



Apprenticeship Building America

# Mentoring Guide

*December 2022*

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Apprenticeship is a centuries-old, proven method for passing skills from one generation of workers to the next. Mentorship is the lynchpin in apprenticeship that models professional, technical, and social skills in a formal, structured way. This guide condenses academic literature, public resources, and conventional and unconventional wisdom into a digestible set of best practices, dos and don'ts, hints and tips, and resources to address common issues. Strong mentorship is a key predictor of the success of an apprenticeship.

## WHAT IS MENTORING?

Mentoring in registered apprenticeship is a structured pairing between a skilled worker and an apprentice trainee. The skilled worker models behaviors and skills necessary to succeed in a particular occupation. The mentee/apprentice emulates the mentor, learning the mentor's skills and adopting/adapting the mentor's behaviors. The mentor inspects and verifies the apprentice's work until the mentor can certify that the apprentice is successfully capable of doing skilled work safely on their own.

Mentoring has many facets in many contexts, but a common thread is relationship. Even in the structured mentorship of registered apprenticeship, the mentor and apprentice will establish a reciprocal bond that goes beyond "tutor-pupil." A mentor models the skills and behaviors of a journey worker in a particular craft or trade in the expectation that the apprentice will learn and emulate these skills and behaviors. The literature is replete with references to mentoring being a two-way street, which necessitates a level of trust between mentor and apprentice. The apprentice will make mistakes but must trust that the mentor's role is to correct, improve, and encourage – not punish. This can be tricky in an apprenticeship because the mentor must also evaluate. The apprentice often brings a fresh perspective to a task, and the mentor should be open to learning from the apprentice as well. Mentors will develop their own managerial and leadership skills through mentoring.

Particularly in youth apprenticeships and those where the apprentice has little to no prior work experience of any sort, the mentor is modeling work behaviors that go beyond occupational tasks, often called soft skills. The mentor models how to relate appropriately to co-workers, supervisors, and customers, along with how to manage time, how to work safely, even how to dress appropriately. Mentors may have to help young apprentices deal with non-work-related challenges and must know how and when to seek assistance.

## GOOD MENTORS ARE TRAINED.

As in any job, preparation is important. Mentors should be trained. A journey worker may be highly skilled at their occupation, but that doesn't mean they are good at passing along those skills to an apprentice. Employers hiring apprentices should be prepared to train the workers they are calling on to mentor, and to recognize that mentoring is an investment. It's an investment with a solid return, as has also been demonstrated in the literature, but employers should expect a dip in productivity from the mentor during the mentorship.



## Best Practices in Selecting Mentors:

- ▶ Choose a mentor for their skills and professionalism, the qualities the employer wishes to propagate in its workforce.
- ▶ Choose a mentor who is fully committed to the concept and value of mentoring an apprentice; a mentor who has been an apprentice themselves can bring a valuable perspective to the mentorship and needs of the apprentice.
- ▶ Recognize that mentoring takes time. Ideally, mentoring is one-on-one; mentors should have no more than one apprentice if possible and resources permit.
- ▶ Mentors are role models, not just of the occupation, but of the company culture; if the mentor hasn't bought into the company culture, neither will the apprentice.
- ▶ Mentors should have an enthusiasm and aptitude for teaching and coaching the apprentice in the mentor's acquired knowledge, skills, and wisdom; recognize that the aptitude for teaching/coaching may differ for adult and youth apprentices.
- ▶ Mentors must be good, active listeners; apprentices should feel comfortable communicating difficulties and questions to the mentor without fear of judgment.
- ▶ Mentors are good communicators.
- ▶ Mentors are patient, respectful, and have a good sense of humor – apprentices make mistakes; it's not the end of the world.
- ▶ Recognize that diversity brings strength to the workforce; the most important thing a mentor and their apprentice has in common in an apprenticeship is that they have chosen to master the same occupation. A good mentor and apprentice pairing will be respectful of and learn from each other's differences.
- ▶ Employers must not penalize mentors for dips in productivity during the mentoring process; ideally, mentors should be incentivized to invest themselves in the mentoring process: the return on investment of the mentor's time comes from a productive apprentice employee, a mentor who has improved their own skills and abilities through teaching and coaching, and a real reduction in long term recruitment and retention costs.

