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## *Mentoring Trial – Chantal Laval and John Skillen*

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### **Mentoring**

Mentoring is a process that provides guidance to individuals in their professional development.

### **Background**

The Mentoring Trial was launched 5 months ago and has been successfully running since.

It currently involves 5 mentors and 3 mentees. Only one pair has withdrawn and this was due to the participant's resignation from the Department.

### **Feedback**

- Since the commencement of the trial mentors have completed three written surveys and have participated in two recall days with the third recently cancelled due to low scheduled participation.
- Mentees have completed two written surveys since the commencement of the program. The various feedback obtained has been very insightful and will not only benefit future programs but has also the remaining time of the trial program.
- Mentees were requested to complete an entry survey to gauge their perception of the program, as in '*has the purpose of the program been made clear to them?*', '*are they comfortable with the commitment?*' and any challenges that they may face.

### **Comments received and issues facing the Mentoring Programme**

- An interesting issue that was raised was the perception that the mentees had little choice in the matter of participation and that they had been nominated from 'above' and thus felt there was an expectation that they had to participate. However they were all quick to point out that they were happy to participate one comment being *'I personally believe in mentoring programs and think that all involved will benefit, this in turn will greatly enhance the Department'* another comment *'I feel the program will be very valuable for newer employees in particular, so I am happy to help the development of this program'*.
- Overall, mentees stated that they were clear with the purpose of the program and what was expected of themselves and from their mentees. A majority did state that time would be one of their major challenges that they would face, and to date this has proven to be a challenge for all involved.
- In the entry survey mentees were clear in the personal and professional goals they wanted to achieve from the program, however it has become apparent through the mentees and mentors feedback that the mentees struggled with setting their goals. This is an issue, which will be looked at closely with the next program. A problem with the mentees taking a considerable amount of time in developing their goals is that it reduces the amount of time they have with their mentor on working towards achieving them.
- The three month review survey completed by the mentees showed fortnightly contact, via the phone or email with 4 to 6 hours commitment per month. Whilst the mentees have stated that this has been satisfactory it is has been made evident that face-to-face contact makes a significant difference. As one mentee stated *'I was feeling that the phone contact was boarding on social, and was wondering if there was any point in continuing with the relationship, however when we met face to face this really changed the dynamics of our relationship and what we wanted to achieve from the program. We were more open and honest and a lot was achieved. I feel like I am back on track'*.
- One major issue that was raised by the mentees in their feedback was the lack of any recall day for the mentees. Originally the program had factored in recall days for both mentors and mentees, however it was advised that only mentors required recall days. Nearly all of the mentees suggested a recall day for mentees would be beneficial. One

comment was *'every 3 months a gathering of mentees separate to mentors would help so we can all benefit from learning about how others are using and benefiting from the program'*. This issue has also been raised with Chantal when she had phone contact with the mentees. A decision has been made that there will be a recall day for the mentees, this occurring in the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> month of the program, though it seems the mentees would have benefited from it earlier on in the program.

- All mentees have expressed that they are receiving encouragement, advice and support from their mentor. For example *'I am receiving constant encouragement, when I set goals, when I achieve goals and when I'm having difficulties'*. Another comment *'being able to ask dumb questions and look forward to sound answers is important. Small difficulties with my immediate supervisor are explained and I am able to see things in a different light'*. Overall mentees have expressed that they are receiving benefits from participating in the program.
- To date the mentors have had two recall days, which were facilitated by the training provider. The days have involved mentors sharing their experiences on what has been working and what not has been working, reinforcement of training, working through mentoring scenarios and dealing with issues that have arisen. A common issue for the mentors (and mentees) is coping with very little face-to-face contact. Whilst the training facilitator has provided the mentors with training on mentoring via the phone and email, all have stated that face-to-face contact makes a significant difference to the outcome of the meeting. Mentors have also expressed that being a part of the program has made them more aware of the type of work of the junior field officers and the high level to which they are performing. Mentors have also expressed that being a part of the program has been rewarding and has given additional job satisfaction.
- An issue that has arisen for the program is 4 partnerships turning into distance mentoring due to participants obtaining new jobs. A distance criteria was placed in the program to not only enable pairs to meet more frequently but also to keep costs down. The partnerships that have turned into distance mentoring have agreed that they wish to continue in the program and thus providing an insight on how and if distance mentoring will work. The pairs will only have email and phone contact, however John and Chantal are encouraging the use of video conferencing.

## The future

- John and Chantal acknowledge the time and effort the mentors have put into the program to date and are grateful for their enthusiasm. All have kept to their commitments of meeting with their mentees, attending recall days and providing feedback.
- The next 6 months for the program will contain 3 recall days for the mentors and hopefully at least one recall day for the mentees and the conclusion of the program in May 2004.
- The next few months will also pose a challenge for the participants in their ability to meet their mentoring commitments during fire season.
- In order to move forward, the next plans for the Mentoring Programme include:
  - investigation and development of graduate and trainee mentoring programs;
  - **expanding the formal mentoring to other CALM staff; and**
  - **improving the quality of informal mentoring.**

Chantal concluded with a comment made by a mentee, which she believes summarizes one outcome the program hopes to achieve from all participants.

*“Being in the program makes me feel appreciated and valued by the Department. It also contributes to enhancing my own loyalty to the Department as I feel they are genuinely concerned with my career development”*