

TEACHING, COACHING, & MENTORING



These teaching, coaching, and mentoring suggestions were directly informed by current literature, academic study, Navy leadership texts and opinions, and other research on team and individual coaching. These suggestions are offered with the belief that Navy leaders at every level can benefit from experiences of others.

TEACHING

1. Purpose. Teaching provides feedback to a Sailor during and after they perform a specific task or evolution and is the most basic element of developing future Navy leaders. Figure 1 highlights that teaching, coaching, and mentoring all fall on a spectrum of giving advice. Specifically, teaching is performance-focused with the goal of assisting Sailors in developing required skillsets to perform their duties proficiently and competently, and is typically curriculum based on pre-agreed learning goals.

Teaching drives development, enforces adherence to standards and promotes accountability. Teaching should provide continual feedback to improve communication, work outcomes, and overall performance. Teaching should be specific and highlight the Sailor's performance with respect to a standard or communicated expectation. It should focus both on areas that require improvement and areas that are performed well and should be sustained.



Figure 1. Variance of Different Guidance

2. Sailor Responsibilities. The Sailor should seek continuous improvement in their ability to complete assigned tasks or evolutions. The Sailor's goal is to become brilliant at the basics of their trade which requires they seek feedback and take action to improve weak areas and maintain strengths identified by the teacher. The Sailor should look for trends in their own performance since they may have different counselors providing feedback over a period of time.

3. Teaching Best Practices:

a. Teaching is about performance – It trumps personality or motivation. The goal should be to focus on the weaknesses that impact performance and strengths that boost performance.

b. Teaching provides an essential feedback loop to help Sailors understand their performance relative to objective standards, and must increase understanding for both the individual and the supervisor. Teaching requires feedback from the member, as it increases their understanding of their own performance with respect to procedures, and engages the member in decision making, which will develop ownership and cultivate accountability and initiative.

c. Teaching Objectives – A focus on improvement, highlighting specific performance issues and challenges, as well as facilitating growth and development. It's also important to instill motivation for further improvement while maintaining realistic goals and ensure shared expectations.

d. Teaching Outcomes:

(1) Sailors understand their performance level of a task with respect to objective standards.

(2) The Sailor and teacher understand the trend in the Sailor's improvement of the task and actions to maintain or improve the trend as required.

e. Teaching methods will vary in different communities and commands as they're based on mission and personnel. The methods need to be tailored to the individual skill level and responsiveness, and must be a frank, open discussion that is fair, accurate, and realistic. SYSCOMS/TYCOMS/Community Leads should continuously develop their own teaching format and structure, periodicity, and documentation.

COACHING

1. Coaching. Effective coaching fosters collaboration that helps Sailors advance to the next level by assessing the Sailor's performance gaps. The coach helps guide the Sailor's development in new or existing skills and focuses on improving performance through training, motivation and feedback. Also, coaching goes beyond teaching by helping the student map out medium-term goals and gives clarity about current career situations and desired career goals. Subsequently, an effective coach should help ask questions and provide insight so that the Sailor can develop plans to address their personal gaps. Coaching should motivate performance improvement. There are 5 major objectives to accomplish during the coaching session:

a. Help the Sailor identify important strengths and shortcomings. A fair, accurate and realistic assessment of the Sailor's performance is crucial to the coaching process.

b. Help the Sailor address specific performance problems, concentrating on ways to develop growth in these areas. The coach should address the Sailor's strengths and encourage their further development. Point out ways to improve, but do not dwell on unimportant faults.

c. The Sailor should present a performance growth plan, if appropriate. Be sure that goals are challenging but realistic and attainable for the Sailor.

d. Ensure Sailors have a clear understanding and acknowledge their performance during the review period.

e. Review what is expected of the Sailor before the next coaching session or evaluation report. Ensure the Sailor understands the rater's expectations.

2. Conducting the Coaching Session. Before Sailors can improve, they must know how well they are currently performing in their assigned role. The coaching process is a dynamic

relationship between coach and Sailor, one in which the Sailor is free to discuss issues for the purpose of obtaining direction and assistance.

a. Techniques. The coach can use one of several methods to give feedback during the session:

(1) Ask the Sailor for their performance appraisal before giving your own.

(2) Discuss strengths and performance accomplishments and, as appropriate, address job elements requiring further input.

(3) Discuss the Sailor's complete performance evaluation and coaching record. This can include teaching data as appropriate.

(4) Review the Sailor's growth plan of action if they have one. Ask the Sailor for their evaluation of the execution of their plan and changes they intend to make based on the coaching session.

b. Guidelines. Knowing where the goals of coaching contain feedback for medium-term goals, the coach needs to remember the following:

(1) Clearly explain the purpose and objectives of the session and what you intend to accomplish.