## HOW TO MENTOR

The mentor's primary role in an apprenticeship is to convey job skills to the apprentice such that the apprentice will become independently capable of journey-level work. However, before that begins and once a journey worker and apprentice are paired as mentor-mentee, the process of forming a relationship begins. Literature suggests that they spend time at the beginning of the process getting to know each other, sharing goals, aspirations, experience, and beginning to build trust. Particularly in youth apprenticeships, the mentee needs to feel comfortable bringing work and non-work concerns to the mentor. The mentor is not a psychologist or social worker but knows from experience that problems away from work often impact job performance and needs to convey that understanding to the apprentice. The mentor should have access to resources to which the apprentice can be referred to deal with such problems – the mentor needs to know when to help and when and how to get help.

Apprenticeship mentoring is a structured process. 80% of the apprentice's training – and most of their learning – will be accomplished on the job. The mentor needs to be well acquainted with the apprentice's training goals and requirements as laid out in the apprenticeship standards so the mentor can guide the apprentice through the progression of skills necessary for successful completion of the apprenticeship. A good mentor will know what theory the apprentice is learning in the classroom and help the apprentice apply it in practice on the job.

Keep good records. Diligence in assessments is an invaluable tool in tracking the apprentice's progress. Good records ensure that an apprentice is being measured consistently and rewarded fairly for their progress through the apprenticeship.



## MENTORING ADULT APPRENTICES

Adult apprentices are those who bring some level of work experience to the apprenticeship, even if not to the occupation for which they are training. Adults have different life experience, learning styles, and social skills that should be considered when mentoring. Some will learn more by reading or hearing how to do the task, others by watching, but research indicates that all tend to learn and retain more by doing the task themselves [Figure 1: Edgar Dale's Cone of Learning]. The basic steps in guiding an apprentice through a given task are:

1. Mentor describes the task to be accomplished.
2. Mentor demonstrates the task while apprentice observes and asks questions.
3. Apprentice performs the task while mentor observes.
4. Mentor evaluates the performance, giving apprentice ample opportunity to ask questions.
5. Apprentice repeats performance of task as appropriate for reinforcement.

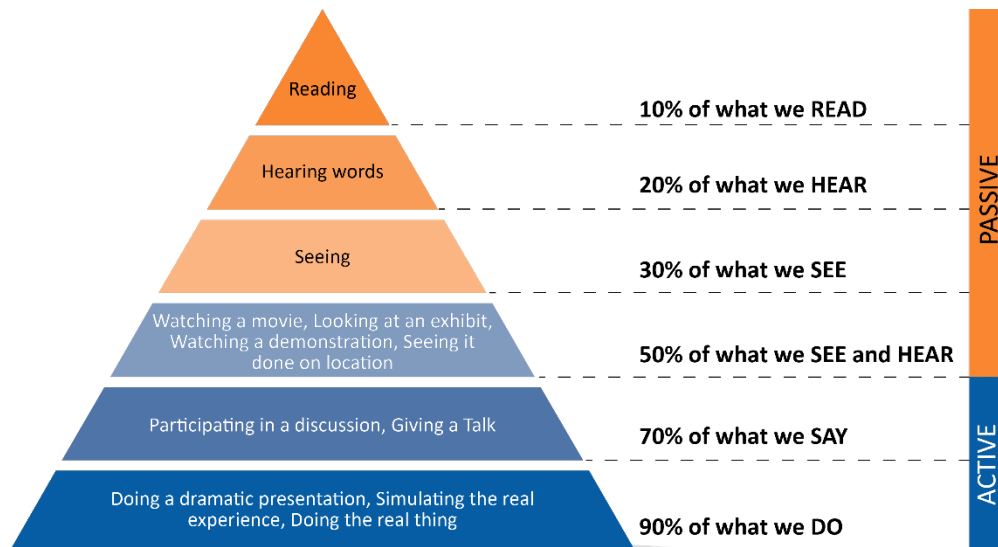


Figure 1: Edgar Dale's Cone of Learning

The Cone of Learning depicts how much we absorb over time from different modalities of learning: Passive (reading, hearing, seeing) and Active (discussing, doing). An apprentice will retain more through doing a task themselves than by hearing how it is done.

Remember, adult apprentices bring some level of previous knowledge and experience to the job; it's possible, but unlikely, that they have no prior experience; take advantage of their experience to draw parallels to the new task. Adults tend to have a narrower interest, limited to the task at hand; concentrate on conveying information directly relevant to the job. Adult apprentices tend to be problem solvers, wanting to apply theory to practice. It is important that the adult apprentice trusts the mentor in the sense that they respect the mentor's superior knowledge and experience with the new task.

