



## **AFMC MENTEE HANDBOOK**

Information for Mentees

Information in this document is from OSD Mentoring Resource Portal, AFMAN 36-2643, *Air Force Mentoring Program*  
2018

## MENTEE GUIDELINES

### Purpose:

To offer a set of standards that assist Mentees to achieve a successful mentoring relationship. Positive mentoring relationships can aid in improving morale and retention in the Air Force. A focus on our Air Force Core Values – Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence In All We Do, should be emphasized and highlighted in discussions between Mentors and Mentees regularly. Mentees should consider these values and find a way to discuss them during mentoring discussions.

### Audience:

Mentees

### Context:

Mentees are encouraged to utilize the Air Force mentoring tool, MyVector, when formally selecting a mentor, however, MyVector is only one way to find a Mentor and different methods can be used. Mentees should refer to AFMAN 36-2643, *Air Force Mentoring Program*: Copy and paste the URL into your internet browser:

[http://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/af\\_a1/publication/afman36-2643/afman36-2643.pdf](http://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/af_a1/publication/afman36-2643/afman36-2643.pdf)

Mentoring also promotes a climate of inclusion that can help foster and develop the diverse strengths, perspectives, and capabilities of all Airmen - reference Air Force Policy Directive (AFPD) 36-70, *Diversity*:

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.652.3550&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.

### Common Terms:

The following are common terms associated with AFMC Mentoring:

*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 Learner, is the less experienced person being mentored.

## HOW TO FIND A MENTOR

First and foremost, Mentors and Mentees should “**self-select**” each other. When looking for a Mentor, a person should spend time thinking about his or her mentoring needs and investigating possible Mentors. A good way to do this is by asking around to get feedback who might be an appropriate Mentor. Good sources of information are first and second level supervisors, peers and others who know you and/or prospective Mentors. MyVector can be a useful tool in finding an appropriate mentor – more information on MyVector can be found at:

<https://afvec.langley.af.mil/myvector>. Mentees should be familiar with information in the Mentoring Toolkit found in AFMAN 36-2643, *Air Force Mentoring Program*.

It is recommended that a Mentor be:

- Someone from beyond the chain of command;
- About one to two grade levels above the individual;
- Someone in your Branch/Career Field/Career Program.

The Mentee already has access to his or her chain of command on a routine basis and is encouraged to discuss personal, professional, and career goals and developmental needs with them on a regular basis. Because of this already existing access, the Mentee should look for someone else beyond the chain of command to serve as a Mentor. Also, there may be, at times, reluctance on the part of the Mentee, to discuss some work related problems/challenges in a candid manner with those in the immediate chain of command. Additionally, sometimes direct mentoring relationships within the chain of command can easily and unintentionally create perceptions of favoritism, which should be avoided.

It is generally recommended that a Mentor not be more than one or two grades above a Mentee. A Mentor who is very senior to the Mentee may be too far removed to provide practical guidance on how to get to the next step. Also, while many people would like to select senior leaders as Mentors, there usually are not enough to go around. Individuals looking for Mentors should be mindful of this, and individuals asked to be Mentors should consider their own time limitations before committing to serve as a Mentor for more than one Mentee.

In looking for a Mentor, consider personality types, communication styles and methods of communication, backgrounds (personal and professional), values, ethos, and experience. Know what you want from the relationship, based on your current situation, and think about the skills you'd like to develop and your career plans. Have realistic expectations: relationships may not last a lifetime, and most cannot fill every need because mentoring styles vary. Some important things to consider include (in no particular order):

- What are your career goals and needs?
- Does the Mentor have knowledge and experience in related areas, or even better, in many of these areas?
- Is the Mentor at the right grade level (i.e., two or three grade levels above, not too far up)?
- Is the Mentor good at what he/she does?
- Is the Mentor an achiever?
- Is the Mentor a good role model?
- Is the Mentor well respected?
- Is the Mentor supportive and respectful of others?
- Does the Mentor value the organization, enjoy the challenges, and understand its vision, mission, and values?
- Will the Mentor be available for uninterrupted, quality meetings?
- Will you feel comfortable talking with the Mentor honestly and do you trust him or her to keep your conversations between the two of you?
- Will the Mentor take a genuine interest in your development? Is he or she enthusiastic about mentoring?
- Will the Mentor give you honest feedback about yourself and your developmental needs?

