



Minnesota Recreation & Parks Association

# Mentorship Program

Improving Knowledge, Lives, and Communities

**Information provided by:  
Minnesota Recreation and Parks Association  
with special thanks to the  
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This toolkit is designed to assist both the mentor and the professional. Parts of this toolkit were created from a mentor program used by Arthur Andersen and Andersen Consulting, Illinois Park & Recreation, Colorado Parks and Recreation Association and from a variety of other mentoring resources.

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## **Program Overview**

This manual provides you with guidelines and suggestions for beginning and maintaining your mentor/professional relationship. The program is created to help all Minnesota Recreation and Park Association (MRPA) members and is meant to complement the career counseling relationship an employee may have with their supervisor. It is not intended to replace any of the formal or informal counseling/mentoring relationships that already exist within or outside a person's place of employment. As a matter of course, MRPA members are encouraged to develop several informal mentor/professional relationships throughout their careers as a means to nurture and foster the park and recreation professional.

## **Objectives**

This program is voluntary and provides individuals with an opportunity to:

- Build professional relationships.
- Discuss career goals and project issues with someone outside of the employees' direct reporting relationship.
- Provide a forum where ideas, questions, and career development are openly discussed.
- Share the MRPA knowledge capital, foster networking within the career, and professionally enhance the career of MRPA members.

## **Program Guidelines**

Listed below are the general guidelines of the program and specific information about the role of the mentor.

- Mentor/Professional relationships will ideally last for one year, but can be longer.
- Mentors and professionals are encouraged to contact one another at least once a month and more often as necessary or desired.
- Meetings are most productive if they are held in settings that allow professional interaction.
- If at anytime during the program the coaching relationship is not meeting the needs of the pair, a re-assignment may be required.

### **A mentor can be expected to:**

- Provide career advice.
- Communicate the purpose of the MRPA and associated initiatives.
- Recommend skill development opportunities to the professional for improvement or preparation for advancement in the field.
- Assist with acclimation and expectation setting for any new position in the field or volunteer assignments with MRPA, regardless of the years of experience.

## **Roles of Mentors**

Your role as a mentor is to be a resource to the professional in the relationship. You need to foster a trusting and open relationship that allows you to give direction and feedback when needed, assist in career development, and be a confidential sounding board. Mentoring is a two-way street, and requires that you commit to the relationship.

### **Mentor Guidelines**

- Be positive and honest.
- Respect the professional you are mentoring. Never make them feel foolish for asking a question.
- Be perceived as approachable and available.
- Get to know your “Professional” on a professional level.
- Provide guidance on career development.
- Make your role as a mentor a high priority.
- Share our experiences and tell your stories – personal scenarios offer valuable, and often unforgettable, insight.
- Share your failures and successes – both types of stories are powerful lessons that provide valuable opportunities for learning.
- Ask questions that make the professional you are mentoring think - good questions require comparison, evaluation and reflection.
- Ask questions. What does the professional you are mentoring think about his/her career? How would he/she like for you to help him/her? What expectations does he/she have of you?
- Support and praise the mentored when the situation merits support and praise.
- Encourage two-way feedback. Periodically assess the mentoring relationship. Is it giving each of you what you anticipated in the teaching relationship? Offer positive and constructive feedback on the relationship.
- Don’t be afraid to say “I don’t know but I’ll follow up and get back to you.”
- Refer to the confidentiality statement found on page 9 for guidelines as to how to handle sensitive matters.

## **Roles of Professional**

As a Professional, you have a wonderful opportunity to benefit from the experiences of your mentor. Your mentor is there to provide support, direction, and feedback. But don't forget that you have a responsibility for this relationship and what you get out of it. Be proactive in fostering the relationship with your mentor and don't always wait for him/her to contact you.

### **Professional Guidelines**

- Be proactive.
- Understand the significance of this professional relationship. It is a two-way exchange and you must be willing to give information and support.
- Be positive, honest, and open.
- Accept advice graciously, but make your own decisions. Only you know what is truly best for you.
- Take responsibility for managing your career.
- Demonstrate confidence. Your knowledge, skills and abilities provide valuable input to the relationship. Your mentor can gain just as much from you as you can from your mentor.
- Be dependable, responsible, and prepared for mentoring discussions.
- Ask questions – even the ones you are hesitant to ask. Your mentor is there to provide support and act as a provider of information.
- Respect your mentor. Their experiences can help you make the most of your own experiences.
- Confide in your mentor and respect the confidentiality of mentoring discussions. Be honest, open and sincere with your concerns. Your mentor may share information with you that they may not otherwise share outside of the relationship; be conscious of this and do not share information publicly that was shared within the mentoring relationship.
- Share your perspectives on life at your level. This will help your mentor keep in touch with people outside of their world of existence.
- Challenge and help your mentor to succeed as a mentor.
- Take responsibility for initiating and maintaining contact with your mentor.

