

Getting the most out of mentoring and coaching for career development

How could mentoring help your career progression? And what would you need to put into the process? Learn from the successful experience of the LSIS-funded Black Leadership Initiative (BLI) mentoring programme.

Rajinder Mann, Director, Black Leadership Initiative



Rajinder began the session with introductions and an invitation to everybody to describe the greatest professional achievement of their career. After discussion around what mentoring meant to the individuals in the group, Rajinder described the key points about the BLI mentoring scheme:

- The focus on career development
- The role of challenge in mentoring
- Boundaries and endings – the importance of avoiding dependency on the mentor
- The value to an individual of having different mentors at different stages
- The importance of understanding the nature of the barriers which mentees are dealing with.

Rajinder described mentoring in practice as:

- The offer to HELP someone, having NO AGENDA of your own, with their personal, professional or career DEVELOPMENT...
- By creating a SAFE ARENA in which a TRUSTING RELATIONSHIP can develop....
- The purpose being to MAXIMISE the Individual's INTERNAL RESOURCES
- Sharing with them your wisdom, experience and expertise in an appropriate and timely manner.

Coaching is an integral part of the mentoring relationship. It's the process that will be used during much of the mentoring relationship especially where the nature of the relationship is for developmental purposes.

The essence of coaching is the unlocking of a person's potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them.

Rajinder described the key precepts of mentoring as:

- "off-line" - objective and independent view of development; broader perspective; fresh 'pair of eyes'; promotes open discussion (no fear of adverse reaction).
- "guide" - non-directive or judgemental; offer alternative solutions; help find the answers within yourself.
- "agreed objective" - focus for meetings & relationship as a whole; you set the agenda.

She described the different types of interaction which form the mentoring arena: challenging, safety valve, sounding board, advice, teaching, coaching and counselling.

What are the steps through which the mentor and mentee go through?

- Rapport-building – getting to know each other, deciding if the relationship will work.
- Direction-setting – creating a sense of purpose for the meetings.
- Progress-making – working together to achieve the relationship goals.
- Winding-down – recognising the formal relationship needs to come to an end at some point.

They presuppose:

- Respect of another person's model of the world.
- The meaning of a communication is the response you get.
- People are doing the best they can with the resources they have available.

Rajinder invited the participants to work in groups to identify any barriers/challenges to progression that colleagues in your group have faced (and any strategies used to overcome these) and this produced the following:

Self-perception	Work-life balance especially for women
Stereotyping	Management means long hours
Comfort zones	Lack of support
Natural levelling	Loss of autonomy
Envy, e.g. from other women	Fear of failure

Strategies for addressing the above were suggested: experience failure; take risks; confront challenge and learn from failure; prepare not to be liked.

Mentoring in practice means deciding with your mentor about the nature of your meetings: frequency, duration, location, whether face to face or by other means, and what preparation would be expected (agenda, expectations, goals). The mentoring agreement helps record what has been agreed and might include: contact guidelines; features of the relationship; how the relationship might be terminated. A model agreement is available.

The BLI has formulated guidelines for dealing with issues and it is suggested that you should:

- Set boundaries of relationship
- Try to prioritise issues in the order you wish to address them
- Discuss a range of solution/options with your mentor, and choose the most appropriate one for you
- Decisions that you make should be your own - mentors aren't responsible for your choices

Dos and Don'ts:

- Do make contact with your mentor within the time frame given
- Don't just sit there – phone us if you have a problem!
- Do use the BLI office effectively, we are there to help not chase!
- Do send in your BLI paperwork – as this will have an impact on additional mentoring processes involved.
- Do respect your mentors time and additional responsibilities.

The next step is the matching process, followed by making contact.

Final thought:

“The difference between a successful person and others is not a lack of strength, not a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack of will.” Vincent Lombardi