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The role of mentoring for trainees

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ABSTRACT

Mentoring is a common word used widely worldwide, particularly in management. However, it is not so common word used in our medical training, in general and psychiatric training, in particular. The present article looks at the concept, different perspectives concerning mentor & mentee, the future development and meanings, all in the context of our culture and trainees.

Keywords: Mentoring, training in psychiatry, mentee, mentor.

Introduction:

The word 'mentor' has its origin in Greeks¹. It is one of the words closely woven with the mythology of the Trojan War when Odysseus, King of Ithaca leaves behind his young son Telemachus under the care of his childhood friend Mentor.

'Mentor brings up Telemachus teaching him the art of statecraft, guile to survive internecine intrigues and techniques to enforce his will over Kingdom'. (Iliad by Homer) There are many more legends abound of saving Mother Penelope from the usurpers which added to the legend of Mentor. Ultimately the story is about young and unsure lad growing up to fine youth emphasizes the importance of such a guide in the life of any person.

There are many examples, quoted in the west as Socrates and Plato, Plato and Aristotle, Haydn and Beethoven, Freud & Jung etc. Coming to India the concept of "Guru & Chela" is as old as our civilization^{2,3,4}. Kings and Chieftains in fact encouraged their lads to be brought up by rishis and sages. Other notable examples are Arjuna's relationship with Krishna and the crucial message is immortalized in the Bhagavad Gita (Gautham /Venkoba Rao etc). Other examples are Parashurama and Karna and Shakuni and Duryodhana. They are less commonly discussed as they were on the losing side. Nevertheless they bring out very strongly the varied issues involved.

MENTOR'S ROLE

Some of the common names given to mentor are friend, guru, counselor, master, philosopher, teacher, role model, coach, specialist, consultant, Godfather etc. Most common euphemism may be 'friend - philosopher - guide'. Friend for the trust, able to reach for a wider horizon and as a guide able to show the direction and the best way to reach it. All the other terms convey one or other part of mentoring issue.

It is said that all have 3 major aspects in their lives: the personal, the social and the professional. There is someone sometime who has helped us wade through these mazes. The role of parents in personal life, guardian in an individual's social life and the mentor in professional life are well known. They may be distinct but overlap each other and this may be the cause of quite a few problems in mentorship.

Some of the well recognized roles of the mentor are emphasized by different authors:

- Stephen gibbs states that mentor is an accomplished and experienced performer who takes a special personal interest in helping to guide and to develop a junior or more inexperienced person and is done without taking the fees.
- Arizona National Guard emphasizes that a mentor facilitates personal and professional growth in an individual by sharing the knowledge and the insights that have been learned through the years. The desire to share their 'life experiences' is the characteristic of a successful mentor.
- Daxid cutterbuck states that a mentor is more experienced individual willing to share knowledge with someone less experienced in a relationship of mutual trust.

Mentoring process

May begin with a simple contact which may act as a trigger and progresses through various stages of exploration, working arrangement, identification of goals and objectives, methods to reach the goals like strategies, monitoring and review and ultimately termination Sunil Unny guptan elaborates that it necessarily covers

1. Values as fundamental issues.
2. Attitudes which are positive and required
3. Personal using - what-is-in-for-me (WIIFM) which guides the relationship.

The positive WIIFMs recognized are learning, helping, sharing, feeling energetic, belonging, teaching, giving back to society, helping the underprivileged, way of life etc.

The not - so - positive WIIFMs are power, control, information, sponsoring, reliving youth and appreciation and a few which are both are networking, recognition and relationship.

4. Maturity and Wisdom
5. Cultural issues

INDIAN CULTURE & MENTORING ISSUES

1. Paternalism

It is possibly has its basis in joint family system where the head has to shoulder responsibilities and guide others.

2. Patronage is a very commonly encountered behavior
3. Familial identity which creeps in all encounters and relationships.

MENTORING COMPETENCIES & SKILLS

It is necessarily for the mentor & mentee to get together, hence the 'chemistry' between them. It can also be expressed as 'perfect fit' which explains being acceptable and positive.

The success of this fit can be assessed on various parameters and they are listed by Guptan as follows:

1. Investment in learning & development
2. Success orientation
3. Altruism
4. Heightened self awareness
5. Technical expertise in the chosen field.
6. Focused approach and goal clarity
7. Communication skills
8. Empathy and sensitivity
9. Relationship skills
10. Conceptualization skills

There are whole gamut of ethical issues involved in the mentoring process which are again summarized by Guptan¹.

- The mentee's developmental needs and growth are the primary focus of the mentoring process, and the mentor's role is to address these.
- The relationship between the mentor and the mentee is mutual and all decisions and actions will be taken by mutual consent.
- The mentor and the mentee must work within the agreed terms of confidentiality and within the context of the relationship.
- Any decision to involve or refer to an external person must be taken following a discussion and mutual consent.
- The mentor and the mentee must strive to be open and truthful with each other not only in the context of the relationship but also in the relationship itself.
- No exploitative expectations should be overtly or implicitly carried into the relationship, either by the mentor or the mentee.
- The mentor and the mentee must strive to guard the relationship and its context against misinterpretation from within and outside.
- The mentor must not intrude into the areas that the mentee does not wish to share in the relationship. Any enquiry into these areas must be with appropriate justification for it being connected to the issues in justification for it being connected to the issues involved. The mentee must respect this reciprocally too.
- The mentor must recognize and respect the individuality of the mentee and must encourage the autonomy of the mentee.
- The mentor must recognize the limits of her / his own competency and capacity and operate within them.
- The mentor must accept the responsibility and work on developing her / his own competencies and capabilities in the practice of mentoring.
- The mentor and the mentee must respect each other's time, other commitments and responsibilities to other relationships. They must be careful not to impose on each other unduly.
- The mentee must work towards accepting increasing responsibility in managing and working with the relationship as the process progresses.
- The mentor and the mentee have a mutual responsibility to discuss any move towards the dissolution of the relationship and the mentoring association with each other.
- The mentor and the mentee share equal responsibility in the smooth and

graceful denouement of the process when the set purpose has been achieved.

- The mentor and mentee have an equal responsibility in avoiding the creation of dependencies.
- The mentee should be aware of her / his rights and the mentor must help the mentee understand them.
- The mentor must work within the realms of any rule or law that may be in force.

Future of Mentoring:

Mentoring process is evolving and bound to grow as more and more organizations realize the importance. Though there are some downsides to mentoring, the advantages for mentor, mentee and organization are profound and they outweigh the former. The organization sponsored mentoring have additional benefits as it brings organizational initiatives. The choice of Internal Vs External mentors have been debated. The implementation of mentoring scheme involves designing, defining expectations, parameters and goals, establishing implementation team, seeking management support so also wider public support, training mentors and mentees and subsequent support and back-up. It is also necessary to have in place mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation.

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