Book review:

Coaching and mentoring in health and social care: the essentials of practice for professionals and organisations

by Julia Foster-Turner

The title of this book implies a health and human services focus, and the author is described as an ‘experienced healthcare professional’; however the author provides very few examples of coaching and mentoring activities in this field. Although in this respect the title is misleading, the book is still a valuable guide to the development of mentor programs and the skills and activities involved in the coaching and mentoring process. Because of the overlapping definitions and interpretations of these terms the author uses the term ‘coach-mentoring’ throughout the publication.

This book has seven chapters covering a variety of topics:

1. The world we live in: the context and case for coaching and mentoring.
   In this chapter the concepts of coaching and mentoring, ranging from the provision of one-on-one advice to supported learning programs, and their benefits to organisations and individuals, are discussed. The chapter introduces the reader to goals, relationships and strategies used in coaching-mentoring processes.

   The author describes models of overt or implied contractual arrangements between the mentor and mentee. Practical ideas are provided for: initiating and building the relationship; establishing the mentee’s current position and future direction; planning and implementing action to achieve identified goals; reviewing progress; and concluding the relationship.

   In this chapter there is an interesting overview of learning styles, communication processes and personal attributes needed by mentors, including empathy and openness, which foster a successful relationship. The importance of establishing the degree of direction and challenge to be provided by the mentor is considered, ranging from ‘telling’ to ‘listening’ and ‘reflecting back’.

4. Tools and techniques for career, work and personal development.
   This chapter provides a toolbox of techniques which can be used in the coach-mentoring process in the areas of career and skills development, problem solving, and personal development. Some of these approaches could be used on an individual basis in the process of developing self-awareness through reflective thinking and goal setting. The chapter includes a section on stress and time management.

5. Making coach-mentoring work in organisations.
   As the title implies, this section focuses on the development of coaching and mentoring programs within organisations for the purpose of staff development. Aspects considered include relationships with existing staff training programs and the identification and matching of mentors and mentees. Case studies from several organisations with successful programs are presented as examples.

6. Achieving and maintaining quality of coach-mentoring in the health and social care sector.
   Three key factors which impact on the quality and success of coach-mentoring activities are described in this chapter: attributes, competencies and knowledge of mentors; supervision and support of mentors; and ethical behaviours, standards and expectations of these relation-
ships. Although there is some repetition of ideas from Chapters 3 and 5, this section presents more detailed and useful information and guidelines.

7. Where now?
This is a short chapter with concluding remarks.

This book is a practical and easy-to-read guide; although the author describes it as being appropriate to literature and research, she avoids the style of a more formal textbook. This should be a useful reference for more experienced colleagues who are committed to supporting the development of younger professionals whether or not they are involved with the ‘mentor schemes’ conducted by some state branches of the HIMAA. Health Information Managers with staff development responsibilities would also benefit from the author’s experience in this field. The toolkit presented in Chapter 4 may be useful to individuals in their personal approach to life-long learning and continuing professional development.

Dianne Williamson
Senior Lecturer
Department of Health Information Management
School of Public Health
La Trobe University
Bundoora 3086, Victoria
AUSTRALIA

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