

Mentoring – Scenario 1 (Nursing Unit Manager)

Pippa has been employed in the coronary care unit as a Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) for the last five years. During this time, she has mostly been in charge of shifts after hours and occasionally acted as Nursing Unit Manager (NUM). Recently, the Nursing Unit Manager position became vacant and was advertised when the previous manager moved to another position. Pippa has applied and been told that she is the preferred applicant. The Program Manager meets with Pippa and suggests that a mentorship program would help her to further develop the leadership abilities she will need for the position. The Manager suggests a number of senior nurses within the hospital who would be suitable and willing to provide mentorship support.

Jan has been a senior Nurse Manager in the organisation for the last 10 years. Pippa approaches Jan and asks Jan to be her mentor. Jan agrees to provide some informal mentoring and they arrange to meet at a coffee shop to discuss the mentoring relationship.

Jan greets Pippa warmly, smiling and shaking her hand. “I was very pleased when you approached me and asked me to be your mentor. I can see you are motivated and have strong initiative. I am impressed with your commitment to achieving your best by seeking help and advice. I am more than happy to provide that where I can, and refer you on to the experts if we run into territory I am not familiar with”. Pippa is encouraged by Jan’s openness and her positive and motivational attitude.

They sit down and Jan asks if Pippa has ever experienced any formal or informal mentoring in the past. Pippa states that she has, but that she had felt she and her previous mentor did not seem to share the same values and views, and that they had not been able to develop a comfortable rapport. Jan acknowledges that mismatching of personalities and attitudes can be a barrier to successful mentoring, but that she hopes they will not experience this problem.

Jan begins by offering to tell Pippa a bit about her current role and her career to date. She describes some of her career highlights, as well as challenges, identifies role models, and describes her areas of interest and expertise.

Jan suggests they start by establishing an agreement about the terms of their mentoring relationship. It is mutually agreed that the meetings will be confidential, and based on respect, honesty and a shared commitment to learning. Jan encourages Pippa to view their mentor/mentee relationship as a forum to share feelings and well as facts, but that boundaries also need to be established. They agree that healthy ventilation of feelings is acceptable, but that gossip or negative topics would be ‘off limits’. Personal issues impacting on work may be discussed, but ‘extremely personal’ information should be withheld. Jan encourages Pippa to be open and honest about her feelings and concerns, and hopes she can provide support and empathy. They agree to meet on a monthly basis, or according to need. It is decided that their place of meeting should ideally be outside of work, unless they require the use of hospital facilities for coaching purposes. It is agreed that they both be accessible between sessions by mobile phone and email. Jan also states that she is happy for Pippa to approach her in the workplace if she wishes.

In order to develop an understanding of Pippa’s needs, Jan asks Pippa what she would like to learn from the mentoring experience. She asks Pippa to describe her current role and leadership experience, her skills and areas of interests. She asks about Pippa’s expectations

and aspirations regarding her career and the mentoring process. “What would you like to gain from this relationship? Do you have any concerns about your new role? What skills would you like to have? What challenges do you see in becoming a successful leader?”

Jan uses active listening to help set mutual goals to achieve Pippa’s needs and guide their relationship. Pippa recognises some deficits in her current leadership knowledge and skills. Her learning goals surround aspects of administration, such as budgeting and rostering, as well as human factors, such as motivating staff and dealing with conflict. Her goals include being able complete the required managerial administrative tasks under the supervision (initially) of the Program Manager. She also wishes to learn and apply techniques to provide feedback, motivate staff and manage conflict within the ward. Her professional goal is to achieve recognition as a competent and efficient manager, allowing her to move her career into the area of health education and policy development (her area of interest). Her personal goal is to maintain adequate work/life balance, allowing her to continue to spend time with her boyfriend and maintain her current sporting interests.

Jan asks Pippa how she might go about achieving these goals and together they build an action plan, outlining this on a timeline. As an expert in her field, Jan is able to act as a resource person for Pippa, providing expert information and advice, and coaching her on completing administrative tasks. Jan is also able to guide her in managing the human resource aspect of her role. In addition to her advice on these matters, Jan recommends a number of courses and conferences run by outside organisations that may expose Pippa to new concepts and research regarding human factors (eg. performance management/conflict management). Jan offers to assist Pippa in refining her notions of future career direction by exposing her to other aspects of the organisation, such as committees and journal clubs, and providing networking opportunities with contacts outside her current organisation (eg. attendance at conferences relevant to her areas of interest).

Jan considers some of the challenges she experienced in maintaining healthy personal relationships and work/life balance when at Pippa’s age and stage of career. She acknowledges that this is a difficult but important consideration, and one that is often overlooked. She reflects on her own experience and shares this with Pippa, offering advice on strategies that she found helpful or unhelpful in the past.

Pippa and Jan end their meeting by reflecting on the mutually agreed terms of the mentorship. They arrange to meet at Jan’s office in one month’s time, to evaluate and review the goals. Jan encourages Pippa to contact her in between meetings if new issues arise that she wishes to discuss. Pippa thanks Jan for her enthusiasm and commitment and says that her support and encouragement has given her confidence to tackle her new role.