• Foster creativity and help them develop their own style.

• Increase their sense of competence by praising them and asking their opinions.

• Encourage them to take risks and assume initiative.

• Help them identify funding, contacts, opportunities, and other resources which will help them advance their careers.

• Be an advocate – Praise mentees and their accomplishments. Recognize their achievements and nominate them for well deserved awards.

• Counsel when necessary – help them deal with professional issues and conflicts that affect job performance.

• Give constructive and honest feedback.

• Take a personal interest, by challenging, giving candid advice, listening and serving as a sounding board. Show genuine interest in their personal values and concerns.

THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

Mentors and Mentees: Definitions and Characteristics

**Mentor:** By Webster’s definition, a mentor is a *wise and trusted teacher or counselor.* A mentor has many roles – friend, role model, advocate, confidant – and has the ability to empower others. Any 4-H educator may become a mentor. It is suggested that mentors have at least one year of experience in the Cornell Cooperative Extension system. An effective mentor possesses the following characteristics:

• High standards; commitment to excellence
• Proven effectiveness in operation
• Respect for the abilities of others
• Commitment to spend time in shared learning
• Willing to be an advocate and supporter
• Trustworthy – able to trust and be trusted
• Caring and empathetic
• Ability to communicate effectively
• Creative – receptive to new ideas
• Positive attitude
• Flexible
• Respect for the differences in others
• Commitment to high standards of ethical behavior
• Professional experience related to the position – Extension and/or other
• Values having more than one mentor

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Mentee: Webster defines mentee as one whose welfare, training, or career is advanced by an influential person. While all individuals embarking in a new professional experience can benefit from a mentor, success in the mentoring relationship may be more likely for a person with the following characteristics:

- Interacts well with others
- Good interpersonal communications skills – knows how to ask the right questions
- Sensitive to others
- Interested in new experiences, challenges, and taking risks
- Interested in learning; able to discover own resources and opportunities
- Actively seeks advice and counsel from others
- Good observer – watches and learns from others
- Teaches self, reflects on learning, works through problems

Developing the Relationship

Taking part in a mentoring program means becoming involved in a relationship. The mentoring relationship is one which is designed to promote the growth and development of the mentee.

Effective relationships are based on many factors. Some of these include communication, an attraction to or appreciation of the other person’s qualities, commitment to the same goals, and sharing of feelings, values and beliefs.

The mentoring program is designed to help develop an effective relationship between mentee and mentor. The structure is designed to allow, as much as possible, mentees to be partnered with mentors to whom they can relate and with whom they share common goals.

Communication, Commitment, and Trust

The keys to making the mentoring relationship work for both parties are communication, commitment, and trust.

- Communication: both parties should communicate openly and honestly. The mentee should willingly indicate his or her needs and the mentors should willingly share their strengths and knowledge.

- Commitment: Both parties should be committed to making the relationship work. All individuals involved should live up to their responsibilities. Because the program is designed mostly for the benefit of the mentee, he or she should take as much initiative as possible in making the relationship work.

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• Trust: Trust is an underlying factor in a successful mentoring relationship. Building trust depends on simple actions such as keeping appointments, as well as more profound actions such as sharing successes and failures. Other trust-builders include respecting confidentiality, being honest and consistent, exhibiting a positive attitude toward the other person, and respecting and valuing each other’s differences.

The Mentor’s Role in Building the Relationship

As the “wise and trusted teacher and counselor,” it’s the mentor’s role to take the initiative in building the relationship. Some suggestions include:

• Find out about your mentee in a caring, non-intrusive way…
  · past work experiences
  · education background
  · hobbies and avocations.
  · community involvement
  · things they value
  · family responsibilities- spouse, children, pets
  · concerns about the workload or certain aspects of the job
  · concerns about office or organizational politics
  · birthday and other significant life events.

• Call your mentee once every two weeks during the first two months and then every month thereafter.

• Seek out your mentee at meetings. Sit together, have lunch. Ask how things are going; concerns, successes, new programs, etc.

• Offer to room with your mentee at overnight gatherings.

• Remember your mentee’s birthday with a phone call or card; ask about other significant personal events.

The Value of the Mentoring Relationship

Benefits to the Mentee

The mentor’s primary role is to support and guide the mentee in efforts to attain program excellence. A successful mentoring relationship should continue throughout the mentee’s career.

The value of the mentoring relationship to the mentee depends upon the nature and depth of the relationship. A mentor can be a friend and confidant throughout one’s career. A mentor can help the mentee sort through the myriad of possibilities and opportunities in order to define a focus to his or her efforts.

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While a mentor should be supportive, he or she should also be objective and provide honest feedback in the most positive sense. The mentor should facilitate the growth of the mentee and their individual strengths and qualities.

Benefits to the Mentors

While the benefits to the mentees are obvious, the mentors also benefit from the mentoring relationship. Some mentor benefits include opportunities to:

- Grow and be challenged.
- Keep abreast of changes, new ideas, and concepts.
- Share ideas and expertise; develop leadership skills.
- Develop interpersonal relationships with mentees.
- Be inspired to set new professional goals and to upgrade skills.
- Conduct programs, produce publications, and increase creative activities in collaboration with mentees.
- Gain a sense of pride from watching mentees develop and grow.

Benefits to NYSACCE4-HE

The association, and therefore, the 4-H Program and its clientele, benefit from the mentoring program. Benefits include:

- Accelerated development of new talent - educators who are motivated and able to mobilize resources and people to meet program goals.
- Improved performance and productivity of both mentors and protégés.
- Increased opportunities for collaborative efforts.
- Retaining individuals with high levels of expertise who are able to meet the needs of clientele while contributing to the profession of 4-H youth development.
- Stronger impact on clientele and recognition of program at local, state and national levels.

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