The concept of senior colleagues supporting the work of more junior colleagues, by sharing the benefits of their hands-on experience is a time-honoured activity. To take this a stage further as part of their induction processes, an increasing number of practices are creating buddy roles. Their aim is to formalise a skills transfer process which previously happened in an ad hoc style. In many cases guidance from a senior colleague has been very much valued by employers and employees alike. This article explores ways to build a mentoring strategy for your practice, which will secure increased benefits from these beneficial interactions.

I am often asked if mentoring is just another name for coaching. The answer is that although there is significant crossover in these interactions, essentially mentors must have actual hands-on experience and expertise in the work role of their mentee. Whereas, in coaching the expertise is coaching rather than applied skills. In this way many business coaches have not ‘walked in the shoes’ of the client. Because the dental team mentor’s skills are in the delivery of dental care, to support their work the practice needs to create a mentoring strategy and provide training and support. In this way all parties are able to secure measurable benefits through mentoring.

Mentoring success depends upon numerous factors, not least finding a best fit mentor and mentee match. A structured mentoring process must be managed in exactly the same way as all other practice activities. This begins with a clear vision to create the design, implementation, support and evaluation processes for your mentoring scheme.

Successful mentoring is dependent upon the participation of senior colleagues as mentors and also as mentees. This is a prime example of leading from the top. The best mentoring schemes start small and grow gradually, stimulated by enthusiasm, positive examples and organisational support. Here is some guidance for the creation of an effective mentoring scheme at your practice:

• Establish the purpose of the scheme - Define who will be involved, what they will do and the expected results. Begin by finding out what mentoring is already happening on an informal basis and assess how valued this format of learning and development is at present.
• Appoint a mentoring lead-person with responsibility for managing and helping to sort out difficulties within the mentoring scheme and its relationships. This person will need to be able to measure and assess personality types and learning styles to find mentor-mentee matches.

• Define mentoring activities. Mentoring to introduce new employees to practice routines is the relatively brief, phase one of the mentoring process. On completion of this phase the more enduring phase two begins. This ongoing stage is where mentors help colleagues focus on their challenges, choices, cause and effect to help them to find creative solutions, learn from experience and decide how to apply learning to their working practices.

• Consider what factors will help and hinder mentoring in your team. Do you have top management support, top management support, do they have time? Once those pragmatic needs have been met, innate learning styles will take over and input of a particular mentor may not be appreciated. In such cases this should not be viewed negatively, simply as recognition a progression of needs and the way forward to building the next level of mentoring relationship.

After the Initial stages
As with all relationships, mentoring relationships grow and develop. New employees will inevitably look to established colleagues for practical information to help them find their way around in their new workplace. Once those pragmatic needs have been met, innate learning styles will take over and input of a particular mentor may not be appreciated. In such cases this should not be viewed negatively, simply as recognition a progression of needs and the way forward to building the next level of mentoring relationship.

Table 1
What kind of things will be talked about?
Open
Acronyms and jargon
Who knows that mentoring is going on?
Public
Mentor-mentee relationships are general knowledge
Private
Details of individual relationships are maintained
Style of the mentoring interactions
Format
Interviews are tailored to suit, at regular intervals over a period of time

The practice needs to provide boundary for individuals to design their mentoring relationship.

About the author
Glenys Bridges is an experienced management trainer and assessor with 20 years experience of working with General Dental Practitioners and their teams. In addition, she has expertise and qualifications in Counselling and Life Coaching. Her first book, Dental Practice Management and Reception was published in 2006 her second book, Dental Management in Practice was published during 2012.

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Gemma Godman

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Les Jones

Be creative
How to market your practice on a tiny budget.
Les Jones

Act fast!
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