Try to strike a balance. The distance can be bridged by positioning chairs near each other. Proper physical distance may be achieved by using a side table setting.
- **Lack of distractions:** Try to eliminate interruptions such as phone calls, visitors, visible reading and work materials. Provide "quality" meeting time, giving full attention to the New Supervisor. You may have to get out of your office to do this.

MANNERISMS

The following mannerisms help create a comfortable atmosphere:

- **Eye contact:** Use appropriate eye contact. Be sensitive to cultural differences in 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 or averting the eyes during listening shows respect, and direct eye contact during speaking is appropriate.
- **Gestures:** Supplement your speech with facial and hand gestures. You can show enthusiasm by nodding approval, smiling, or shaking the other person's hand. However, don't be artificial. Don't "fidget" or play with papers.
- **Open body posture:** Keep an open body posture. Rest your arms casually at your side or on a surface, rather than folding them. Try leaning forward as if eager to hear what is said.

AGENDA

As with any meeting, an agenda or clearly stated purpose will help your meeting to be productive. When setting up the meeting, determine the purpose in advance. This helps you:

- Allot an appropriate amount of time
- Come prepared
- Avoid surprises
- Determine if the meeting was a success

At the end of each meeting, plan on when the next meeting should be and for what purpose. Agree that if either of you finds it appropriate to request a meeting in the interim, you will tell the other the purpose. Then don't change the purpose of the meeting without mutual consent. For example, if you are planning to meet to work on the Individual Development Action Plan (IDAP), and the individual has experienced a significant problem on the job, you may need an interim meeting. The IDAP should probably not be worked on during this interim meeting, unless you both agree that the combined purpose meeting would make sense.

2.0 INTERPERSONAL STYLE

Despite your best effort to follow the tips in this mentoring resource, your natural preferred behavioral style will affect the way you interact with the New Supervisor. For example, one Experienced Supervisor serving as a Mentor may prefer to intersperse business conversation with humor, while another Mentor may not. One may prefer to talk about the big picture before discussing details, while the other may prefer to get the facts lined up before dealing with a large issue. One may focus on logic, while the other focuses on feeling. Being aware of your personal style and the New Supervisor's interpersonal style may be a critical factor in the comfort level of your meetings. You may discover differences in style gradually or you may compare notes from a behavioral style questionnaire or assessment tool. Either way, an Experienced Supervisor should be conscious of style differences and be flexible in style practices in order to contribute to positive and comfortable communication with the New Supervisor. If you are open about this attempt on your part, you may also teach the New Supervisor to recognize the importance of flexible style in his/her interactions with you and with others.

3.0 LISTENING

ONE-WAY LISTENING

One-way listening, also known as passive listening, occurs when a listener tries to understand the speaker's remarks without actively providing verbal responses. The listener can either deliberately or unintentionally send non-verbal feedback through eye contact, gestures, smiles, and nods. However, there is no verbal response to indicate how the message is being received. Sometimes one-way listening is an appropriate way to listen. If the New Supervisor wants to "air a gripe," vent frustration, or express an opinion, you may want to practice one-way listening. The individual may not want or need a verbal response; rather he/she may only want you to serve as a "sounding board." One-way listening is also appropriate when you want to ease back mentally. It would be a mistake to interrupt during this time to tell a good joke or story.

TWO-WAY LISTENING

Two-way listening, also known as active listening, involves verbal feedback. There are two types of feedback that you can use as a listener. The questioning response is one type of verbal feedback. By asking a question about what the person said, you get the individual to elaborate on information already given. The additional information may clarify or confirm your understanding. The paraphrasing response is a second type of verbal feedback. You demonstrate understanding by rephrasing the New Supervisor's ideas in your own words. Doing this helps you avoid selective listening, which is responding only to the parts of a conversation that interest you. You can summarize their main points by saying, "Let me make sure I'm with you so far..." or "The way you see the problem is..."

