

# ***The Mentoring Program: Being a Mentor***

## **Kentucky Cooperative Extension**

COOPERATIVE  
EXTENSION



UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY  
College of Agriculture

KENTUCKY STATE UNIVERSITY

*Caring about others works because it's a paradigm focused on people, not things; it's focused on relationships, not schedules; it's focused on effectiveness, not efficiency; it's focused on personal leadership, not resource management.*

--Stephen R. Covey

**University of Kentucky ♦ Kentucky State University**



## Acknowledgments

Extension materials reviewed and used for the development of this program were from the following states: *Ohio, Wyoming, Tennessee, Maine, Georgia, Colorado, Kansas, Connecticut, and Idaho*. Additional information came from the *International Mentoring Association and The Mentoring Institute*. Finally, the following books were used as background information for developing the philosophical foundation for this program: *Mentoring: Helping Employees Reach Their Full Potential* by Gordon F. Shea and published by the American Management Association, 1993; *Mentoring: How to Develop Successful Mentor Behaviors*, by Gordon F. Shea and published by Crisp Publications, 1997; and, *Mentoring: A Success Guide for Mentors and Protégés* by Floyd Wickman and Terri S. Jodin and published by McGraw-Hill, 1997.

## Committee:

Members of the state-wide committee which framed the Mentor Program for Kentucky are as follows:

Martha Nall, Chair .....	Program and Staff Development Specialist
Lena Mallory .....	Graves County, 4-H/ Youth Development
Brenda Franey .....	Fayette County, 4-H/Youth Development
Linda Stephens .....	Russell County, Home Economics
Don Sorrell .....	Campbell County, Agriculture & Natural Resources
Carol Benson .....	Laurel County, Home Economics
Rick Greenwell.....	Washington County, Agriculture & Natural Resources
Doug Choate .....	Mammoth Cave Area Program Director
Bill Umscheid.....	Assistant Director, 4-H/Youth Development

## INTRODUCTION

As organizations have become more complex mentoring has gained acceptance as a tool to help individuals develop knowledge, skills and attitudes that promote their growth as individuals and as valuable employees. The research of Daniel Levinson and Gail Sheehy in the late 70's and early 80's led to a recognition of the important role a mentor plays in personal and professional growth and integration into career development tracks.

Cooperative Extension is a multi-million dollar organization which makes vast demands on employees. It operates with several layers of management and responds to stakeholders at local, state and national levels. Additionally, as an organization the entry level professional position in Extension is that of a program manager. We call them County Extension Agents, however, the responsibilities include organization, supervision and management.

For an employee new to the organization, having a co-worker who serves as a guide and coach to help them avoid mistakes, address concerns, answer questions and provide a sounding board for ideas, makes the transition from *new agent* to *experienced agent* a smoother process and increases the potential for success. For the organization, facilitating the orientation and integration of the new employee leads to increased effectiveness, managerial success and reduced turnover.

This mentoring program is designed to be flexible, yet provide parameters and guidelines to assist all persons involved in helping a new agent. The activities of visiting with agents in other counties will continue to be an integral part of a new agents orientation. The core trainings, program area trainings, newsletters, and District Director visits are important to the development of the new agent and should be continued. No topic or idea included in this document should replace something currently being done, but rather, this program should be seen as an opportunity to reinforce the current programs. The mentoring relationship should be seen as one of several professional relationships which guide and direct a new agent in the first year of their employment.

### Origin of "Mentor"

The term *mentor* has its origins in Greek mythology. When King Odysseus left home to fight in the Trojan War he entrusted the care and education of his son Telemachus, to his friend and advisor, Mentor. While Odysseus was gone, Mentor served as guardian, teacher and father figure to his young charge. The term "mentor" has become synonymous with trusted advisor, friend, teacher and wise person.