- Can the Mentor help you look for opportunities to gain visibility/demonstrate your capabilities?
- Will the Mentor give you candid information about the organization and be willing to share knowledge, experience, insights?
- Is the Mentor a good teacher/coach/motivator?
- What do other peers or Mentees say about the Mentor, as a Mentor?
- What are the Mentor's expectations?
- How well does the Mentor emulate the organization Values and Ethos?

## **1.0 TIPS FOR AN EFFECTIVE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP**

There are five essentials for a successful mentoring relationship. Both the Mentor and the Mentee must want the relationship to work. Watch for signs of "lopsided" mentoring: both the Mentor and the Mentee should be committing appropriate time and energy to the process. Five things are essential:

1. Respect - established when a Mentee recognizes attributes, skills, and institutional competencies in the Mentor that he or she would like to possess; and when the Mentor appreciates the success of the Mentee to date and the Mentee's desire to develop his or her attributes, skills, competencies, capabilities, experiences, and value to the organization.
2. Trust - is a two-way street. Mentors and Mentees should work together to build trust, through communicating, and by being available, predictable, and loyal.
3. Partnership Building - The Mentor and Mentee are professional partners. Natural barriers that all partnerships face may include miscommunication or an uncertainty of each other's expectations. Activities that can help you overcome these barriers include:
  - Maintaining communication
  - Fixing "obvious" problems
  - Forecasting how decisions could affect goals
  - Frequent discussion of progress
  - Monitoring changes
  - Successful partnerships develop through:
    - The expression of enthusiasm each has for their relationship.
    - Activities of idea exploration and successful problem solving which create an atmosphere of emotional acceptance of each other.
    - Strategies and tactics of change that move slowly enough to be monitored and adjusted to assure optimum growth and success of the Mentee.
4. Realistic Expectations and Self Perception - A Mentor should encourage the Mentee to have realistic expectations of:
  - Their own capabilities
  - Opportunities in terms of present and potential positions

- The energies and actions the Mentor will commit to the mentoring relationship
  - What the Mentee must demonstrate to earn the Mentor's support in his or her personal/professional/career development
  - A Mentor may help define the Mentee's self-perception by discussing social traits, intellectual abilities, talents, and roles. It is important for the Mentor to always provide honest feedback.
5. Time - Set aside specific time to meet; do not change times unless absolutely necessary. Meet periodically, and at mutually convenient times when you can control interruptions. Frequently "check in" with each other via informal phone calls or e-mail (it's a good idea to schedule even informal activities to assure regular contact).

### **Mentee Responsibilities**

Your development depends on exploring career aspirations, strengths and weaknesses, collaborating on means to "get there," implementing strategies, and evaluating along the way. Your Mentor will provide the "light" for you to follow. Learning from the wisdom and past experiences of your Mentor will serve you well and produce great benefits.

Here are a few roles and responsibilities to help you in the process:

#### **Commit to your development**

- Ideally, your mentoring journey will need to include: 1-4 hours a month, to include face-to-face meetings every 1-2 months, and periods of reflection
- Assume responsibility for acquiring or improving skills and knowledge
- Discuss your Action Plan with your Mentor
- Be open and honest on your goals, expectations, challenges and concerns
- Actively listen and question
- Build a supportive and trusting environment
- Seek advice, opinion, feedback, and direction from your Mentor
- Be open to constructive criticism/feedback and ask for it
- Come to your meetings prepared with a clear idea of what topics or issues you want to address
- Respect your Mentor's time and resources
- Apply what you learn from your meetings back on the job
- Keep your supervisor informed of the process and your progress
- Give feedback to your advisor on what is working or not working in the mentoring relationship
- Participate in the scheduled activities

## **2.0 RECEIVING FEEDBACK – CHECKLIST FOR MENTEES**

Think of feedback as a learning opportunity. Exhibit positive body language.