CONCENTRATION

Strengthen your listening skills by:

- **Holding back judgments:** Learn not to get too excited or angry about the New Supervisor's comments until you're sure you understand them. Do not immediately draw any conclusions about whether the meaning is "good" or "bad." Reduce your emotional reactions.

- **Listening for the main points:** Focus on the person’s most important ideas. Make a mental outline of the main points. Relate other ideas to the main points.
- **Resisting distractions:** Try to ignore outside noises or people. Control as many distractions as possible. For example, do not take phone calls during your meetings. Focus on the New Supervisor’s facial expressions.
- **Use excess thinking time appropriately:** On average, people speak 125 words per minute. People think at almost four times that speed! Try to not let your mind stray while you’re waiting for the next words. Instead, use the time to “listen between the lines.” Do this by observing and interpreting the New Supervisor’s non-verbal messages, and mentally compare them with the main points.
- **Listening for the whole meaning:** Listen for feeling as well as fact. Pay attention to emphasis on certain words, phrases, or ideas. Note the use of emotional words that may reveal meaning. How the New Supervisor was affected by an event may be more important than the event itself. Be careful not to let personal prejudices or emotional words detract from your understanding of what the New Supervisor is saying.

4.0 COACHING

With a novice, you may need to perform the role of coach to help the New Supervisor learn specific job tasks or to overcome performance difficulties. When coaching, remember to do the following things:

- Describe the behavior that you want from the New Supervisor.
- Remind the individual why this skill is important.
- Explain in detail how to approach the task/activity.
- Demonstrate the desired behavior.
- Observe the New Supervisor performing if possible.
- Evaluate the performance by giving feedback.

5.0 FEEDBACK

Coaching primarily involves feedback on performance. As an Experienced Supervisor, you must give two kinds of feedback:

- **Positive feedback:** to reinforce correct behavior.
- **Constructive feedback:** to change behavior that is incorrect or needs improvement. Both types of feedback are critical to the New Supervisor’s professional growth. If you know how to provide feedback, you can perform the role of coach more easily.

Feedback should be:

- **Frequent:** Give frequent constructive feedback so the New Supervisor will have a clear understanding of his/her progress.
- **Economical:** Give concise, quality feedback which will be better understood and appreciated.
- **Specific:** Focus the feedback on what, how, when, and why.

- **Direct:** Tell the New Supervisor what you have directly observed, not what you have heard from others.

When giving constructive feedback:

- Don't use judgmental labels, especially negative ones such as "immature" or "unprofessional."
- Don't exaggerate.
- Phrase the issue as a statement, not a question.

When giving feedback, concentrate on the behavior that you would like the New Supervisor to do more of, do less of, or continue performing. It is important that you not give feedback when:

- You don't know much about the circumstances of the behavior.
- The time, place, or circumstances are inappropriate (for example, in the presence of others).
- It's good practice to set up a regular schedule for providing feedback. The schedule should be based on individual need and development activities of the New Supervisor.

6.0 LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

As an Experienced Supervisor, share the wisdom of your past experiences and insights as a seasoned professional. Make a point to relate learning experiences, special anecdotes, and "trials", whenever appropriate. The New Supervisor not only learns from your errors, but also realizes that no one is perfect. It is this sharing of information that strengthens an Experienced Supervisor – New Supervisor relationship. The New Supervisor needs to learn there is more than one way to get things done. Learning from experience is not automatic. Most people assess developmental assignments in terms of how well or easily they accomplished a project, rather than in terms of what lessons were learned. To help the New Supervisor learn from experiences, try discussing the experience this way:

- Have the person give a concrete, detailed description of the experience. Probe for specifics on what was done and how problems were handled rather than generalizations on "how it went."
- Ask the New Supervisor to describe feelings about particular aspects of the experience. This is known as reflective observation.
- Have them explain what lessons were learned in the process. This leads to generalizations about technique, politics, and interpersonal relations, working within the rules, organizational culture, management styles, and functional interrelationships.

Based on the insights expressed in the above steps, get the New Supervisor to discuss possible strategies for future behavior in similar situations.

