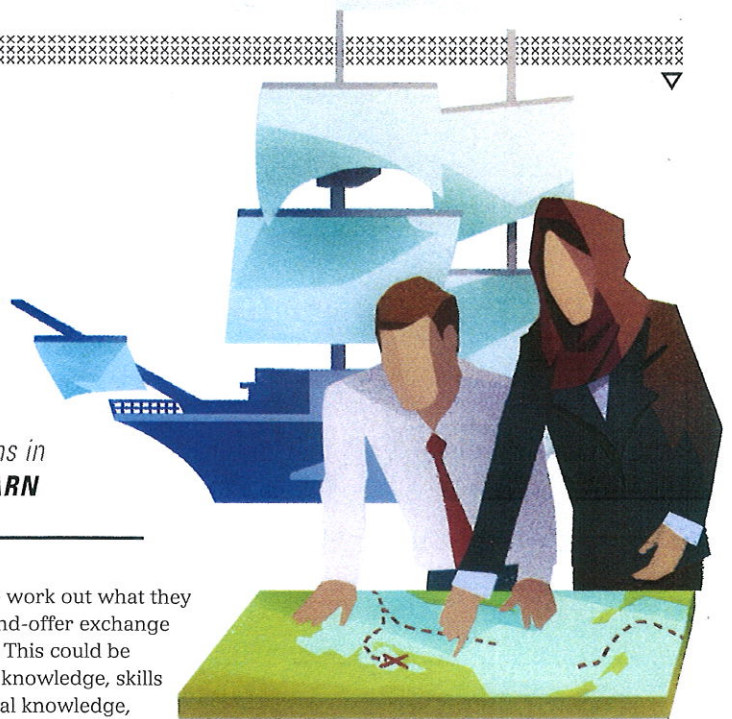


## OPINION

# HELP AT HAND

Guidance from a mentor can help you through an array of situations in the workplace, say **MANDY FLINT** and **ELISABET VINBERG HEARN**



**EVERYONE CAN BENEFIT** from having guidance from a mentor, regardless of what stage you are at in your career.

The idea of a mentor is that you have someone, often more senior than you, who can challenge and support you – and provide guidance – as a way of helping you develop in a new role, for a new challenge or simply for the future.

But that person doesn't always have to be more senior than you. In a world of increasingly flat structures there are many more peer-to-peer mentor relationships.

A mentor can offer his/her own knowledge, skills, experience and even personality as a way for the mentee to learn and develop. It's very different to the role of a coach. As a mentor, you are often asked to give answers and make suggestions, whereas pure coaching is about asking questions so that the coachee can then find the answers.

## THE BENEFITS OF MENTORING

By being a mentor or mentee you learn a lot, not only by gaining external knowledge

on, and mentors-to-be work out what they can offer so a needs-and-offer exchange mechanism is created. This could be criteria like functional knowledge, skills knowledge, behavioural knowledge, levels of seniority or levels of experience.

Regardless of which role you take, it will make you feel very good and should have a profound impact.

## THE PITFALLS TO SUCCESSFUL MENTORING

There are several reasons why mentoring programmes can fail. For example, people feel they are 'forced' to do them; they don't feel like they have time; one side is not making an effort; or people are not sure how to get the most out of it as the expectations have not been set correctly.

To overcome these pitfalls and potential risks, you need to do it in a holistic way that supports the individuals and the organisation, with full upfront involvement and ownership to ensure success.

In our experience, and according to research, the most successful type of mentoring is 'organic', where people seek

available within your organisation, then explore if you can participate in it, but even if you can't, don't let that stop you. Business/industry networks can be a good place to look for mentors – as are business schools, associations, members' clubs, and sports clubs. Sometimes the most beneficial mentoring relationships can be found in unexpected places.

## MAKE THE MOST OF IT

First, you need to decide on an outcome – what do you want to achieve?

Find a mentor who you know has the experience/skills/characteristics that you know you can learn from.

Agree with your mentor from the outset about how the mentoring will work, working out all the practicalities together.

Find a way to overcome obstacles such as 'we are too busy'.

Set expectations of the relationship up front to be clear, open and transparent, as this relationship will be built on trust.

Let go of any need either of you may have to be right or look good.

## IS IT TIME TO BECOME A MENTOR?

Why not consider becoming a mentor yourself? To mentor is to reach out to someone more junior than you, or just someone who doesn't have your skills.

And by generously sharing your experience, skills and knowledge, you are contributing to something bigger than yourself – you are helping to create the kind of sharing practice that can benefit generations to come. ■

*Leading Teams – 10 Challenges: 10 Solutions* by Mandy Flint and Elisabet Vinberg Hearn is out now (FT Publishing) [LEADINGTEAMSBK.COM](http://LEADINGTEAMSBK.COM)

## » MENTOR PROGRAMMES ARE BEST DESIGNED AS A MATCH-MAKING SERVICE. THINK OF IT LIKE A SKILLS AND BEHAVIOURS EXCHANGE SCHEME

and experience, but also about how you work, personally. We all have strength blind spots and if we are really good at something we often don't know how good we are or how we do it. Getting into a mentor/mentee relationship allows you to learn about your strength blind spots.

Mentor programmes are best designed as a match-making service. Think of it like a skills and behaviours exchange scheme. Mentees-to-be first work out what skills, behaviours etc they need to be mentored

out a mentor for a reason and choose a specific person. When setting up a mentoring scheme, we recommend an approach that emulates organic mentoring as closely as possible, while providing any support that's needed, including a critical messaging and communication strategy for the mentor programme so everyone involved really understands its value.

## WHERE TO FIND A MENTOR

If there is a mentoring programme