Chapter 16
Mentoring in an Online Environment

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to illustrate how online mentorship can be as effective or even more effective as in-person mentorship. Individuals have been mentored online for years; however, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become more popular out of necessity. Mentorship can happen in any number of settings. The focus for this chapter will be on different areas that foster mentor/protégé relationships. These include competency-based education programs, doctoral studies, instructional design, adjunct and fulltime faculty, and nonprofit leadership.

INTRODUCTION

Mentors see potential in their protégés and help them navigate the world in order for them to be the best they can be. "Mentorship can also enhance professional development and improve performance outcomes" (Andrews & Cook, 2020, p. 1). Adams and Hemingway (2014) discussed how it is common knowledge that mentorship and learning are social activities that can take place in many forms such as online and in-person environments and casual or more traditional settings. Oftentimes, someone providing guidance has been where their protégé is aiming to be. For example, a nonprofit leader might take a student under their wing and show them what steps they need to take in order to be in the same position one day. A good mentor is a guide who offers advice in various situations in order for the best outcome to be reached. Someone might provide guidance for several years, or just give one piece of helpful advice that could even result in lifetime benefits. There are several guides to explain mentorship; however, the actions mentors take in order to assist their protégés is rarely examined (Adams & Hemingway, 2014). Mentorship in the online realm is studied even less. Online platforms such as Zoom and learning management system discussion boards can be wonderful tools to promote effective mentorship. The COVID

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pandemic has significantly increased traffic on these platforms since people have been confined to their homes. Even with the "return to normal," it is highly likely many people will continue to rely on these tools for communication in the future.

BACKGROUND

There are infinite opportunities for mentorship in every industry. Some of these include mentoring students, nonprofit leaders, and even faculty. Some type of mentorship activity is structured, such as someone chosen to be a doctoral dissertation chair. Other mentorship relationships are more casual, such as a brief interaction on LinkedIn where someone in a more seasoned role provides advice to someone who is new to the workforce. Mentorship in previous years happened more often in person. Nowadays, more and more guidance happens through online channels. This has significantly increased, with much more work being moved online as a result of the COVID pandemic. Through it we have seen people hired and fired through Zoom, and quite a lot of professional growth has happened through this online platform as well. This chapter examines various online mentorship relationships, including students and faculty in competency-based education (CBE) and instructional designers and faculty and will examine what makes them effective or ineffective.

MENTORSHIP AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

Social class in the United States is not as structured as in other societies, and many people do not understand the concept well. It can be divided into five categories that include upper, upper-middle, middle, working, and lower. In the United States, there are two main factors that determine how Americans view their own social class. These include education level and income. Another factor to be taken into consideration is occupation. Citizens who make less than $20,000 per year are most likely to consider themselves lower or working class, while those who make more than $250,000 are more likely to classify themselves as upper-middle or upper class. Perceived social class is significantly affected by education level. Those who do not possess a high school diploma are likely to see themselves as lower or working class. While individuals who have undergraduate or graduate degrees are more likely to see themselves as middle class or upper-middle class, with the perception of upper-middle class becoming more predominant with a graduate degree (Bird & Newport, 2021. These observations are where mentorship comes into play. College often brings more mentorship opportunities that students would not otherwise have. "The best schools lift up those who never thought they could rise" (Gates, 2019, p. 122).

In college, students get opportunities to work with professors who are either full time or in adjunct positions where they may hold high-level jobs elsewhere or be retired from a job such as a chief executive officer post. Either way, they have the ability to give students knowledge to succeed in certain roles or connect them with individuals in jobs they might want to be in one day. College opens up doors for students to succeed in infinite ways if they apply themselves and search for the opportunities.

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