

## **Mentoring for coaches**

According to Greek mythology Odysseus asked his trusted friend, Mentor to watch over his son when he (Odysseus) left for the Trojan Wars. Mentor undertook to guide and educate Telemachus into adulthood and so the term mentor came to mean a trusted adviser or friend.

Mentors are needed to help and guide trainee UKCC level 2 and 3 coaches whilst they do practical coaching sessions before putting themselves forward for assessment. These sessions give the coach time to embed the skills they have learned on the coaching course, refine their style of coaching and gain confidence before putting themselves forward for assessment. The level of support provided by a mentor can be critical to the progress made during the sessions.

Mentoring is different from coaching. Coaching is about improving performance in a particular role or area of skill while mentoring aims to increase an individual's potential and help them to develop their own self reflection practice as a coach. The role of the mentor is not to preach or dictate but to assist the mentee to develop and clarify their own personal set of values and beliefs.

If you are asked to be a mentor it is usually a sign that the mentee respects your work as a coach and you should be very pleased but you need to ask yourself a few key questions:

### **Do I have the time, commitment and availability needed to help the mentee?**

Meeting face to face and being present at the sessions being delivered is the ideal but it is still possible to mentor from a distance using email, phone or Skype. You will need time to find out in what way you can help the mentee and what their needs and expectations are. You will also need time to review and discuss each session soon after it has taken place so that the mentee can reflect and plan the next session.

### **Do I have the skills to be a good mentor?**

Some of the core mentoring skills includes being able to develop a good relationship with the mentee, being approachable, open minded and objective and showing a genuine interest in helping the mentee to develop. You will need to be able to use questioning effectively to encourage them to self reflect on why and how they are doing things. Take the time to listen and consider your response - active listening is important to your understanding of their thoughts and ideas. Can you provide constructive feedback in a way that encourages the mentee to self reflect and find solutions to problems?

### **Am I sufficiently committed to develop my own mentoring skills?**

Just because you are an experienced coach doesn't automatically make you a good mentor. In any new role there are skills to be developed and processes to learn to improve your own performance in the role. A useful book *Mentoring in Sport* is available from SportsCoach UK who also offer a 3 hour workshop "A Guide to Mentoring Sports Coaches" while you can gain a level 3 qualification in Workforce Mentoring through 1<sup>st</sup>4Sport.

Having a good mentor can make a tremendous difference to the level of competence exhibited at assessment. At level 2 the 6 sessions form part of the assessment with the assessor looking to see if the sessions have been suitably planned and that the coach is undertaking self evaluation as well as seeking feedback from participants and the mentor and using this information to assist in planning the following sessions. While you as mentor may have seen the sessions delivered the assessor only has the information on the paperwork provided upon which to base their decision (they also assess several written home study tasks and the final practical observed session) so it is important to encourage

your mentee to put as much information as possible onto the session plans and evaluation forms and to provide them with written feedback.

A document "Guidance notes for mentors" is given to all UKCC learners to pass on to their mentors. If you've been asked to mentor and haven't seen this you can download it from the coaches section on the British Orienteering website.

All good coaches, whether they are working towards a higher level of qualification or not, should actively seek opportunities to work with and benefit from other coaches to develop areas of their coaching skills that they wish to improve. Mentoring is a two way process and has benefits not just for the mentee, by challenging and encouraging the mentee the mentor will themselves be challenged to adapt and evolve thus improving their own coaching. Whilst the vast majority of mentoring will take place between coaches qualified in Orienteering the benefits of working with coaches from other sports should not be overlooked.

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