

Building successful mentoring relationships

Kisha is a staff nurse who has been in practice for seven years. Her career goal is to be in a formal leadership position within the next year, and she decides to find a mentor who can provide her with the support and guidance necessary to explore and achieve this. Chris has been a manager of a clinical teaching unit for 20 years, and he recently realized that this is a good time in his career to become a mentor and share his knowledge, expertise and wisdom while learning from a mentee. Kisha and Chris are about to embark on what could be a transformative relationship for them both — if they know the keys for success.

Mentoring, a tool for professional development, can support retention, succession planning, job satisfaction and role enhancement. At the heart of mentoring is the relationship between mentor and mentee, which, like all relationships, requires thought, time and care. In 2007, after more than 15 years of observing many mentoring relationships, we identified three key ingredients for their success: understanding the

why of the relationship, understanding its *how*, and then committing to it. We decided to create a tool to help mentors and mentees find and use those ingredients so that they can forge a relationship that works. The Five-Phase Mentoring Relationship Model was the result, and if you've been interested in becoming a mentor or a mentee but haven't known where to begin, or tried mentoring and been disappointed by how it turned out, the model may help you find your way.

Purpose informs all phases of the mentoring relationship and is the touchstone for its continuous evaluation. Here you develop a clearly articulated purpose or intention for the mentoring relationship that is intertwined with your career vision, goals and plan. New career challenges or responsibilities or a desire for enrichment opportunities may trigger an interest in mentoring: a mentee may seek an experienced guide for support and encouragement as he or she takes on a new role, or an executive may want to foster the professional development of others. Kisha is clear about her purpose of finding a mentor to help her

Five-Phase Mentoring Relationship Model

Phase One: Purpose

*Why do I want a mentor?
Why do I want to be a mentor?*

Phase Two: Engagement

*Finding and Being a Mentor
How do I begin?*

Phase Three: Planning

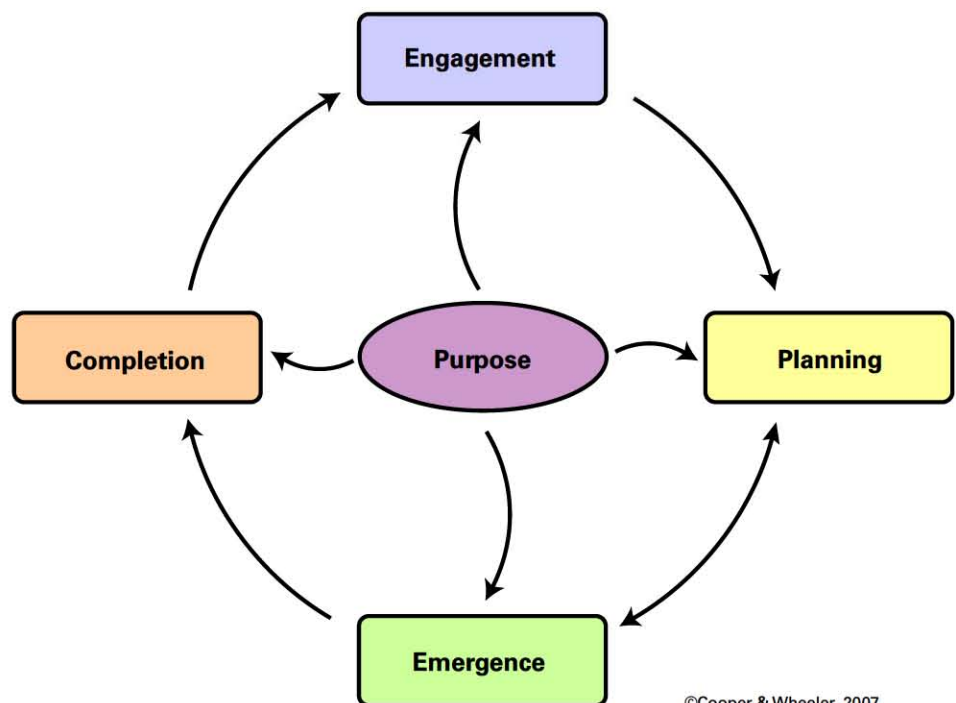
*Developing your Mentoring Action Plan
How can I achieve my goals?
How will we work together?*

Phase Four: Emergence

*Engaging in the Conversation
How am I doing?
What are we learning?*

Phase Five: Completion

*Celebrating Accomplishments
What are my next steps?*



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realize her goal of a leadership position; Chris wants to share his knowledge, skills and experience as a manager. This clarity is the first step to finding the right mentoring partner.