## **THE EXTENSION MENTOR**

Mentoring programs are developed for a wide variety of purposes. Kentucky Cooperative Extension hopes that through positive mentoring experiences our employees will find the challenge of growing as a professional and becoming an integral part of the organization an experience made easier through the support and encouragement of a caring co-worker.

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

Through caring, professional partnerships, useful knowledge and skills are communicated to new agents, thus assisting them in becoming productive County Extension Agents that enhance Kentucky Cooperative Extension and improve the quality of life for the citizens of this Commonwealth.

## **PHILOSOPHY**

The five statements listed below communicate the philosophical foundation of the mentoring program. Simple statements that yield profound outcomes when integrated into the mission, objectives, procedures and experiences of a mentoring relationship.

- 1) Mentoring is a partnership.
- 2) Mentoring is a nurturing, professional relationship.
- 3) Mentoring is communicating with each other.
- 4) Mentoring enhances development of the employee.
- 5) Mentoring benefits the new agent, the mentor, and the organization.

## **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

The goal of the Cooperative Extension Mentoring Program is to provide a professional, educational, and personal support system for new agents. This goal can be realized by achieving the following objectives:

- # Identifying resources and resource persons for the new agents.
- # Educating the new agents in organizational philosophy, goals, and values.

# Sharing the skills and knowledge of an experienced and successful County Extension Agent to meet the needs of the new agents.

# Strengthening the new agents' leadership skills and self-confidence.

By achieving these objectives, the new agents will experience an easier transition into the Extension team, be better integrated into the Cooperative Extension system, and increase the overall effectiveness of Cooperative Extension.

### **UNDERLYING EXPECTATIONS OF MENTORS**

Because of the strong influence the mentor has on a new employee and ultimately the high impact on the system, it is essential that all mentors possess the following characteristics.

- 1) Committed to the mission of Kentucky Cooperative Extension.
- 2) Demonstrates programming skills.
- 3) Knowledgeable of policies and procedures of Cooperative Extension and the University of Kentucky.

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF MENTORS**

Those interested in becoming mentors and those involved in selecting (nominating) candidates for the mentoring program should consider the presence of the following characteristics in potential mentoring program candidates (*listed below in no particular order*):

# Exhibits a positive attitude and a sense of humor.

# Respected by peers and shows respect for others.

# Listens and communicates effectively.

# Recognizes and encourages excellence.

# Trustworthy.

# Demonstrates ethical, professional behavior.

# Self-confident.

# Patient.

# Appreciates and encourages diversity.

# Flexible / adaptable -- receptive to new ideas.

## GENERAL GUIDELINES/CONSIDERATIONS

The following guidelines apply to each mentoring relationship and should be understood by both the mentor and new agent.

- # Commitment to the formal mentoring relationship is one (1) year.
- # Mentor should contact the new agent within the first week of the relationship being announced or determined.
- # A minimum of three (3) face-to-face visits should occur between the mentor and new agent within the year. The first visit should be done during the first month after the pairing is announced. The remaining two visits/meetings should be during the next 9 months.
- # Mentors and new agents should correspond at least bi-weekly either by phone, e-mail, in person, etc. It is both persons' responsibility to make sure that this communication occurs.
- # "No Fault" Arrangement: Throughout a professional career all employees face various challenges and changing circumstances which are often unexpected and make assignments such as "being a mentor" difficult to fulfill. This program operates with a NO FAULT philosophy that allows mentors **and** new agents to request changes or reassignments without fear of repercussions. The mentor or new agent may request a change or release from the assignment by contacting one of the District Mentor Contact Agents.

## MENTOR GUIDELINES

Mentoring relationships are well documented in nurturing a sense of loyalty and commitment to one's profession. This mentoring process is the "guiding of a less experienced person through the new experiences of Cooperative Extension work."

The role of a mentor should be perceived as a nurturer who has strong respect and concern for the new agent. The major contribution made by the mentor is his/her willingness to devote time and energy on behalf of the new agent.