## BEST PRACTICES FOR TEACHING / COACHING AN ADULT APPRENTICE

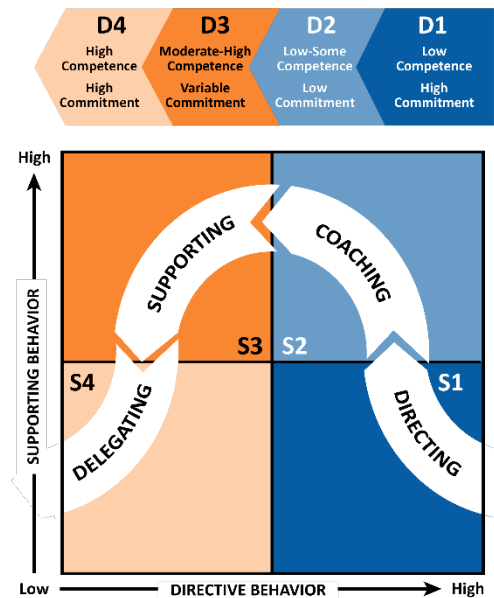
- ▶ Start by describing the context of the task, then follow with specific examples and instructions.
- ▶ Don't flood the apprentice with information; apprentices can only absorb so much at a time; emphasize what's important and be open to questions.



- ▶ Communicate; ensure that what you're saying is what the apprentice is hearing and understanding – communication is a two-way street.
- ▶ Ask open-ended questions (questions that elicit more than a yes or no response).
- ▶ When tasks are especially complex, break them down into key steps and summarize at each point.
- ▶ Ask the apprentice to describe the task before tackling it, especially if safety is an issue.
- ▶ Observe the apprentice performing the task, intervening only if asked or if there is a safety issue.
- ▶ Be constructive, and engage the apprentice with questions that spur self-evaluation, e.g., “Why did you do this step in this particular way?”
- ▶ Have the apprentice repeat the task, even if they did it correctly, repetition breeds learning.
- ▶ With few exceptions, most tasks have multiple paths to successful (and safe) execution; be open to learning yourself from the path the apprentice takes.
- ▶ Again, remember that apprentices won't always get it right; mistakes are part of learning. Have a sense of humor.

### MATCH TEACHING STYLE TO THE APPRENTICE'S STYLE & BACKGROUND

All apprentices exist on continuums of confidence in their ability to learn and accomplish a task, and competence or actual ability to do that task. Where competence and confidence are low, the mentor will be more engaged in direct teaching and supervision of the apprentice to help them master the task and build their confidence in their ability to do it unsupervised. Where competence and confidence are high, e.g., where the apprentice brings prior relatable experience to the task, the mentor can delegate the task to the apprentice and primarily just provide feedback and evaluation [Figure 2: Blanchard-Hersey Situational Leadership Model].



Hersey, P. and K. Blanchard Management of Organizational Behavior, Utilizing Human Resources. Prentice-Hall Inc. 1977.

*Figure 2: Blanchard-Hersey Situational Leadership Model*

The Situational Leadership Model helps mentors adjust their teaching styles to the continuums of competence that an apprentice brings to a task and confidence in their ability to do the task.



- ▶ Low competence, low confidence: Be more direct, explicit, and present in your teaching and supervision.
- ▶ Low competence, some confidence: Adopt more of a coaching style; the apprentice brings some ability to do the task but needs more encouragement to employ the skills they have effectively.
- ▶ Some competence, more confidence: Like coaching, the apprentice can be taught and encouraged with a lighter touch and less direct supervision.
- ▶ High competence, high confidence: The mentor can let the apprentice run with little intervention.

Adjusting your style of mentoring to the apprentice's situation will result in better communication, less frustration, and better learning outcomes.

## MENTORING YOUTH APPRENTICES

Youth Apprenticeship employs the same structured approach to work-based learning as any other apprenticeship; the only difference is that the apprentice is younger and has less life experience. Employers frequently say that it is easier to teach a novice the technical skills required to do a particular job than it is to teach the soft skills required for the novice to work effectively as an employee or on a team. Teaching a novice how to work is easier than teaching them how to be a good worker.

Anyone starting a new job needs a guide, someone to introduce them to the workplace. Youth apprentices may not have had any job, and need to understand basics, like how to show up on time, when to take breaks, how to interact with co-workers. Young apprentices may never have been in a situation where they were expected to accept criticism over a job and need to be taught how to respond constructively. These soft skills are important. Some of them are trained behaviors, but many are absorbed and learned by the apprentice observing them in the mentor. Youths in general have had less opportunity to be exposed to the social and professional culture of work, which adds a dimension to mentoring that may not be as critical with adult apprentices.