## **Before You Begin...A Message to Mentors**

### **Mentors, you've been selected**

- Proactively participate in the program - it's important to help develop others in this profession.
- Get to know the person you are mentoring and understand what his/her goals are for the program.
- Share your knowledge and experiences with the person you are mentoring.
- Have fun, network, and learn from the relationship.

### **Mentoring Preparation**

*These questions will help you prepare for your first mentor meeting. Complete these questions and begin thinking about your goals and expectations of the relationship.*

1. What outcomes do you most want from the relationship?
2. What do you need to do as the mentor to make this work?
3. What are some features of my job that I like best? That I like least?
4. What are my major accomplishments since I started the position I am in?
5. How can I best help my profession?
6. What have I done for my personal and professional development?
7. What one thing do I wish someone had told me when I was at the level of the professional?
8. What does it take to be successful in the park and recreation career?
9. Describe your perception of the roles and responsibilities of both the mentor and the professional.
10. How did you first get involved in the MRPA?
11. How did you get involved in any affiliate you might have worked with?
12. How did volunteerism in these organizations help you nurture your career?
13. What were some of the more valuable lessons you learned from these acts of volunteerism?
14. Who was a mentor for you in your early years in the field? If you have a mentor now, who is it?
15. Why have you stayed in the park and recreation career?

## **Before You Begin...A Message to Professional**

### **Professional, you've volunteered to participate**

- Proactively participate in the program – you have so much to gain.
- Get to know your mentor and share with him/her your goals and objectives of the program.
- Take responsibility for your career and personal growth.
- Have fun, network, learn from the relationship, and learn how to be a good mentor for others.

### **Professional Preparation**

*These questions are designed to stimulate your thinking and to help you prepare for your meeting with your mentor. Think about your personal and professional development plan and what you can do to help nurture this plan. Considerations you can think about include how you can contribute to the profession as a volunteer and what you can do to enhance career growth and development for yourself. It is recommended that you complete these questions and use this form as an outline for your first mentoring meeting.*

1. What do I consider the important competencies that my job requires?
2. What are some aspects of my job that I like best? That I like least?
3. What are my major accomplishments since joining the organization? Since last year?
4. In what areas do I need to improve over the next three months?
5. In what areas of responsibility in my job do I feel I need more experience and training?
6. What have I done for my personal and professional development for me?
7. What have I done to enhance the professional development of others?
8. What are my long-range plans? What type of work do I see myself doing five years from now? How am I preparing myself for this work?
9. How can I get involved in MRPA?
10. Describe your perception of the roles and responsibilities of both you and the mentor.
11. What specifically do you hope to learn from this mentoring relationship?
12. What do you hope to contribute to the mentor from this relationship?

## **First Meeting Agenda**

This worksheet provides a topic agenda for your first professional/mentor meeting. It is suggested that your initial meeting focus on defining your relationship by discussing roles and responsibilities, expectations, needs and goals. The first meeting sets the tone for the teaching/learning relationship. This tool will help you plan and prepare.

Review the meeting agenda, prepare necessary notes and use as a discussion outline.

### **Before the Meeting**

- Complete your preparation planning worksheets.
- Review the First Meeting Agenda
- Attend to necessary logistics (schedule time, advance notice and no telephone interruptions).

### **During the Meeting**

- Getting acquainted
- Review the agenda to determine desired outcomes of the meeting.
- Discuss expectations, roles, responsibilities and needs.
- Record decisions and outcomes.
- Discuss what went well and what improvements can be made for your next meeting.
- Schedule next meeting (not more than 30 days is suggested).

### **After the Meeting**

- Review objectives that were accomplished.
- Determine future meeting topics.
- Summarize meeting results and next steps.

## **Discussion Questions for Mentoring Meetings**

Below are some helpful questions and topic ideas for you to use during your mentoring meetings.

### **Getting Acquainted – Questions to ask your Mentor:**

- How did you get to where you are in your career and can you describe your struggles and achievements along the way?
- What are your professional needs and goals?
- Do you have three words of advice you can offer me so that I can continue to progress within the career?
- What are the most valuable lessons you have learned during your career? How might I apply it to my career?
- What skills do I need to nurture that will help me to be extraordinary in my current job?
- What issues do I need to focus on that would help me understand the direction of my career?
- What is the best way for me to connect to the community I serve without usurping the authority of the administrators who I report to?
- What are some political difficulties that I can learn to avoid that will enhance my effectiveness in the community I serve?
- Who would be the most effective people I need to associate myself with to improve the opportunity for advancement in the career?
- Considering my goals, what can I do to expand my skill base?
- Any ideas on how I can independently assess my true career potential?