Every mentor has a specific body of professional knowledge and skills to share. The knowledge that the mentor has must be transformed into a package that will meet the new agent's maturity and experience level.

## **Initiating the Relationship . . . . .**

Research shows that the most successful mentoring relationships are those which are initiated as early as possible in the new agent's tenure. In addition, a mutual commitment to meet regularly is important, since success seems related to time spent together.

The following suggestions should help in "getting started" with the mentoring relationship:

- # Write a letter of commitment to the assigned new agent. (See Appendix A for an example) Send copies to the District Director and District Contact Agent(s).
- # The mentor calls the new agent to initiate the relationship.
- # Get started early. Set-up first meeting within one month of the mentor and new agent pairing announcement.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR A SUCCESSFUL MENTORING VISIT**

The following suggestions will help assure a productive and successful visit with the new agent.

- # Schedule the visit to maximize opportunities
- # Provide directions to meeting location(s).
- # Be ready and accessible for mentoring visit(s).
- # Know what you want to accomplish to enhance the mentoring visit.
- # Have information readily available for sharing.
- # Allow time for an office tour and introduce county staff. (Do this in either the new agent's office or the mentor's office.)

## **DO'S FOR MENTORS . . . . .**

Be prepared to devote time and energy to the relationship and to form a strong emotional bond. The most important factor in mentoring is the mentor's willingness to give time and attention to the new agent. You accept great responsibility in this close, trusting relationship. Pitfalls can be averted by honest, open communication that establishes ground rules and clarifies the concerns of the new agent.



The following are some things the mentor should **DO** in the mentoring relationship.

**Do's:**

- # Review the new agent's biographical sketch to learn more about his/her interests and background.
- # Take responsibility to initiate the relationship.
- # Foster creativity and independence.
- # Set aside time for the mentoring process and keep all appointments.
- # Display professional behavior and dress.
- # Schedule meetings and feedback sessions with planned topics.
- # Be positive, enthusiastic, and supportive.
- # Be a good listener.
- # Establish open and honest communication and a forum for idea exchange.
- # Maintaining confidentiality is essential between both the mentor and the new agent! If something concerning the mentor or new agent needs to be discussed with others, it should first be discussed within the mentoring relationship.
- # Be flexible on meeting times and places.
- # Offer to share resources, expertise and experiences.
- # Provide opportunities for the new agent to talk about concerns and ask questions.
- # Invite the new agent to meetings or activities, as appropriate.
- # Arrange further bi-weekly contacts through telephone, e-mail, fax, face-to-face, etc, as appropriate.

**DON'TS FOR MENTORS .....**

The following are some things mentors should **avoid** in the mentoring relationship.

**DON'Ts:**

- # Criticize.
- # Rescue.
- # Try to give advice on everything.
- # Allow an "apron strings" dependency.
- # Complain about your own problems.
- # Be too busy when the new agent needs your friendship or your support.
- # Take responsibility for the new agent's programs or duties.



## **SUGGESTED TOPICS OF DISCUSSION FOR MENTORS & NEW AGENTS**

These suggestions and topics for discussion are in no particular order. A “checklist” of topics to cover is not recommended and should not be developed. Mentors and new agents should review these topics to see if any of them represent areas of needed discussion. Many of these topics are covered in District Director visits, orientation and core training workshops. However, the new agent may need clarification or further discussion related to application and implementation of content. Please view this as an opportunity to reinforce information and as a support of other training experiences. This list should be viewed only as a list to give the mentor and new agent ideas of “what to talk about.”

### **Organizational Development:**

- X Paperwork/Reporting
- X Organizing work area in office
- X Setting up personal office files
- X Handling (returning) phone calls
- X Office staff relationships (e.g., secretary, co-worker, etc.)