#### **Do use:**

- Good eye contact
- Interested/neutral facial expression
- Nodding of head to show understanding or agreement
- Calm tone of voice

- Even voice volume
- Sitting slightly forward
- Relaxed arm and hand placement

**Do not use:**

- Reduced eye contact, scowling, or narrowing of eyes
- Tense or aggressive posture
- Rocking, pen bouncing, hand wringing, or your specific version of nervousness/defensiveness
- Hands on hips or tightly clenched
- Arms tightly crossed across chest
- A blank expression

Don't interrupt when the other person is explaining. If you need more information ask for clarification or specific examples. Paraphrase and repeat back to make sure you understood what was said. Keep doing this until you are clear on the feedback. Say things like...

- What I understood you just told me was.....
- When I \_\_\_\_\_ you think I.....
- What I hear you say is if I \_\_\_\_\_ I will.....

Provide relevant background information and explanations– not excuses. In your last meeting with your Mentor you may not have given enough background and there may have been a misunderstanding – elaborate if necessary.

Listen carefully and don't become defensive. Do not “think ahead” preparing a rebuttal to a comment, you may miss a very important piece of information. Compare this feedback with others you've received. Discuss strategies and next steps. Provide possible solutions – you are the captain of your ship. Seek follow-up to your feedback session and share your progress with your Mentor.

**3.0 TYPES OF MENTORING**

Mentors and Mentees can utilize multiple approaches in a single mentoring relationship. Mentoring relationships work best when participants are flexible. Use whichever approach is most convenient while supporting the goals of the participants. At the start of a relationship, discuss your desired approaches and agree on your modes of interaction.

**INFORMAL MENTORING**

Informal mentoring, also referred to as traditional mentoring, focuses primarily on the Mentee and her/his goals (both personal and career). This type of mentoring promotes the examination of the Mentee's career path through goal setting. The Mentor and Mentee work together to devise an action plan that sets career goals that will lead the Mentee on the appropriate career path. Informal mentoring not only encourages the Mentee to establish career goals but also advocates setting personal goals. The overall development of the individual is the focus of informal mentoring.

Informal mentoring is a natural process; that is, the Mentor and Mentee often pair together by their own internal forces. Internal forces, such as mutual respect, shared experiences, and common interests, are the ingredients that create the relationship. If no prospective Mentor comes to mind, a Mentee should have access to a Web-

based tool or system, such as MyVector, to view a comprehensive list of Mentors and their respective professional experiences to choose a potential informal Mentor. Installation Mentoring Program Coordinators also can provide info on this.

Informal mentoring can last for years – and friendships that are formed through this type of mentoring can last a lifetime. Another characteristic of informal mentoring is that it can involve interaction between the Mentor and Mentee away from the workplace. This type of mentoring relationship may result in the Mentor and Mentee spending time together outside of the office. Informal mentoring is usually successful because the two parties have a genuine concern for each other's well-being. Friendship, rather than job requirements, keeps the two parties together.

## **FORMAL MENTORING**

Formal mentoring, also known as planned/structured mentoring, primarily focuses on organizational goals and how the Mentee's goals fit into the organization. Organizational goals increase productivity, eliminate turnover and reduce absenteeism. This type of mentoring usually has a defined timeframe and is tied to a developmental program and concentrates heavily on the needs of the organization, yet benefits both the organization and the Mentee. This type of mentoring promotes a "formal business" approach to the relationship, therefore, there is little or no social interaction. The Mentor and Mentee rarely see each other outside the office.

The Mentees are offered an electronically generated list of potential "suitable" Mentors. These matches are based on similar attitudes, work assignments, characteristics, and specific self-selected criteria. The Mentor and Mentee develop a formal mentoring agreement plan, or contract, that outlines expectations and obligations. Both participants sign the agreement to formalize and clarify the relationship from its inception. The participants actively seek and obtain training to understand their roles as Mentor and Mentee. The Mentor and Mentee monitor the mentoring relationship against the program to ensure compliance with the formal partnership plan. The program is evaluated to determine the results, such as advantages, cost effectiveness, and difficulties.