### **Volunteerism and Building Professional Relationships:**

- How do I cultivate successful professional relationships in MRPA?
- What can I do to network in an effort to develop more contacts?
- What communication skills are critical for effectively dealing with people in my work and the park and recreation career?
- What value is volunteerism with MRPA and affiliates to me?
- What areas of involvement in these organizations would you recommend to me?

### **Balancing Your Personal and Professional Life:**

- The hours I work make it challenging to have personal time outside of work. Do you have any helpful suggestions?
- I'm working for a difficult individual who doesn't share the same personal priorities that I have. Do you have any suggestions?
- Any creative solutions for balancing my personal life with work?

## **Mentoring Behaviors to Practice- In Cases Where The Professional is Having Difficulty on the Job**

The following are tips on how to be an effective mentor under these circumstances:

### **Listening**

Listening may be the premier art of coaching. When the professional has a problem, providing a respectful, listening ear and serving as a sounding board may be all that is needed to help. Respectful listening means actively hearing what they are saying about her/his problem without inserting your own opinion. When this occurs, it gives them the opportunity to “think aloud”, articulate the problem and various options, and achieve the emotional release they need. Careful listening will help them accept ownership and responsibility of his/her problem. They may often find the needed decision on how to solve the problem from thinking out loud. They will also have pride and satisfaction of having solved the problem on his/her own.

### **Feedback**

When the professional explains a problem to you, his/her explanation will contain both facts and feelings. By listening carefully to discern the feelings involved and providing feedback to them on what you’re hearing, in terms of the facts and feelings, you will let them know that you not only heard them, but you understand. This helps the professional feel that they are not alone with the problem. By allowing them to flood their feelings, he/she can move on to exploring options and working on a solution. After they have worked through their feelings ready to explore options, they may be ready for you to share information or personal insights.

### **Productive Confrontation**

At some point, you may wish to confront the attitude, behavior or plans of the professional. It is extremely important to avoid criticism, which may result in resistance or harm his/her self-esteem. Communication specialists recommend using an “I” message confrontation as the most effective way to bring about beneficial change. This approach can be effective because it allows your participant to make his/her own decision based on additional information that you provide. The “I” approach is made up of three parts:

- Start with a neutral description of what you perceive that our professional intends.
- Indicate the possible negative consequences that you anticipate as a result of his/her intention.
- Note the feelings or emotions you are experiencing about the professional’s plan.

Example: Your participant has stated that he/she is planning to “have it out” with a manager who has been giving him/her problems. “I” confrontation response: “I’m concerned that you are going to have a major confrontation with (\_\_\_\_\_) and that this will result in a serious disruption to your working relationship and could be damaging to your career.”

### **Context Shifting**

An important way that you may be able to help the professional is to assist them to see him/herself in a broader, more self-actualizing, positive light. By helping them to shift his/her self-image or shift the paradigm he/she has of a particular situation, you may be able to help him/her shift the mental context from today’s problems to tomorrow’s success.

### **Confidentiality**

The foundation to building trust between the mentor/professional is the belief that the exchange of information will remain between the mentor/professional. However, when a mentor or professional demonstrates through his/her actions, words or gestures the physical or psychological threat to the other professional, it is the receiver’s responsibility to report the threat to the appropriate authorities.

## **Managing Your Relationship**

### **Leading by Example – Being an Effective Mentor Model**

*“More is caught than taught.”*

*“People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”*

#### **Have Integrity**

- Do you do what you say you’ll do?
- Do you live according to the values and principles you verbally espouse?
- Would you be ashamed if people really knew you?
- Can the following people depend on you? Boss? Peers? Subordinates? Family? Friends?
- When was the last time you apologized to someone for a mistake or offense?

#### **Be Competent**

- Do you understand and communicate the overall business objectives driving projects?
- Do you understand the park and recreation industry and the issues affecting the career?
- Do you possess the technical knowledge and skills necessary for you to perform effectively?
- How would you assess your project management skills?
- How are your people skills? Do you relate with concern, respect and effectiveness?
- In general, do people like working for and with you?

#### **Balance Personal and Professional Priorities**

- Does work fit into your life or does life fit into work?
- Is your family life suffering as a result of your professional life?
- Do you know your limits?
- Do you effectively set boundaries and keep them?
- How much time per week do you spend developing personal friendships?
- When was the last time you respectfully told your boss, “no”?

