

The Mentoring Program: The New Agent

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.

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.

GUIDELINES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR THE NEW AGENT

The following are some things the new agent should **DO** in the mentoring relationship. Remember, your mentor is a supportive friend with a strong respect and concern for the new agent and his/her professional development and success. Plan to devote time and energy to the relationship, just as your mentor does.

DO'S FOR NEW AGENTS.

The following are some things the new agent should **do** in the mentoring relationship.

DO's:

- # Review your mentor's biographical sketch to learn more about his/her interests and background.
- # Establish open and honest communication and a forum for idea exchange.
- # Maintaining confidentiality is essential between the mentor and new agent! If something concerning the mentor or new agent needs to be discussed with others, it should be discussed first within the mentoring relationship.
- # Understand what you want from the mentoring relationship and communicate your goals and aspirations to your mentor. Balance personal and professional relationship with your mentor.
- # Understand that you have to give as well as receive from the relationship.
- # Act on your mentor's advice when you feel it is applicable to your situation.
- # Follow-up with resources/references that your mentor gives you to find answers to questions or needed information.
- # Keep all scheduled appointments with your mentor and display professional behavior and dress, as appropriate.
- # Arrange further bi-weekly contacts with your mentor through telephone, e-mail, fax, face-to-face, etc.
- # Be flexible on meeting times and places.
- # Be realistic, maintain a positive attitude.
- # Be ambitious and enthusiastic.

DON'T'S FOR NEW AGENTS.

The following are things the new agent should **avoid** in the mentoring relationship.

DON'Ts:

- # Ask for advice on everything. Have a purpose in each request.
- # Ask your mentor to act in your place or tell you precisely what to do.
- # Rely on your mentor to give or seek answers to all of your questions/requests.
- # Complain about other people or missed opportunities in an unprofessional manner.
- # Commit yourself to obligations you cannot keep.
- # Cancel meetings/visits with your mentor at the last minute.

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

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 A for a copy of the Evaluation form.

Appendix A

Educational programs of Kentucky Cooperative Extension serve all people regardless of race, color, age, sex, religion, disability or national origin.
UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY, KENTUCKY STATE UNIVERSITY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, AND KENTUCKY COUNTIES COOPERATING

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