7.0 COUNSELING

During the course of the mentoring relationship, you may be counseling the New Supervisor on problems that stem from conditions outside of work or from conflicts at work. You may also counsel them on how to make certain decisions. The role of counselor requires a trusting and open relationship. To create such a relationship, stress confidentiality and show respect for the New Supervisor. You can promote confidentiality by not disclosing personal information that the New Supervisor shares with you. Show respect by listening carefully and attentively to the New Supervisor and do not interrupt while they are talking.

THE NON-DIRECTIVE APPROACH

As an Experienced Supervisor, you should be familiar with the non-directive approach to counseling. The focus of this approach is to let the New Supervisor discover problems and work out solutions that best fit his/her value system. This type of approach avoids the need for making a diagnosis. You don't want to assume the role of a psychoanalyst. Don't try to diagnose the New Supervisor's problem. A non-directive counseling approach requires active listening skills. While listening to the individual, refrain from passing judgment. You should accept the different values and opinions of the New Supervisor without imposing your own values and opinions.

Make the New Supervisor feel comfortable and at ease. Show a genuine interest in their welfare. Attempt to get the New Supervisor to "open up" with phrases such as: "I see, would you like to tell me about it?", "Would you help me to better understand your feelings?", "Why do you feel that way?", "OK...what happened?"

- **Reflection:** As part of the non-directive approach, you should learn to reflect upon what has been said by the New Supervisor. A non-directive approach does NOT mean that you are passive throughout the discussion. Any discussion, if it is to be productive, requires a give-and-take style. You should reflect on the New Supervisor's statements by restating the key point(s). Make sure you really understand what the individual is trying to tell you.
- **Silence:** It is not unusual for a person to stop talking during a conversation to organize thoughts, focus opinions, interpret feelings, or simply catch his/her breath. You may feel great pressure to break the silence by saying something. Don't try to anticipate the New Supervisor's feelings or thoughts. This can lead the conversation off in the wrong direction. It is better to let them restart the conversation when ready and continue it at his/her own pace. This eliminates putting too much of your own feeling and bias into the conversation. Let the New Supervisor voice his/her own feelings and thoughts.
- **Emotion:** If the New Supervisor becomes emotional during your discussion, let him/her work through their feelings. After an emotional release, it is not unusual for a person to feel shame or guilt. If they want to discuss this, you should allow him/her to talk freely about it.
- **Advice:** It is better to let the New Supervisor arrive at his/her own solutions. This helps the New Supervisor sharpen problem-solving abilities. Of course you can give advice, but you need to emphasize that this advice comes from your own perspective or experience. If asked for advice, preface your statements with "From my experience...", "The way I view the situation...", or "If I were in your situation, I would consider..." These statements help the New Supervisor understand that this advice is from your perspective. It is their choice and responsibility to decide whether or not to apply it. Effective counseling should stimulate the New Supervisor's ability to independently solve problems or make decisions.
- **Personal Problems:** Remember the more serious and personal the individual's problem, the more cautious you should be about giving advice. Confidences should be maintained. You should use considerable discretion in handling sensitive information. Realize that the New Supervisor may feel anxiety, apprehension, or fear about disclosing personal information to you. They may wonder how this information is going to be interpreted or acted upon. (This is where trust really is a factor.) If the problem exceeds your level of expertise as a leader or is very serious in nature, you should refer the New Supervisor to someone else that is trained to handle that level of problem. **[Insert specific resources available to Supervisors in your organization like Employee Assistance Program (EAP), Family Advocacy Program, drug and alcohol counselors, a chaplain, the chain of command, or a local Medical Treatment Facility].**

8.0 GUIDING

As a guide, you help navigate through the inner workings of your organization and decipher the “unwritten office rules” for the New Supervisor. This information is usually the “kernels of knowledge” that one only acquires over time. The inner workings of your organization are simply the “behind the scenes” dynamics, or office politics, that are not always apparent, but are crucial to know. “Unwritten rules” can include special procedures, the guidelines that are not always documented, and the policies under consideration. As an Experienced Supervisor, it is important that you help the New Supervisor to understand the inner workings and “unwritten rules.”