#### **Care About People and Demonstrate This**

- Do you listen and ask questions with the goal to understand and get to know others?
- Are you willing to consider others’ input and perspectives even if they are less experienced?
- Do you give people warning before asking them to work overtime?
- Do you consider your team’s schedule before accepting additional unplanned work?
- When was the last time you asked a co-worker a question about his/her personal life?
- Do you treat a supervisor or a part-time employee with the same respect as a board member?
- Do you ever look for opportunities to help others even when it’s not your responsibility?
- When is the last time you gave someone a praise or complement?

#### **Take the Initiative**

- Do you ask others to do things you wouldn’t do yourself?
- Do you often take the first step in relationships or in opening up?

#### **Make Yourself Accountable**

- Do you ask for help?
- Do you share your goals, struggles, and progress with others and let them help you?
- Do you welcome feedback?
- When was the last time a co-worker or friend told you something that was difficult for you to hear?  
How did you respond?

## **Mentoring Behaviors to Avoid**

Below are tips of items to avoid in a mentoring relationship:

### **Offering Advice**

Offering advice shifts responsibility for constructive decision making from the professional to the mentor. If the mentor offers advice, it curtails personal growth by the professional. The advice carries the subliminal message the “You’re not able to solve the problem on your own, so I can do it for you by telling you what I think”. It infers that you have superior knowledge or insight into the problem, when the Professional is actually the one who has the personal experience of the problem at hand. Effective mentors share, model and teach; they do not take over problems.

As a mentor, you can best help the professional you are mentoring by:

- Listening carefully as he/she describes the problem.
- Confirm the emotions you hear him/her express to indicate that you have not only heard them, but that you understand the deeper, emotional nature of his/her difficulty.
- Provide ideas or information, when he/she asks, which he/she can use to develop his/her own solution.

### **Criticizing**

Research has shown that there is no such thing as constructive criticism. By definition, criticism is evaluative and judgmental and usually perceived as threatening. People resist listening to criticism in response to the basic need for survival and security. Criticism damages self-esteem. Rather, your Professional can benefit from your assistance in helping him/her explore where a course of action may lead or provide a new analysis of problems. You may help to define the gap between what is and what is needed. The gap needs to be defined in neutral, non-evaluative terms. Closing the gap needs to be viewed as something to be accomplished.

### **Building Barriers**

Mentors have the potential of building barriers between themselves and the professional without intending to and without realizing the barriers have been created.

### **Rescuing**

If a person recognizes the cause of his/her mistake and utilizes that information to make better decisions in the future, growth can occur. Rescuing, however, has to do with trying to help someone who has established a pattern of mistakes. If a person’s mistakes are driven by a repetitive pattern, such as driving too fast, rescuing them will only encourage them to continue the same behavior. A good example of this may be seen with parents who constantly rescue their children from the consequences of their actions. When dysfunctional behavior patterns appear to persist, it may be helpful for you to point out the patterns to the professional and use counseling skills to help him/her break the pattern.

### **Professional Behavior**

This program is designed to encourage a free exchange of ideas in which all individuals are treated with respect and dignity. They will promote the development of professional relationships between mentors and professional. Any abusive attitude, language, or conduct is to be avoided at all costs.

Sources: Shea, Gordon, (1994). Mentoring: Helping employees reach their potential. New York, NY: AMA Membership Publications Division  
Shea, Gordon, (1992). Mentoring: A practical guide. Los Altos, CA: Crisp Publications.  
Homewood Flossmoor Park District Personnel Policy Manual

## **Summary of the 16 Laws of Mentoring**

- 1. The Law of Positive Environment** - Create a positive environment where potential and motivation are released and options discussed.
- 2. The Law of Developing Character** - Nurture a positive character by helping to develop not just talent, but a wealth of mental and ethical traits.
- 3. The Law of Independence** - Promote autonomy; make the professional independent of you, not dependent on you.
- 4. The Law of Limited Responsibility** - Be responsible to them, not for them.
- 5. The Law of Shared Mistakes** - Share your failures as well as your successes.
- 6. The Law of Planned Objectives** - Prepare specific objectives for your relationship.
- 7. The Law of Inspection** - Monitor, review, critique, and discuss potential actions. Do not just expect performance without inspection.
- 8. The Law of Tough Love** - The participants acknowledge the need to encourage independence in the professional.
- 9. The Law of Small Successes** - Use a stepping-stone process to build on accomplishments and achieve great success.
- 10. The Law of Direction** - It is important to teach by giving options as well as direction.
- 11. The Laws of Risk** - A mentor should be aware that a professional's failure may reflect back upon him. A professional should realize that a mentor's advice will not always work.
- 12. The Law of Mutual Protection** - Commit to cover each other's backs. Maintain privacy. Protect integrity, character, and the pearls of wisdom you have shared with one another.
- 13. The Law of Communication** - The mentor and the professional must balance listening with delivering information.
- 14. The Law of Extended Commitment** - The mentoring relationship extends beyond the typical 9-to-5 business day and/or traditional workplace role or position.
- 15. The Law of Life Transition** - As a mentor, when you help a professional enter the next stage of his life or career, you will enter the next stage of yours.
- 16. The Law of Fun** - Make mentoring a wonderful experience laugh, smile, and enjoy the process.