Most key elements of successful mentorship remain, however. The mentor is there to teach proficiency in occupational skills, which requires effective communication and coaching skills. With youth apprentices, the relationship building process is more important, as the mentor will be modeling what it means to be a good corporate citizen to an apprentice who may never have had such a role model. The mentor is teaching, coaching, and modeling skills to a youth apprentice in four areas:

- ▶ Technical skills – those required to master the occupation
- ▶ Problem-solving skills – how to apply prior learning to new situations
- ▶ Social interaction – how to work on a team; how to interact with co-workers, subordinates, managers, and outsiders to the organization (e.g., customers or clients)
- ▶ Personal behaviors – building confidence in being a competent, productive worker, able to accomplish the job when the apprenticeship is finished

While the first two will be actively taught by the mentor, most of the learning of the second two will proceed from the apprentice emulating what they see in the mentor's behavior.

The initial stage of mentoring a youth apprentice will establish a level of trust and respect between mentor and apprentice:

- ▶ The mentor will take time to get to know the apprentice. Both of you have chosen the same occupation; take time to understand why, what hopes you have, barriers you face, and try to understand each other's styles of learning and communication.
- ▶ Set expectations for how the apprenticeship will proceed. Give a clear understanding of the training, milestones, formal and informal assessments, what you expect from the apprentice. Ensure the apprentice understands what is expected and what incentives are available for meeting or exceeding expectations.



- ▶ Help the apprentice begin to understand the structure of the organization, and its formal and informal rules. As mentor, you will be the primary interface introducing the mentor to their co-workers. You're the ice breaker helping the new worker assimilate smoothly.
- ▶ If the youth apprentice is from a different socio-economic, cultural, racial, or ethnic background, build on the commonality of your career choices and goals (and hopefully your own experience as an apprentice) – the apprentice wants to learn skills and you want to pass them on. Let that lay a foundation of respect and trust that will bridge differences and bring strength to the mentor-apprentice relationship. The steps for mentoring a youth apprentice in technical aspects of the occupation are the same as for an adult apprentice, but may require more patience on the part of the mentor as the apprentice develops competencies:
  1. Mentor describes the task to be accomplished – explain why a task is to be done in a particular way or to certain specifications.
  2. Mentor demonstrates the task while apprentice observes and asks questions – always encourage questions.
  3. Apprentice performs the task while mentor observes – intervene only when asked or if there is a safety issue.
  4. Mentor evaluates the performance, giving apprentice ample opportunity to ask questions. Directing questions toward self-evaluation is the best strategy to give the apprentice ownership of their performance.
  5. Apprentice repeats the performance as appropriate to reinforce skills learned.

Communication with a youth apprentice is vitally important. It's unavoidable that the mentor is there to render judgment on the apprentice's work. How that's done makes all the difference.

- ▶ Be constructive; use questions rather than render edicts. Harsh words will discourage and cause a youth apprentice to stop listening.
- ▶ Help the apprentice learn how to evaluate their own work.
- ▶ Help the apprentice understand that mistakes are just a part of learning. Keep a good humor; you've made your own share of mistakes.
- ▶ Practice active listening
  - When you're engaged with an apprentice, give the apprentice your full attention.
  - Listen to what the apprentice says and question if you're not sure.
  - Use criticism sparingly.
  - Be present in every way: eye contact, body language, gestures, etc.
  - Give the apprentice every chance to say more before you contribute.

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR MINORS

Parents and guardians of minor apprentices can be partners in the mentoring process. Family can be a source of encouragement for an apprentice and a source of information for the mentor on personal issues that may affect work performance. Having a channel of communication open with the parents of a minor youth apprentice can contribute to the apprentice's chances of success.

An apprentice of any age may bring personal issues to the workplace. Mentors are not required to deal with non-workplace issues but may if a sense of trust and empathy develop to that level in the mentor-mentee relationship. The mentor must know where to draw the line, however, and not attempt to deal with issues that are beyond their abilities. The mentor should also be comfortable telling the apprentice when an issue crosses that line and when the mentor needs to seek advice. With youth apprentices under age 18, the mentor has an extra duty of care to report issues of personal abuse, substance abuse, or other illegalities. In those cases, the mentor is obligated to bring them to an appropriate authority, Human Resources, or management.