Brief the New Supervisor on who does what, the critical responsibilities that each performs, and the personal/job styles involved. You may also help the New Supervisor navigate the “white waters” of change. How to deal with turmoil, downsizing, rapidly changing missions and organization structures are issues that may be of great concern to a New Supervisor.

9.0 CAREER ADVISING

Career advising involves helping the individual set and meet career goals. Using the following steps may be helpful.

1. DETERMINE THE NEW SUPERVISOR’S INTERESTS

This can be done by asking questions such as: What work activities do you enjoy or find satisfying? What did you like best about your last or present job? What are outside activities or organizations you enjoy? What are volunteer programs in which you are active? By categorizing the person’s interests into key areas you can help them focus on the types of tasks, jobs, or professions that would be both suitable and enjoyable.

2. IDENTIFY THE ATTRIBUTES, SKILLS, AND COMPETENCIES WITHIN THESE APPROPRIATE HIGH ENJOYMENT AREAS

Keep in mind that some Supervisors may have difficulty in doing this because people tend to:

- Be modest and not want to “blow their own horn.”
- Recall only those skills necessary for a current job and discount skills learned in previous jobs or non-work experiences
- Diminish their skills, thinking they’re too common.

Ask the New Supervisor:

- What are your work responsibilities?
- What attributes, skills and competencies do you need to meet these responsibilities?
- What do you believe are your strengths?
- What would you consider your three most significant accomplishments?
- Why do you consider these to be the most significant?

You can help the New Supervisor reveal attributes, skills, and competencies by forcing him/her to closely examine professional or personal accomplishments. The New Supervisor’s manager would normally have valuable input for this analysis.

3. HELP THE NEW SUPERVISOR DEVELOP OR ISOLATE APPROPRIATE CAREER GOALS

Start with a mission statement similar to what you would do/use in a unit. Help the New Supervisor identify what the his/her mission is in life (personally and professionally). Next, help the New Supervisor draft out their long term goals (2+ years) and work backwards from there. It is easier to identify near and short term goals once you know what the long term goals are. Near term goals are six months to 2 years out. Short-term are goals over one to six months out. There are several factors to consider when setting career goals.

Goals should be:

- **Specific:** Goals need to be clearly defined in terms of what the person wants to achieve.
- **Suspended:** Plan an overall deadline for goals to be accomplished with interim deadlines to ensure the New Supervisor is moving toward these goals.
- **Results-oriented:** New Supervisors should initially concentrate on the results of their efforts, not so much on the activities that are required to accomplish them. Sub-tasks and activities are determined after the goals are set.
- **Relevant:** The goals should be appropriate and in tune with those of the [insert DOD Component/Agency name], while moving the New Supervisor closer to the type and level of work that he/she finds challenging and enjoyable. In determining interests and abilities to prepare for goal development, you may have discussed some social and personal interests with applicability to career planning. If the New Supervisor develops personal or social goals, in addition to career goals, the Experienced Supervisor can try to relate them to career goals. For example, a social desire to “interact with many people” may be turned into a career-related goal to achieve an elected position in a professional society.
- **Realistic:** Goals should be within the New Supervisor’s reach. They need to feel challenged, but not incapable of reaching the goals. Consider the individual’s special talents and weigh these talents with the requirements of the position for which the person strives.
- **Limited in number:** You may want to create several career goals to eliminate the possibility of the New Supervisor feeling “trapped,” but avoid setting too many goals at once. Concentrate first on setting goals that will help the person accomplish what needs to be done.
- **Flexible:** Goals shouldn’t be so rigid that adjustments can’t be made. Sometimes changes in the New Supervisor’s interests, the organization’s missions, or the individual’s workplace, will require altering goals.

4. TARGET THE AREAS THAT REQUIRE DEVELOPMENT

To target developmental areas, the New Supervisor needs to know the requirements of future positions. If you’ve never held the desired positions, talk to people who have, or ask your [Insert the contact information of your local HR Department] for information about the position(s). Identify the critical attributes, skills, and competencies needed for effective future performance. Weigh these against the attributes, skills, and competencies the New Supervisor already possesses.

