Mentoring — study guide

Mentoring turns a new seafarer into a competent one, and it takes place on the job, one task at a time. This guide covers the mentor's role, the relationship and the practical method.[1]

Who can mentor and what it means

Anyone from the Master to the AB can become a mentor. The meaning of mentoring is assisting people to understand the new situation they have entered.

The first task and method

When dealing with mentees who have not been on board ship before, the mentor's first task should be to conduct an introductory visit to all parts of the ship. The most rewarding method of mentoring is **task-based** mentoring, for both parties.

The relationship

For mentoring to succeed, the most effective relationship to develop is **mutual trust** — its fundamental basis is a full commitment by **both** parties. One attitude that is detrimental to mentoring is an experienced seafarer feeling that passing on knowledge may undermine their own status and position within the crew hierarchy.

How to be effective

The mentor should identify the gaps in the mentee's knowledge and skills. When a mentee faces a new task, the mentor should briefly brief them beforehand about the expected outcome and any dangers that could arise. While the mentee is busy with the task, the mentor stays involved — observing and ready to assist — rather than taking over.

Effects and benefits

For the mentee, the main effect of mentoring is that the mentor shows how to **practically apply** the knowledge learnt at school. For the mentor, the aim is making sure the mentee knows clearly how to do the task correctly. Effective mentoring develops a practical relationship in which the mentor's own experience grows the mentee's confidence and knowledge, and it improves the competences of junior crew while reducing the likelihood of errors. Senior officers benefit too: they develop greater confidence in the reliability of their juniors.

New crew at the start of their careers

New seafarers arriving on board face the need to develop new skills and acquire practical experience to function effectively; mentoring by an experienced crew member is a vital component of every seafarer's progress toward becoming an effective

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member of the crew. Nautical College training provides the theoretical understanding of all aspects of ship operation — mentoring is what turns that theory into practice. The main function of mentoring on board is to assist seafarers who boarded the ship for the first time to familiarise themselves with the new environment.

Key facts to remember

- Anyone from Master to AB can mentor; mentoring = helping someone understand the new situation they have entered.
- First task for a new-to-ship mentee: introductory visit to all parts of the ship.
- Most rewarding: task-based mentoring. Best relationship: mutual trust, with full commitment from both.
- Detrimental: fear that sharing knowledge undermines your status.
- Identify knowledge/skill gaps; brief the expected outcome and dangers before starting.
- Mentee benefit: practical application of theory. Mentor aim: mentee knows how to do the task correctly.
- Benefits: fewer errors, more competent juniors, senior officers gain confidence in juniors.

Sources

1. STCW Convention and Code — on-board training, familiarisation and assessment of seafarers' competence.