## TOP TIPS FOR MENTORING YOUTH

- ▶ Be purposeful about your engagement with your apprentice; plan and organize
- ▶ Listen, ask questions, and encourage
- ▶ Get to know who your apprentice is beyond their workplace persona
- ▶ Be interested in what matters to them
- ▶ Build your apprentice's confidence and self-esteem
- ▶ Confidentiality and trust are important; keep confidential information private
- ▶ Be diligent about evaluation and follow-up

## Some resources for training mentors:

### ▶ **WorkforceGPS.org Mentorship Resources:**

- Harper College Train the Trainer Mentor Resources:  
<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwjly5rp3fH6AhUIX0KHeAUB-8QFnoECBAQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.illinoisworknet.com%2FApprenticeshipIL%2FDocuments%2FTrain%2520the%2520Trainer%2520Manual.pdf&usq=AOvVaw0p5bL-9swrd3UMt4xndtcC>
- Webinar – Effective Mentoring in Apprenticeship:  
<https://closingskillsgap.workforcegps.org/events/2022/01/20/20/22/Effective-Mentoring-in-Apprenticeship>
- Keystone Development Partnership's Apprenticeship Mentor Training Curriculum:  
<https://www.scribd.com/document/403644662/KDP-Mentor-Training-Curriculum-Outline>
- KDP Mentoring for Apprenticeship: Train the Trainer for On-the-Job Training:  
[https://www.expandapprenticeship.org/system/files/mentoring\\_for\\_apprenticeship.pdf](https://www.expandapprenticeship.org/system/files/mentoring_for_apprenticeship.pdf)
- Aerospace Joint Apprenticeship Committee Mentor Job Description: <https://www.ajactraining.org/wp-content/uploads/Master-Mentor-AJAC-Job-Description.pdf>
- H-CAP Mentorship Training Program: <https://www.hcapinc.org/mentorship-training-program>
- Apprenticeship Carolina guide on mentor training:  
<https://www.apprenticeshipcarolina.com/Training/General%20Mentor%20Training/story.html>
- Apprenticeship Carolina online mentor training: <https://www.apprenticeshipcarolina.com/training.html>
- Course on establishing mentor expectations and parameters:  
<https://apprenticeship.nsc.ca/mentoring/Mentoring.Course.Introduction.pdf>
- Keystone Development Partnership—Mentoring for Apprenticeship: Train-the-Trainer for On-the-Job Training:  
[https://www.expandapprenticeship.org/system/files/mentoring\\_for\\_apprenticeship.pdf](https://www.expandapprenticeship.org/system/files/mentoring_for_apprenticeship.pdf)
- LinkedIn Learning: <https://www.linkedin.com/learning/topics/coaching-and-mentoring?u=95232193>

Jobs for the future: diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in mentorship for registered apprenticeship (8 x 20 minute modules, free, registration required) <https://www.iff.org/resources/diversity-equity-inclusion-and-accessibility-in-mentorship-for-registered-apprenticeship/>



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES & REFERENCES

Video from a New Zealand company on mentoring best practices: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NT8w6TxmRs8>

*Effective Journeyperson Apprenticeship Mentoring On-The-Job: Tips, Strategies, and Resources*

The Canadian Apprenticeship Forum – Forum canadien sur l'apprentissage (CAF-FCA <https://caf-fca.org>), 2013

*Mentorship and Registered Apprenticeship*

Minnesota Apprenticeship (<https://apprenticeshipmn.com>)

*Successful Mentoring for Apprentices*

Stuart Bass, Plans & Trusts, May/June 2022

*Mentor Guide for Youth Registered Apprenticeship Programs*

Stephen F. Hamilton with Zach Boren, Bhavani Arabandi, and Tamar Jacoby (Cornell University), Urban Institute, June 2021

*Learning Mentor Apprenticeship*

EDN Training, 2021

*Learning Well at Work: Choices for Quality*

Mary Agnes Hamilton, Stephen F. Hamilton (Cornell University), 1997

*Mentoring an Apprentice – What are The Best Practices?*

Obi Umegbolu, Data Science Foundation, September 2020

*Mentoring for Apprenticeship: Train-the-Trainer for On-the-Job Training (OJT)*

Stuart Bass, Keystone Development Partnership, February 2017

*When is Work a Learning Experience?*

Mary Agnes Hamilton, Stephen F. Hamilton (Cornell University), January 1997

Kovalchick, Ann; Dawson, Kara (2004). *Education and Technology: An Encyclopedia*. ABC-CLIO. p. 161. ISBN [1576073513](https://www.abc-clio.com/ISBN/1576073513).

Hersey, P. and Blanchard, K.H. (1977). *Management of Organizational Behavior: Utilizing Human Resources*. New Jersey/Prentice Hall.