Engagement focuses on how one begins to find or be a mentor. You can do this either informally, as a request or offer made of anyone you think can help you achieve your goal, or formally, through a program with a pre-selected pool of candidates to choose from and a systematic method for matching pairs. Whichever method is used, the mentor and mentee make the final decision about the fit of their mutual goals, learning needs and learning styles. Using the questions in our model to guide conversations helps the mentor and mentee determine whether there is a fit and a will to enter into the relationship. Kisha and Chris meet at a National Nursing Week function, and when Kisha shares her career goal in conversation, Chris offers to help. They discuss the possibility of mentoring and set up a meeting to talk about it in more detail.

In the **planning** phase, the mentee and mentor develop a mentoring action plan, which includes goals, action steps, resources, timelines and how they evaluate success specific to their mentoring relationship. This is also when they discuss the terms of the relationship and what expectations they have of each other. We refer to this component as the “mentoring relationship agreement.” The agreement in our model is more than a contract that focuses on the frequency and timing of meetings; it is a framework that guides meaningful discussion about how the mentor and mentee want to work together to create a climate of trust and respect. When such agreements are established at the start, partners can often prevent breakdowns from occurring and will have strategies for addressing problems should they arise. Indeed, upfront investment in the purpose, emergence and planning phases increases the likelihood of a satisfying mentoring relationship and positive outcomes for both participants. Through their discussions, Kisha and Chris get further clarity about how their purposes and values align and establish the basis for the relationship to grow.

During **emergence**, the mentoring relationship slowly evolves. The goals are clear, a plan is in place, and the mentor facilitates the growth and development of the mentee by supporting, encouraging and challenging. Note, however, that in the diagram, the arrow between planning and emergence goes in two directions. This is an iterative process, and as the mentor and mentee engage in conversations about possibilities and action and then reflection, they are evaluating how the relationship is going. In our model, a mentorship journal guides the preparation

for and evaluation of each encounter and helps the pair decide if they need to go back and modify the action plan or mentoring agreement. At this point in the process, Chris is leading, setting the pace and reviewing progress. Kisha continues to take action, and together, she and Chris are continually asking themselves and each other “How am I doing?” and “What are we learning?” and documenting their reflections in a mentorship journal.

The **completion** phase is a time for celebrating your accomplishments, redefining the relationship and examining what your next steps will be. Kisha and Chris may want to set new goals and continue the relationship. Or they may decide that the frequency or intensity of mentorship interactions can be reduced so that their meetings continue on an as-needed basis. Or they may decide that they are both ready to move on. The mentorship relationship at this point generally becomes more collegial: they follow each other’s accomplishments and successes, keep in touch and let the other person know how they made a difference.

Whether you participate in a formal mentorship program or informal mentoring, achieving your goals is more likely if you and your partner can build an effective relationship. Our five-phase model can help provide the foundation for a rewarding shared professional endeavour. ■

Note: We created a workshop to help mentor pairs learn the model, a workbook that serves as a self-directed learning guide and resource for mentor pairs, and followup teleconferences to build capacity. We piloted the model and these tools in an Ontario Oncology APN Interprofessional e-Mentorship Program research project. The program has recently been expanded to include all oncology nurses in Ontario. The resources are also being used with two other initiatives: a research project at Ryerson University with nursing alumni and new graduate nurses and a formal mentorship program for primary health care quality-improvement coaches, launched by the Quality Improvement and Innovation Partnership.

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