Source: Wickman, Floyd & Sjodin, Terri, (1997). Mentoring. Chicago, IL: Irwin Professional Publishing

## **Effective Listening**

### **Book Data**

Listening: The Forgotten Skill – A Self-Teaching Guide. Madelyn Burley-Allen, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.

### **Problem Area**

The author's main area of concern is that most people have never learned how to be a good listener. Our educational institutions teach us how to speak, spell, and write, but they don't teach us how to listen. This seems odd, since about 40% of our communication time with others is spent listening. However, listening is a skill, and thus, can be learned. She sets out to show that acquiring this skill is crucial to our interpersonal relationships. Good listening skills can result in the following benefits:

- Improved communication with other people.
- Reduced misunderstandings.
- Fewer mistakes (some may be costly!).
- Fewer quarrels between friends and family, etc.

The author uses research, experience, life experiences of others, and self-study exercises to help make her book easy to read, convincing and practical. She argued convincingly that most people are ineffective listeners even though listening is the biggest channel for learning and the biggest part of communication. She distinguished between 3 levels of listening and helped her readers understand and practice "level 1," or "empathic" listening.

### **Helpfulness**

We appreciated the author's clear explanations and practical examples from the work environment. She helped heighten our awareness of the importance of effective listening and how poorly we often listen in business and in other relationships. She offered tips to practice when listening and when speaking that will be very helpful to us as we try to communicate effectively.

When listening, we want to remember the following:

- Summarize (internally and verbally back to the speaker) and confirm understanding
- Concentrate; focus on the main ideas, don't get lost in the details, and resist distractions
- Keep an open mind and don't be defensive; don't formulate a rebuttal while listening
- Do not judge or refute right away, jot down questions and seek to understand fully
- Be vocally attentive
- Do not give advice right away, let the other person suggest her own solution
- Take initiative and get interested; take advantage of the opportunity to learn
- Be aware of emotions and hot buttons; these may make empathic listening difficult
- Use supportive and not suppressive language
- Focus on intent and meaning; evaluate the content and not the words or delivery
- Take brief but meaningful notes
- Check non-verbal signals

When speaking, we want to remember the following:

- Make eye contact
- Know what you want to say (plan it if possible) and be concise and specific
- Know the listener
- Gain favorable attention and encourage feedback
- Secure understanding and aid retention
- Give nonjudgmental positive feedback rather than general judgments
- Speak in terms of how you feel and don't blame the other person; take responsibility

## **Listening Tips**

### **When Listening**

#### **Do this:**

Focus attentively; make eye contact; be interested and involved or get out of the conversation

Seek to understand vs. refuting, forming rebuttal in my mind

Don't try to solve problems or give advice right away

Be aware of initial biases or emotional hot buttons

Communicate respectfully – disagree when appropriate, but don't assassinate character or belittle

#### **Down Side**

Takes energy, distracted

Lack of focus; pride; desire for efficiency

Lack of focus; pride; desire for efficiency

Don't know self; difficult

Insecurity, lack of care, desire to be right

#### **Up Side**

Might learn something

Builds relationship; learn; or more creativity

Affirms person; lets them develop

Tempers response; won't discard entire argument

Creates mutual respect

### **When Talking**

#### **Do this:**

Plan what to say when possible; be concise

Don't dominate conversation – ask questions of other

Ask questions and look for non-verbals to secure understanding

Give positive non-judgmental feedback vs. general judgments

#### **Down Side**

Takes time

Risk lack of control or in-attention

Self-absorbed

Tend to evaluate

#### **Up Side**

Efficient

More attention received

Increase understanding

Increase openness

## **Recommended Reading**

### **Mentoring**

Brounstein, Marty. (2000). Coaching and Mentoring for Dummies. For Dummies; 1 edition

Burley-Allen, Madelyn, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Listening: The forgotten skill – As self-teaching guide, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

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