5. CREATE A WRITTEN INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN

The best way to assure that goals are reached is to outline specific actions needed to achieve them. You can suggest several career building activities and alternatives such as:

- **Enrichment:** enhance skills and responsibilities by seeking/accepting new tasks and assignments while remaining on the current job.
- **Reassignment:** move to another position with different duties.
- **Job Rotation or Details:** temporary/time-limited assignments in a variety of functions or related sub-specialties provide breadth and perspective, and usually end by returning to the primary/original position.
- **Education or training:** take skill enrichment courses, enroll in academic programs, or self-study activities.

- **Professional organization membership:** participate in meetings, hold office, attend seminars/workshops/conferences, read relevant periodicals.

When academic training is appropriate, get the New Supervisor to consider several alternatives. Some courses have quotas. Timing is often critical. Encourage the New Supervisor to accept personal responsibility for expenses or off-duty time commitment to achieve some goals.

6. DETERMINE SUCCESS INDICATORS

The New Supervisor needs to have a clear vision of what the desired results of the developmental activity or task are. They should be able to answer the question “How will I know I’ve succeeded?” It’s not important what indicators you use, except that these indicators must be measurable and meaningful to the individual. Once you have an action plan in place, it will be an “enabler” to move the New Supervisor toward the career goals that you help set in your role as an advisor.

7. EVALUATE PROGRESS

A periodic meeting to evaluate progress toward the goals is the final step. This will provide the opportunity to reflect on what has been learned, and to make adjustments as necessary. Marking/celebrating progress as interim goals are achieved can also be a motivational factor.

10.0 ROLE MODELING

As a role model, you are a living example of the values, ethics, ethos, and professional practices of the [insert DOD Component/Agency name]. Setting the example may be your most effective teaching tool. The person will learn a lot about you while observing how you handle situations or interact with others. For this reason, you need to be careful of how you come across to the New Supervisor. You must strive for high standards of professionalism and exhibit a solid work ethic and a positive attitude. Give the individual an opportunity to see and learn the positive qualities of an experienced professional. Stop and think about what your own position, branch, career field, career program require in terms of self-development. Show the New Supervisor what you have done and/or are doing to fulfill those requirements. Even if you are in a different position than the one to which the New Supervisor aspires, your personal example is important.

In teaching the individual how to think, learn, and develop professionally, “attitude” and “style” are often the subtle subjects you will be developing in the New Supervisor. You may want to assure that the New Supervisor observes you demonstrating flexibility and variety in approaches to tasks or situations, so they can see different ways of getting things done. When possible, take them to various meetings or workgroups to observe you in different settings or situations, and discuss why you did certain things. This is sometimes referred to as “shadowing” or “left seat ride.” Remember that the New Supervisor doesn’t have to be just like you. You don’t have to be the only role model that the New Supervisor imitates. Recommend several other role models for the individual to observe. Then help the New Supervisor create his or her own unique professional identity.

11.0 MOTIVATING

Most New Supervisors are highly motivated individuals with a thirst for success. You usually perform the motivator role only when the New Supervisor has a very difficult assignment and is afraid of failing. Through encouragement and support, you can motivate the individual to succeed.

ENCOURAGEMENT: One of the most effective ways to encourage the New Supervisor is to frequently provide positive feedback during an assignment or while the New Supervisor strives toward a goal. Positive feedback is a great “morale booster” that removes doubt, builds self-esteem and gives the individual a sense of accomplishment. Concentrate on what they are doing well and relate these successes to the New Supervisor.

SUPPORT: You can also motivate the New Supervisor by showing your support. Do this by making yourself available, especially during stressful periods. The New Supervisor who knows you are always available will not be intimidated away from asking questions and seeking guidance. Helping the New Supervisor to see an overwhelming task as manageable smaller tasks may be all the support needed.