### **Time Management:**

- X Time management challenges — daily planning (calendars)
- X Priorities — how to set and manage them
- X Management of e-mail and regular mail
- X Burnout
- X Balancing work and personal life
- X Calendar of Events (list of upcoming activities and deadlines)

### **Public Relations/Marketing:**

- X How to respond to sensitive situations
- X Conflict resolution
- X Techniques to increase community involvement and being involved in the community
- X Professionalism
- X Relationships with key leaders (county & state officials), local media, volunteers, co-workers, etc.
- X Customer service/response to clients
- X Newsletters/news articles
- X Marketing programs and activities

### **Programming:**

- X Elements of a Kentucky County Extension Program for 4-H Youth Development, Agriculture/Natural Resources, Family & Consumer Sciences, and Community & Economic Development
- X Program techniques
- X Program development process (Advisory council systems, Plan of Work, Evaluation)
- X Programming for special audiences (disabled, migrant, Seniors, etc.)

- X Utilizing Extension Specialists and other resources
- X Networking with other agencies/associations
- X Co-sponsoring/Collaboration of programs with other agencies/associations
- X Accountability to leadership/clientele
- X Share ideas on how to effectively work with diverse audiences
- X Share strategies for overcoming “brick walls/bridges” and “road blocks” in programming.

**Professional Development:**

- X In-Service education opportunities
- X Membership in Agent associations
- X Advanced degrees
- X Self-directed study (community workshops, CEU classes)

**Volunteer Management:**

- X Risk management issues involving volunteers, programs, and clubs
- X Volunteer recruitment and management
- X Delegation of tasks to volunteers

**Other:**

- X The frustrations of being a new agent
- X Kentucky Cooperative Extension philosophy
- X Kentucky Cooperative Extension organizational structure
- X Extension’s Cultural Norms

**PROCEDURE FOR MATCHING NEW AGENT WITH MENTORS**

- # Mentors are to be selected from a pool of qualified and committed agents who have worked at least two years and completed an in-service training for mentors.
- # The Program and Staff Development Unit will offer training once a year or as needed to maintain a qualified pool of agents.
- # The Program and Staff Development Unit will maintain a list of all agents who have completed the training and indicated they would like to be a mentor.

## **MATCHING MENTORS WITH NEW AGENTS**

- # When the staff development specialists meet with new agents during their new agent orientation session in Lexington the Mentor Program will be explained. Each new agent will be asked to complete a Biographical Sketch Form.
- # The staff development specialist who serves on the state Mentoring Committee will contact the District Director and District Mentor Contact Agent(s) to select the mentor from a pool of qualified and committed agents who have attended the in-service training for mentors.
- # Matches should be easily accessible, geographically. However, they should not be limited by Extension Districts or program areas. The matching decision will be based on a variety of factors including information on the biographical sketch from both new agents and mentor agents. Additionally, the county demographics may influence the matching of a mentor and new agent.
- # District Director will contact the agent to initiate a letter of commitment signed by the mentor. A copy of this letter will be forwarded to the new agent and the District Mentor Contact Agent. (See Appendix A for sample letter.)
- # The formal mentor/new agent relationship will continue for one year from this point. (Although the length of the formal relationship is one year, we recognize that through the process friendships develop and relations are established that may extend throughout the mentor and new agent's careers.)

## **ROLE OF DISTRICT DIRECTOR**

The role of the District Director is critical to the success of the mentoring relationship and the program as a whole. The District Director is involved in the following ways:

### **Matching:**

- # Encourages agents to become mentors.
- # Work with District Contact Agent(s) and Program & Staff Development Specialist to assign mentors to new agents.
- # Contacts agent to be potential mentor, confirms pairing (copies/notifies Program and Staff Development Office and appropriate Assistant Director) and asks the mentor agent to initiate a letter of commitment to the new agent with copies to the District Director and District Mentor Contact Agent(s). (See Appendix A.)

