

The Citymothers Mentoring Scheme: An introduction and resource

Esther Cavett

Welcome to the Citymothers Mentoring Scheme

Louisa Symington-Mills, founder of Citymothers and Cityfathers, and I are delighted you have decided to join the Citymothers Mentoring Scheme and hope you will find this e-booklet useful. It is written specifically as an introduction to the Scheme and resource for participants, and covers the following topics:

- What is mentoring?
- Why is Citymothers offering a Mentoring Scheme?
- Mentoring Benefits
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Stages of the mentoring process
- Useful materials

Citymothers will be offering face-to-face support for mentors and mentees in periodic mentoring scheme “surgeries” during the year, but in your application to be admitted to the Scheme you agreed you would read and reflect on this e-booklet and I encourage you to provide feedback on it and on the Scheme generally to me at esther@citymothers.co.uk.

We hope you will benefit from and enjoy being part of our community.

With best wishes,

Esther Cavett

Citymothers Mentoring Scheme Director

What is mentoring?

There is no general agreement on what is meant by mentoring, as the following quotations, taken from various resources on the subject, show:

“Offline help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking”

“A voluntary, mutually beneficial and purposeful relationship in which an individual gives time to support another to enable them to make changes in their life ”

“One to one relationship over a period of time between a less experienced person (mentee) and an established professional (mentor) which provides support, guidance and practical help ”

The first quotation brings out the “offline” aspect of most mentoring relationships. In other words the mentor is not typically the mentee’s line manager; it also references the role of mentoring in assisting the mentee in making “transitions” of various kinds. It might be questioned whether all mentoring involves making a transition, but it is surely the case that one seeks a mentor to consider some kind of change in approach if not circumstance. The second definition again brings out the element of “change”, and also references the relationship being “voluntary, mutually beneficial, and purposeful”.

Whether or not the mentor receives remuneration, which is not the case in this Scheme, the relationship will not work well unless the participants are voluntarily committed to it. The “mutually beneficial” reference anticipates later comments in this e-booklet, on the mentor’s role: this is a two-way relationship where both have much to learn and gain.

This second quotation brings out an important point—that mentoring involves the giving and receiving of time. For the specific audience of professional women who are often time poor in any case, and usually much more so when they have had children, this is particularly resonant.

The third quotation considers mentoring to be “one-to-one” which is typically but not necessarily the case. The quotation also references the difference levels of professional experience between mentor and mentee, which generally is a feature of the Scheme, but peer mentoring can be very productive.

The question of whether the relationship should provide “guidance” and “practical help” is another moot point. Certain types of coaching, influenced by counselling models, might dispute this. Overall, these definitions illustrate that there are many different definitions of mentoring, and thus the way is open for Citymothers to offer its own, which is as follows:

“The purpose of the mentoring relationship is for the mentor to offer the mentee a supportive and confidential environment in which to discuss and think through issues regarding her work and parenting role from the perspective of managing her career progression and work-life balance.”

You will see that our aspiration is to assist you in considering career and work-life balance issues, rather than personal matters, but we of course acknowledge that personal issues inevitably have an impact on your performance at work.

How do people typically “use” a mentoring relationship?

From the mentee’s perspective, typically she will want:

- Someone to listen
- Advice on career
- Advice on work / life balance
- Recommendations
- Feedback
- A sounding board
- Advice on visibility
- Encouragement

But the mentor’s role is not only to give to the mentee. The process of being a mentor can be personally enriching, too. So the mentor will gain:

- A growth opportunity
- Giving something back
- Fresh perspectives
- Opportunity to improve and develop coaching and listening skills

What the mentor might offer the mentee?

She or he is a resource to:

- Suggest strategies to accomplish work objectives
- Share ideas and possibly technical knowledge of a particular area of business
- Provide insights into work and life issues
- Give support

She or he may have a “coaching style” which:

- Uses open questions to define issues and establish objectives
- Reflects on the issues the mentee brings to the table
- Create a non-threatening climate to test skills and receive feedback
- Helps the mentee devise strategies for managing work / life balance; performance anxiety; difficult situations; other concerns raised by mentee

She or he may act as a role model who:

- Shares appropriate behaviours, attitudes, protocol and life experiences
- Demonstrates effective behaviours
- Inspires mentee because of having “been there and done it already”

Clearly the extent to which these ingredients are present will depend on the background and experience of the mentor, and nobody is likely to offer everything outlined above.