Note: Some mentoring relationships develop into a combination of both informal and formal - mentoring relationships are not mutually exclusive.

## **SITUATIONAL MENTORING**

Situational mentoring is usually short-lived and happens for a specific purpose such as preparing for a board or a new assignment.

## **SUPERVISORY MENTORING**

Per the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), Supervisory Mentoring is an inherent responsibility of leadership. The Individual Development Plan usually outlines expectations for supervisory coaching and feedback. Most frequently, this mentoring is informal and related to day-to-day guidance about the current job. As leaders, supervisors should also encourage outside mentoring partnerships, informal and formal, and allow their employees the time to work on them.

All good supervisors Mentor their subordinates to a degree, but there can be some drawbacks to this arrangement. The supervisor may not be a “subject matter expert” in the subordinate’s desired career path. While supervisors can guide subordinates in their present positions, they may not be able to help them with future goals. Today’s supervisors are often heavily tasked, and there is the possibility that they may not be able to devote equal time to each subordinate, which could create feelings of exclusion and favoritism. Another consideration is that many Mentees are uncomfortable being mentored by the person who rates their performance. The Mentee may not wish to discuss such things as areas of weakness and plans to leave the organization or changes to career paths.

### **ONLINE MENTORING (ALSO KNOWN AS EMENTORING OR VIRTUAL MENTORING)**

Online mentoring affords an opportunity to establish and engage in a mentoring relationship that does not depend on the individuals to meet in person. This type of mentoring uses videoconferencing, the Internet, and e-mail to Mentor individuals. This is beneficial for those who are unable to leave their workplace and for those who live in rural or remote communities. Online mentoring is usually less expensive compared to face-to-face mentoring and provides an individual with more choices for Mentors. Even with virtual mentoring, it is recommended the Mentor and Mentee meet face-to-face at least once.

This mentoring approach is usually a relationship with an individual within the same grade, organization, and/or job series. The purpose of peer mentoring is to support colleagues in their professional development and growth, to facilitate mutual learning and to build a sense of community. Peer mentoring is not hierarchical, prescriptive, judgmental or evaluative.

AFMAN 36-2643, *Air Force Mentoring Program*, also highlights the Air Force virtual Force Development Center, (vFDC), which is located on the AF Portal site and provides a clearinghouse of leadership development resources. The vFDC features learning programs based on the AF institutional competencies and may be recommended by mentors as a development opportunity for mentees. Resources available through the center are free, flexible, and available on-demand. In addition, the center features a learning program created to assist new or experienced mentors who may want to refresh their competencies.

## **4.0 STAGES OF MENTORING**

Mentoring consists of different stages reflecting the Mentee’s learning and growth needs. Each stage may require the Mentor to assume different mentoring roles. The stages may blend into each other. The roles listed under a stage are not exclusive to that stage, but indicate when Mentors are most likely to begin performing that role. With this in mind, the Mentor can brush up on the necessary skills to perform the role effectively. The four main stages of mentoring are:

Prescriptive

Persuasive

Collaborative

Confirmative



In order to determine at which stage to begin the relationship, the Mentor and the Mentee must consider:

What are the Mentee's attributes, skills, and competencies?

What is the Mentee's level of experience?

What type and amount of guidance and support does the Mentee need?

### **PRESCRIPTIVE STAGE**

In the first stage of mentoring, the prescriptive stage, the Mentee usually has little or no experience at the job or in AFMC. This stage is most comfortable for the novice, who depends heavily on the Mentor for support and instruction. This is where the Mentor is providing stronger, more direct, more specific, more detailed guidance and advice. During this stage, the Mentor primarily assumes the roles of:

Coach

Motivator

Teacher

During this stage, the Mentor gives a lot of praise and attention to build the Mentee's self-confidence. The Mentor devotes more time to the Mentee in this stage than in any of the other stages. The Mentor focuses on providing detailed information to the Mentee on many, if not all, workplace issues and procedures.