(2) Establish and maintain rapport with the Sailor. A fundamental role is to "be yourself." A coaching session will be more successful the more organic and relatable the working relationship is.

(3) Convey acceptance of the Sailor as a person and what they have to say. Acceptance does not imply agreement, but rather accepting the Sailor's right to have opinions and perceptions.

(4) Actively listen and do not interrupt the Sailor. Listening and understanding is a technique that is useful in reducing or eliminating the problem of false assumptions. Avoid "drive-by" coaching sessions and really show interest in solving the Sailor's issues.

(5) Avoid confrontation and argument.

(6) Focus on performance, not personality. Characteristics like attitude, adaptability, integrity, dependability, appearance, initiative, etc., should be addressed only as they relate to job performance.

(7) Focus on future expectations as well as past performance.

(8) Emphasize strengths as well as areas requiring development.

(9) In general, the performance coaching session should focus on reinforcing Navy's expectations, providing observations about how the conduct of the Sailor matches the standards measured against and motivating the Sailor toward high standards of professionalism. The session is not a substitute for official disciplinary actions related to significant misconduct, but is an excellent opportunity to share impressions and reinforce expectations.

(10) Know when to terminate the coaching session, ensuring the Sailor has clear guidance on how to proceed forward with their plan of action, and in lieu of that, put them in touch with someone who can better assist with their plan of action.

3. Follow-up. Following up and answering any remaining questions can be just as important and the coaching session itself.

a. Evaluate the coaching session. Review and summarize key issues discussed and review the goals with the member for the next appraisal period. A method for summarizing is to ask the members for their comments on the discussion to make sure they understand the advice given. It may take time for coaching advice to be absorbed properly, and delayed questions from the Sailor are normal.

b. If specific follow-up actions were discussed, then the coach should ensure they are completed.

c. Conduct informal coaching sessions as required to help keep the Sailor on track in the areas of job performance and career development. Never hesitate to give or accept feedback.

MENTORING

1. Purpose. Mentoring is a means of forming professional relationships that foster free communication and provide an avenue for Sailors to share experiences and offer long-term guidance. A mentor is typically an expert in a particular field or position who can aide a mentee to follow in their footsteps. Mentoring plays a crucial role in retaining expertise resident in a mentor's community, developing future leaders, fostering a culture of inclusion, and perpetuating the community's success. Mentoring is recognized as a beneficial career development tool that not only affects individual career health and longevity, but enhances morale and improves operational readiness and professionalism.

Mentorship is an essential part of the military profession, but it is not a one-way street. Done correctly, mentorship requires active participation from both the mentor and the Sailor. Identifying professional goals and career needs is central to the mentor-Sailor relationship. Good mentorship enables Sailors to successfully navigate the complex challenges of balancing personal and professional life. Of note, it is not recommended that mentoring be forced. Many mentoring relationships fail as they don't have the proper buy-in from the mentor, mentee, or both.

2. Mentor Guidelines. There are no rank or position requirements or qualifications, however, the best mentors have already “walked in the boots” of the Sailor and are in a position to share perspective. There are also many benefits with reverse mentoring – from empowering emerging and established leaders, providing in-group access and career advice, to bringing different generations of Sailors together, helping to eliminate generational gaps and certain biases in the Navy.

Good mentors know what is current, new and changing in the Navy. Good mentors check their ego at the door and let their experiences naturally guide discussions. Mentors must establish trust and respect, share their knowledge and experience, be available and reachable, and ultimately provide insight, feedback and perspective. Mentors should channel independent thought and avoid being prescriptive.

The importance of seeking multiple, diverse perspectives cannot be overstated. Another option is to have your unit host “speed-mentoring” workshops to initiate conversations and networking relationships between junior and senior sailors that otherwise would not have been possible. Moreover, many Navy communities have networking events around the globe, and it is highly encouraged to send interested Sailors to these informative sessions where mentors can be found outside a unit or area.

3. Mentee Guidelines. Mentors are usually chosen by the Sailor and can develop into long-term relationships that extend beyond a single tour. Sailors can and are encouraged to have multiple mentors to get a variety of recommendations and opinions. It is also encouraged to seek out multiple mentors who will offer unique, diverse perspectives.

It is the protégé’s responsibility to promote trust and respect, demonstrate professional competence, and, if in the same chain of command, maintain balance between the supervisor and mentor relationship. In order to be successful, it is important to clarify what you need – you may only need a quick mentoring question answered vs. long-term guidance. Finally, not all mentoring relationships are mutually beneficial, and Sailors can dissolve the relationship at any time.

