



Cherie Blair
**FOUNDATION
FOR WOMEN**

The Role of the Mentor and How to Excel

Introduction

To be an effective mentor, it's crucial to understand the role and responsibility that comes with the role. Every mentor should consider how to approach their interactions with their mentee, keeping in mind that the ultimate goal is to create an environment where mentees can truly flourish.

Mentors on the Mentoring Women in Business programme act like a sounding board and support for their mentee. Your role as a mentor is to provide your mentee with support, knowledge and guidance to help her reach her goals and evolve as an entrepreneur.

You are there to encourage your mentee and gently hold her accountable for achieving her goals; to metaphorically stand next to her and to provide her with an alternative perspective. The benefits of a mentoring relationship are reciprocal; you will also develop your own personal and professional skills.

The below principles, along with the Core Competencies are the building blocks for you to get the most out of your time on the Mentoring programme.

Commitment

Success in mentoring hinges on full commitment to the relationship. Although mentees are responsible for scheduling meetings, mentors must be attentive, available, punctual, and prepared. Dedicate at least two hours each month to provide your mentee with your undivided attention.

Encouragement

Mentors are pivotal sources of support and encouragement. Recognise and celebrate your mentee's achievements as if they were your own. By fostering their development through positive reinforcement and affirmation, you help your mentee build confidence and stay motivated.



Respect and Care

Respect is the cornerstone of a strong mentoring relationship. By valuing your mentee's unique circumstances and perspectives, you can offer guidance and support that is both meaningful and relevant. While you may share insights from your own experiences, it's important to recognise that you're not there to solve their problems but to support their growth. This mutual respect and genuine care will forge a deeper connection and enhance your investment in their success.

Listen

It may sound simple, but listening is the foundation of a successful relationship. Use active listening, be present, and ask open questions.

Listen not to respond, but to hear what your mentee wants to convey. By listening deeply to your mentee, you will not only increase your capacity to empathise with her, but it will also give you time to reflect and determine how to effectively support her. Often, the most powerful response you can give is a question that encourages her to dig deeper, see things from a different perspective, or identify a block or solution.


This relationship is a two-way street; when you show that you are truly engaging in what your mentee is saying, then your mentee will be better able to connect with you, and the relationship will flourish.

Accountability

Holding your mentee accountable for their goals and targets is essential. Assist them in articulating their objectives and reviewing their progress regularly. This structured approach helps solidify their aims and keeps them focused on achieving their goals, thus motivating them towards success.

Support Through Perspective

Provide your mentee with valuable perspective by helping them identify and navigate obstacles. Rather than offering direct solutions, support them in exploring their own ideas and strategies. This approach encourages mentees to tap into their own wisdom and problem-solving abilities.





Trust your mentee and yourself

Trust is fundamental in a mentoring relationship. Show your mentee that you believe in her potential and are confident in her commitment to her goals; she is the expert in her business. By demonstrating trust and stepping away from any perceived authority, you foster a sense of equality and mutual respect. This trust encourages your mentee to reciprocate, strengthening the relationship.

It's also essential to trust yourself. There will be times where you may feel unqualified, or undeserving of your position as mentor. It's important to value your contributions and trust your skills.


You are not going to be able to answer 100% of your mentee's questions and you aren't going to be able to solve all her problems; that's not your role. A mentor is not supposed to act as an advisor, and will not tell your mentee what to do. Instead, your role is to reflect on your mentee's goals and approach, and be a source of support, guidance and accountability.

Remember, pairs are matched because your skills and your mentee's goals complement each other. We only accept onto the programme those that have what it takes to be a good mentor.

Evaluate & Reflect

Effective mentors listen actively and facilitate opportunities for mentees to evaluate their own progress. Engage in meaningful dialogue, ask insightful questions, and share your perspectives to help your mentee reflect on their journey and assess their development.

Be open with your mentee and regularly offer the opportunity for feedback on the relationship. You should encourage both of you to reflect on how the relationship is progressing: what is working well and what could be improved? Look to incorporate the feedback received into your mentoring approach, to ensure both of you continue to gain even more value from the relationship.





Bring enthusiasm

Enthusiasm and positivity are contagious. From the very beginning, establish a high standard of engagement with your mentee to set the tone for the entire mentoring relationship. By showing excitement about having this opportunity to work with a woman entrepreneur and develop your own skills in return, you will help foster a sense of equality and reciprocity in the relationship.

By ensuring punctuality, asking questions, and making efforts to engage with your mentee's life beyond her business, will show that you are ready to make a connection. It is also important that you display positive body language in meetings and that you are reflecting on their relationship in between sessions. Taking these actions will show your enthusiasm and will demonstrate to your mentee that you are invested in her success.


Be humble

It's essential to remember that the mentoring relationship can be a great opportunity for you to develop your own skills and knowledge. It's also important to note that your mentee is the expert in her business. In many ways, you will learn as much from your mentee as your mentee will learn from you.

This is essential to break down any imposter syndrome, or perceived hierarchy in the relationship.

We therefore recommend that you show your mentee that you are aware of this and present humble mentoring traits. These include: teachability, admitting mistakes and limitations, acknowledging the strengths of others, and showing an openness to learn from your mentee.

By showing these traits, you will climb down from a position of invulnerability and authority. You will show to your mentee that you are genuine and fully committed to having an authentic and reciprocal relationship.





Exercise

Consider the following questions and write down your answers wherever you like to record notes. These can be revisited anytime you want to consider your role as a mentor.

- What does success in your role as mentor look like to you?
- Which aspects surprise you?
- What do you find most challenging?
- What will you do to practice it?
- What are you most confident about?
- How will you hold yourself accountable to these qualities?

Conclusion

The mentoring relationship is an organic, living thing. It will not stand perfectly tall from the first meeting. Like all relationships, it will grow and develop with time and effort.

Successful mentoring relies on commitment, respect, encouragement, accountability, trust, and perspective. Focus on building a strong foundation based on trust and respect, listening to your mentee, and getting to know her as a person and the unique challenges she faces as a woman entrepreneur in low or middle income country.

By fully engaging in these aspects, you create a supportive environment that enables your mentee to flourish and achieve her goals. Embracing these principles not only fosters your mentee's growth but also enriches your own professional and personal development, making for a rewarding mentoring experience for both.