The Mentor thinks of the Mentee as a "sponge" soaking up every new piece of information provided. The Mentor shares many of his or her own experiences, "trials" and "anecdotes" during this stage, giving examples of how he or she or others handled similar tasks or situations and with what consequences.

### **PERSUASIVE STAGE**

The second stage requires the Mentor to actually persuade the Mentee to find answers and seek challenges, rather than getting them from the Mentor. The Mentee usually has some experience, but needs firm direction. The Mentee needs to be provided an opportunity into taking risks. The Mentor suggests new strategies, questions, challenges, and pushes the Mentee into discoveries. Generally, the additional roles the Mentor assumes during this stage are:

Counselor

Guide

### **COLLABORATIVE STAGE**

In this stage, the Mentee has enough experience and ability to work together with the Mentor to jointly solve problems and participate in "more equal" communication. In this stage, the Mentee actively cooperates with the Mentor in his/her professional development plans. The Mentor lets the Mentee to take control and work independently. For instance, the Mentor gives him/her a piece of an important project to do independently, with little or no guidance. In this stage, the Mentor is likely to pick up the following roles:

Career Advisor

Role Model

### **CONFIRMATIVE STAGE**

This is the stage in which the Mentee has a lot of experience and has mastered the job requirements, but requires the Mentor's wisdom and professional insight into policies and people. In this stage, the Mentee may need the Mentor to perform many of the previously practiced roles. Most importantly the Mentor is a sounding board and empathetic listener. The Mentor gives advice and encouragement in a non-judgmental manner about career and personal decisions. Questions can be answered through discussions with the Mentee, by observing the individual or by consulting with others who know the Mentee such as his or her supervisor. The mentee can ask the mentor for advice and encouragement.

Mentoring relationships may follow all four stages or only a few of these stages. In fact, there is such a fine line between each stage that frequently it is difficult to tell when one stage ends and another begins. The Mentor needs to continually evaluate the mentoring relationship as it evolves, and determine when it is time to alter the mentoring roles. The Mentor must keep in mind that the relationship will stagnate if the mentoring style remains in a stage that the Mentee has outgrown.

## **5.0 MENTORING BENEFITS FOR MENTEES**

Mentoring is a special partnership between two people based on commitment to the mentoring process, common goals and expectations, focus, mutual trust and respect. Both the Mentor and the Mentee give and grow in the mentoring process. You, the Mentee, can learn valuable knowledge from the Mentor's expertise and past mistakes. You can increase your institutional competencies in specific areas. You can establish valuable connections with higher level employees. You, the Mentee will get many benefits from this experience. Here are just a few additional benefits you might consider:

- Having a caring ear to hear your triumphs as well as your frustrations. Mentees are provided a role model and a sounding board.
- Developing your skill as a "planner" - getting a sharper focus on what's needed to grow professionally.
- Developing your skill as a "learner"- getting new ways to acquire new skills.
- Developing your skill as a "communicator" – improving your ability to express your expectations, goals, and concerns.
- Learning what it is like to be in a higher level position.
- Getting an advocate within the organization – increase visibility.
- Receiving knowledge about the "ins and outs" of the organization.
- Getting honest feedback.

- Mentoring builds confidence and encourages the individual to grow beyond the usual expectations.
- Mentees have a better understanding of the organization and what is required to succeed and advance.
- For the novice Mentor, mentoring allows for a smoother transition into the workforce. A new workforce member may join the organization with unrealistic expectations and naïve illusions. A Mentor can make this adjustment period easier through communication, understanding, and guidance.
- Studies indicate that Mentees report greater career satisfaction, and their performance and productivity ratings tend to be higher.

**Information Source Disclaimer**

- Information in this mentoring resource was obtained from various Air Force sources to include: AFMAN 36-2643, *Air Force Mentoring Program*; Air Force Policy Directive (AFPD) 36-70, *Diversity*; and the Air Force mentoring tool, MyVector. In addition, information was obtained and adapted from WHS Director of Administration and Management Enterprise Mentoring, Tools for Learners. All content is provided for informational purposes only.