4. Mentoring Periodicity. Mentoring periodicity is often driven by career or life milestones. Promotion, transfer, new duties, marriage, divorce and births are a few examples of life experiences that warrant mentoring guidance. Many mentor-mentee pairs find it helpful to agree on an initial schedule when starting in order to help set expectations and ensure the mentoring process continues. Mentors and Sailors should never hesitate to request or offer mentoring sessions. As every mentoring relationship is different, based on goals, personalities, amount of guidance needed, etc., it is up to the members how often they should meet.

5. Fundamentals for Mentors. One important aspect of successful mentorship is a successful relationship. One study demonstrated that unless mentees have a basic relationship with their mentors, there is no discernable difference between mentees and those not mentored. Each person is different, not only in style and personality, but in their backgrounds, personal goals and

aspirations. It is important to take this into consideration when picking a Sailor to mentor. Potential mentors should also be aware that Sailors may be uncomfortable requesting mentorship, therefore, being approachable matters.

Mentors should help Sailors clarify their goals and corresponding timelines. Once the goals and timelines are established, it is easier for the mentor to track the Sailor's progress. Additionally, feedback from mentors can be used to enhance a Sailor's commitment to their goals or drive increased effort towards reaching those goals. Sailors and mentors should actively seek feedback regarding their performance and goal attainment. Regardless of whether or not feedback is positive or negative, it must be constructive and focus on providing concrete information that helps motivate someone to reassess behavior in light of new information.

a. **The Right Questions.** One key to being a great mentor is asking great questions. Knowing the right questions to ask is as important as knowing the right answers. By asking probing questions, a mentor can stimulate critical thinking and draw out ideas and underlying assumptions held by the Sailor.

Allowing the Sailor to discover their own truths and solutions instead of "spoon-feeding" resolutions reinforces a Sailor's critical thinking skills and develops their confidence in their own problem solving abilities. However, a mentor's knowledge and experience should inform their line of questioning and help the Sailor gain valuable insight.

The right questions can provide clarification and reduce confusion. The right questions help a mentor better understand a Sailor's skillsets, goals, and values while managing expectations of the mentor-Sailor relationship. Balancing between asking open-ended questions to generate conversation and asking closed questions to elicit short answers is important. Too many open-ended questions may frustrate a Sailor, while too few will limit the depth of discovery and development.

b. **Connecting People.** One of the most powerful benefits a mentor can provide is the ability to help build professional and personal networks. Mentors should look for opportunities to connect their Sailor with others who have similar interests and goals - mentors who connect Sailors with valuable resources build stronger leaders and ensure the future of the Navy

Additionally, it is important for mentors to know their limitations. There will be times when your Sailor seeks guidance in areas about which you know little to nothing at all. Temptation may lead you to provide guidance to not lose face or seem weak. However, acknowledging your lack of expertise while utilizing your network to connect your Sailor with a more experienced and knowledgeable resource will strengthen the mentor-Sailor relationship.

Finally, it is also important to take mentoring one step further, from the personal commitment of a mentor to the public commitment of an advocate. By advocating for their Sailors, mentors take action. They scan the environment for professional opportunities —

projects, jobs, workshops — for which one of their Sailors would be well matched, succeed and grow. An advocate then contacts the decision-maker for that opportunity and recommends their Sailor be considered for the position.

c. Common Pitfalls. Whether you are a seasoned Sailor with years of experience mentoring experience or just starting your career journey, there are 4 main hazards when embarking on a mentor-Sailor relationship.

(1) *Do not tell your Sailor to be just like you.* History has proven there are many ways to achieve success. As a mentor, you need to be current on what Navy values. You need to know the right questions to ask to get to know the other person’s goals, strengths, and weaknesses in order to build their competence, confidence, and professional development.

(2) *Do not tell your Sailor what to do.* A common mistake many mentors make is thinking that the only way to be a good mentor is to provide plenty of advice and guidance about what to do, think, or feel.

(3) *Do not try to solve the Sailor’s problem – enable them to solve their own.* Each individual must determine their own path. Mentors provide feedback and support to help Sailors develop insight to realize their path with clearly defined goals.

(4) *Be optimistic, and hold back the cynicism.* Mentors need to be supportive and cultivators of new ideas, and good mentors should encourage unconventional success. Do not create a negative base for the relationship (e.g. don’t use the mentoring session as a “gripe session,” and don’t talk down to the Sailor). Channeling negativity can only breed cynicism.