

Board Development Mentor Program

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According to Lois J. Zachary, President of Leadership Development Services, LLC; mentoring increases commitment to the organization and its board, and is extremely gratifying. Every new board member is assigned two mentors from day one- a veteran board mentor and a lay leader mentor- to hasten his or her integration and involvement. The board development committee does the matching.

Mentoring partners meet virtually and/or in person prior to and after every board meeting during the first year of board service. The board mentors welcome the new board members into the "organizational family" by introducing them to the people, issues, and work of the organization and serving as go-to people and sounding boards. The lay leader's job is to translate organization alphabet soup and familiarize new board members with the organization's current and long-term programmatic and financial operations. As both mentors get to know the new board member, they confer about how to best utilize the mentee's time and talent and enhance his or her board experience.

After one year of service, one board member commented to me, "I've served on many boards and never before felt so welcomed; as a result, am I more willing to give my time. I feel connected to the people, the work, and the mission of the agency. Because of that, I am able to better represent its mission to our stakeholders."

Promoting ongoing individual and organizational learning; A long-term health care organization hired me to develop a peer mentoring program for its board members. The goal was to continuously educate board members about complex health care issues and trends. At the first meeting of the year, they receive a 12-month board education agenda and are invited to share their expertise and/or experience in critical areas and to mentor fellow board members. These critical areas include board issues, policy making, budgeting, allocations, relocation, advocacy, and the endowment.

In talking with new board members, I hear remarkable stories that speak to the power of mentoring. They can't imagine not having a go-to person to answer questions, bounce ideas off of, and help sort out organizational puzzles. They tell me they feel more comfortable more quickly because they have established meaningful relationships. And because they are able to grasp the big picture faster, they are able to make meaningful contributions to their boards sooner.

To build, grow, and support a viable board mentoring culture, you should do the following:

- Establish concrete learning objectives and long-term goals that you can measure and celebrate.

- Secure visible support, involvement, and commitment from the highest levels of the board and staff.
- Involve the governance committee in developing, implementing, and evaluating the program.
- Determine how you will pair mentors and mentees (this will depend on your goals and learning objectives).
- Be willing to look outside your organization for mentors; for example, your governance committee chair might ask a governance committee chair in a sister organization to be his or her mentor.

MENTORING DOs AND DON'Ts

- Do establish points of connection early on in the relationship.
- Don't assume because you serve together that you know each other.
- Do be sensitive to the day-to-day needs of your partner.
- Don't forget to find out what else is on your partner's plate.
- Do identify and utilize multiple venues for communication. Don't rely on face-to-face interaction alone.
- Do set a regular contact schedule, but don't be inflexible.
- Do check regularly on the effectiveness of communication. Don't assume that the messages you are sending are being received or understood.
- Do talk about the effectiveness of the mentoring process. Don't forget to evaluate learning progress.

Defining the Mentor and Mentee

A mentor is an experienced lay leader, or professional who can provide guidance for the mentee's volunteer path. He/she is also available to the mentee to provide support on an ongoing basis. Mentors may also assist mentees with other networking opportunities relevant to their professional career.

A mentee is someone who is interested in developing an ongoing relationship with a more seasoned lay leader or professional, who can guide him/her on their volunteer path within an organization. Mentees may also be seeking additional networking outlets for professional development.

Mentor Roles/Responsibilities

- A more experience lay leader or professional will be selected to provide guidance and direction for the mentee. Once a match has been identified, the mentor will receive an email with the information on the mentee, including his/her contact information. The mentor should call the mentee to set up the initial meeting.
- The mentor should discuss the following at the initial meeting:
 - ❖ The parameters of the relationship they both are comfortable with; how often to meet, what the best way is to communicate, etc.
 - ❖ Goals and objectives for the mentoring relationship. Mentor should be able to identify why he/she wants a mentee and what can be gained from this experience.

- ❖ Suggest ways he/she can assist the mentee in reaching their goals.
 - ❖ Share why he/she chooses to be an active lay leader or professional
 - ❖ Discuss the confidentiality of the relationship.
- The mentor and mentee should commit to meeting for an entire year. Ideally, the mentor and mentee will maintain this relationship after the year is complete, and the mentor will guide the mentee on his/her leadership path in the community.
 - Mentor should be available to their mentee by phone, email and by meeting in person. Every 6 – 8 weeks in person would be appropriate.
 - ❖ Check in by phone periodically, especially after board meetings, or when suitable to get mentee's feedback and serve as a sounding board.
 - By serving in a mentoring role, the mentor will utilize their years of involvement to help develop the next generation of leaders. The mentor will guide the mentee by helping to identify appropriate roles and responsibilities for the mentee to pursue.
 - Mentor should invite his/her mentee to join them for events and meetings, as well as professional events if applicable.
 - ❖ Call mentee before appropriate meetings or events to arrange to attend together.
 - Mentor may attend the mentee's transition interview and assist in determining how the mentee may continue volunteering.

Mentee Roles/Responsibilities

- Mentee will be matched with an active lay leader or professional. Leadership will coordinate to make appropriate mentor/mentee matches.
- Mentee should discuss the following at their initial meeting:
 - ❖ The parameters of the relationship they both are comfortable with; how often to meet, what the best way is to communicate, etc.
 - ❖ Goals and objectives for the mentoring relationship. Mentor should be able to identify why he/she wants a mentor and what can be gained from this experience.
 - ❖ Suggest ways he/she would like mentor to assist them in volunteer and/or career path.
 - ❖ Share why he/she chooses to be an active lay leader in the Jewish community.
 - ❖ Discuss the confidentiality of the relationship.
- Take the lead on scheduling meetings and determine how frequently you wish to meet. Every 6-8 weeks is a good guideline for meeting in person. Additionally, you may wish to speak by phone between meetings.
- Ask questions:
 - ❖ Use time together wisely to get the knowledge you are seeking.

- ❖ Be prepared with questions at each meeting to learn about Mentors community experiences.
- Be a good listener:
 - ❖ Actively listen for the information that will be helpful to them.
 - ❖ Feel free to take notes at meetings, as this is a learning experience.
 - ❖ Think about what can be learned from your mentor and their experiences; what committees they have served on, roles they have played in the community, relationships with professionals/lay leaders, etc.
- Make an effort to attend meetings and events with your mentor, when appropriate. Don't hesitate to call and ask whether or not you can join him/her.
- The mentee can also utilize his/her mentor in the planning of meetings and to learn about community resources available for programming.
- Continually revisit how the mentor can assist them in their volunteer and/or career path.
 - ❖ Identify problems/obstacles that they are encountering so they can be discussed with mentor.
- Don't take your mentor for granted; do not ask for inappropriate information or favors
- Mentee may have their mentor at the transition interview so the mentor is able to assist in determining how the mentee may continue volunteering.