**Ongoing Support:**

- # Supports the mentoring process as it becomes a part of the organization's culture.
- # Encourages new agents to seek guidance from the mentors.
- # Follows-up with the new agent by including the mentoring process as a topic for discussion on the new agent checklist. (Example: "How is it going?" "Are you and the mentor meeting?")
- # Works with the District Mentor Contact Agent(s) in evaluating the process and facilitating requests for changes in the new agent/mentor assignments.
- # If changes are made in the new agent/mentor match, and notify all agents involved.

**Evaluation:**

- # Recognizes willingness to serve as mentors and effectiveness of agents as mentors, taking this into consideration in mentor assignments with District Mentor Contact Agent, incorporating it into performance appraisal.
- # Provide input to the state mentoring committee for ongoing evaluation and improvement of the mentoring program.

**Selection of District Mentor Contact Agent:**

- # Selects a District Mentor Contact Agent from the pool of agents in the district who have completed the mentor training and committed to be a mentor.

## **ROLE OF DISTRICT MENTOR CONTACT AGENT**

This person has completed the mentor training and agreed to be a mentor.

**Matching:**

- # Get to know all of the new agents in the area as soon as possible.
- # Work with the District Director and Program & Staff Development Specialist in matching new agents to mentors.

**Ongoing Support:**

- # Maintain regular contact with mentors and new agents within the area.
- # Follow-up with the new agent within three weeks of pairing with a mentor.
- # Work with District Director and agents in facilitating reassignments or cancellation of the mentor relationships.

**Evaluation:**

- Ask mentors and new agents to complete evaluation forms at the end of the year assignment. (See Appendix B for copy of evaluation form.)

## **EVALUATION**

A short evaluation form will be completed at the end of the year by both the mentor and new agent. The purpose is two-fold. First, to determine the degree of success in achieving program objectives, and secondly, to identify areas of the program which might be changed to make it more effective. The evaluations will be reviewed by the State Mentoring Committee to provide direction for future program changes.

See Appendix B for a copy of the Evaluation form.

# Appendix A



## Sample Letter

*The following letter is a sample of a letter that a mentor agent might send to the new agent as a way of initiating the relationship.*

County Extension Office  
Agents Road  
Some Town, KY 00000

Dear New Agent,

I am pleased that we have been matched as mentor and new agent to participate in Kentucky Cooperative Extension Mentoring Program. It is my hope that this relationship will provide a positive professional, educational and personal support system for you.

During our time together, we'll examine Cooperative Extension philosophy, goals, and values, identify resources and resource persons, share skills, knowledge and ideas pertaining to the job of County Extension Agent. We'll also have time to discuss any concerns or questions you may have. Let's plan to have at least three face to face visits throughout the year and also keep in regular contact by phone, fax and e-mail.

I would like to meet with you sometime this month, (first month after pairing is announced). Here are some days that I have available:\_\_\_\_\_ Please check your calendar and let me know a date that is convenient with you. I look forward to working with you this year.

Sincerely,

Mentor

c: District Director  
District Mentor Contact

# Appendix B

# **Program Evaluation**

## **Mentoring Program for Kentucky Cooperative Extension**

Check one:     \_\_\_\_\_ New Agent                             \_\_\_\_\_ Mentor

The purpose of this evaluation form is to give new agents and mentors the opportunity to provide the State Mentoring Committee with feedback on the program which will assist them in changing and adapting it to more effectively serve Kentucky Cooperative Extension. Your thoughtful response to these questions is appreciated and will be handled confidentially.

1. Describe your experiences in working with the new agent or mentor. Include the number of times you met; type of contact you had i.e., face-to-face, e-mail, phone calls, etc.; the topics you discussed; and your perspective of the effectiveness of the relationship.
  
2. Describe three or four activities which were most helpful in developing your mentor/new agent relationship.
  
3. Describe three or four barriers that affected the development of the mentor/new agent relationship.
  
4. What suggestions do you have for making the program stronger?

Mail to:  
Martha Nall; Program & Staff Development; 712 Garrigus Bldg.; Lexington, KY 40546-0215

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Issued 11-98; rev. 2-06; rev. 2-07