
How to Get the Most From Your Mentoring Relationship

Sarah Jones-Butler and Gwenda Sippings

With the introduction of the new Framework of Qualifications came the new mentoring relationship into the Chartership process. Here we see both perspectives as the mentor and mentee each reflect on the experience and offer their suggestions as to how to make sure you get the most out of the partnership.

The Mentee's Perspective

CILIP's mentor scheme was in its infancy when I registered for Chartership in October 2005. I was lucky that the first mentor I contacted was willing to mentor me. Over the last year, my mentoring relationship with Gwenda has proved extremely worthwhile and enjoyable. I hope others can benefit from the following tips and advice gleaned from my experience.

Find a suitable mentor

Every mentee-mentor relationship will be different. The most important thing is that you find a mentor with whom you feel comfortable discussing your personal professional development.

I chose Gwenda from CILIP's list of mentors because she had a similar legal information background to me. However, Gwenda has worked in several sectors and I have found it interesting to hear her compare and contrast these. I have enjoyed having someone outside my normal working environment as my mentor. I find it easier to think reflectively away from the distractions of work and have found Gwendais 'external' perspective very refreshing and inspiring.

I sent Gwenda an email to introduce myself and find out whether she would be interested in mentoring me. We then arranged an informal meeting to find out more about each other. Following this, we arranged a first formal meeting and completed a mentoring agreement.

Tips for choosing and contacting a mentor*

- Remember, your mentor does not have to be in your workplace, sector, or local area
- If you know someone through work, a CILIP branch or special interest group who you think would be a suitable mentor, ask him or her whether they would like to register and attend free training
- Approach one mentor at a time

- Attach a completed mentee information form to an email to your chosen mentor

It is important for you and your mentor to complete a mentoring agreement at the outset of your relationship, when you are both happy to pursue your working partnership.

What to agree with your mentor

- Expectations regarding the mentoring process
- Particular areas for discussion and support including any topics that will be 'off limits'
- Overall timescale for mentoring (6 months – 2 years)
- Format and frequency of communication (to include face-to-face and distance methods)
- Review date for your mentoring agreement (between 3 and 9 months from the outset of the agreement)
- Understanding of confidentiality

Gwenda and I agreed to hold four face-to-face meetings during the year and to communicate by email/phone on an ongoing basis. This balance has worked well for me. A face-to-face meeting approximately every three months has given me enough time, yet impetus, to produce work and make progress. I enjoy our face-to-face meetings and think they have been instrumental in developing our relationship and making me feel at ease discussing my progress and any issues.

Prepare for your first formal meeting

I would advise getting to grips with CILIP's chartership and mentoring documentation before your first formal mentor meeting. Gwenda steered me through the checklist in the Chartered Membership Handbook, introduced me to the Body of Professional Knowledge and suggested some very useful amendments to my draft PPDP, so I found our first meeting invaluable!

Things to take to your first meeting

- Chartered Membership Handbook
- Body of Professional Knowledge
- Mentor Scheme Guidelines (including mentoring agreement template)
- Up-to-date CV
- Draft PPDP
- Ideas about how you would like to be supported and possible topics for future discussion

Subsequent meetings

I found a presentation given by Judith Cattermole on the 'mentor support network and the role of the mentor' incredibly useful in terms of providing guidance on what to cover at mentor meetings. It was given at a Career Development Group (CDG) event: 'Preparing for Chartership and beyond'.

Judith suggested planning discussion topics in advance of meetings. Gwenda and I put this into practice and I have found it very useful. Example topics Gwenda and I have discussed are how to plan a strategy for a library / information service and how to get the most out of meetings.

What to cover during face-to-face meetings

- Note successes
- Note targets not met
- Reflect and review progress
- Discuss future challenges
- Note any action points
- Pre-arranged discussion topic

Record meetings and correspondence

Chartership portfolios must include evidence of participation in a mentor scheme, e.g. evidence of professional discussion. I write minutes of my meetings with Gwenda. This helps me reflect upon what we have discussed and I am able to give Gwenda a copy so she can add comments. It is a good idea to keep a record of any correspondence with your mentor.

I have found it useful to meet other mentees at CDG events and to discuss mentoring with them. I would highly recommend others to do the same. I have also found the email discussion list LIS-CILIP-REG very useful.

I have really benefited from Gwenda's support, ideas and encouragement over the last year. I have found our discussions thought provoking and have gained a great deal personally and professionally from our relationship.

Sarah Jones-Butler

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The Mentor's View

Be realistic and well prepared

When I registered as a CILIP Mentor, I decided only to accept one candidate for my first year, so that I could ensure I had enough time to give to developing the relationship and becoming familiar with the process. As the current scheme was so different from the one under which I Chartered, I was keen to get to grips with the new procedures early on, and so it was important for me to read the documentation, and the helpful information on CILIP's website. I also found the Mentor's training session run on behalf of CILIP by PTEG enjoyable and useful, even though I went along some time after accepting my first candidate. It

was good for me to think again about mentoring techniques, and the differences between line management and coaching and mentoring. The session was very practical too, and it was useful to carry out mini mentoring sessions and get feedback from the nominated observers. It was also an easy way to meet other mentors, and I have had a chance to keep up with some of them through the LIS-CILIP-MENTOR list and by personal follow up meetings.

Be ready to learn as well as to share knowledge

Although Sarah comes from the legal sector, and I had previous experience of working as Head of Information at Clifford Chance law firm, I find it very interesting to hear about her work in a very different type of firm, and a very different environment. The clout that the name of Clifford Chance commands was obviously special, but I was horrified to hear that suppliers were dismissing her interests as 'too small'. I also find it quite a salutary experience to hear someone just moving up into management voice concerns about things like speaking out in meetings, and managing issues upwards and downwards. It brings back memories of my first forays into business interaction, and reminds me that time and experience can make you forget those early fears.

Be flexible and open to new ideas during the year

I am lucky to have as my first mentee someone like Sarah, who is very well organised and very committed to the details of the Chartership process. She documents our meetings very well, and it is fascinating feedback for me to see how she interprets our conversations, and which points she finds most helpful, or most surprising. Following attendance at a Mentee training session, Sarah put into practice some of the ideas from it, such as nominating a special subject as an agenda item for each meeting. This helps give our meetings a sharper focus, and I have time to think about the chosen subject, and note some ideas and experiences to share with her.

Conclusion

I have been tremendously encouraged about the future of the profession by working with Sarah, and am taking great pleasure in being her Mentor.

Gwenda Sippings

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Further reading

CILIP (2006), How to choose your mentor, Available:

<http://www.cilip.org.uk/qualificationschartership/FrameworkofQualifications/mentor/howtochooseyourmentor.htm> [24 October 2006]