

## Chapter 10

# The Magic of Mentoring

Lisa Miguel

**My official job title is claims and assessing manager. I work for IAG in the personal insurance division, managing a claims and assessing region that processes motor and home claims for both NRMA and CGU Insurance.**

## About Me

We have approximately 180 staff within the region and operate from sites within the southern suburbs of Sydney and on the North Shore at Chatswood.

More importantly I am a wife, a mother of two young children, a student (I'm currently completing my MBA), a daughter and a friend to many.

I've been employed by IAG my whole working life, and whilst I love my job and the company that I work for, my life doesn't end when I close my office door each day.

## What is Mentoring?

Mentoring or coaching usually occurs where one wiser and more experienced person (in my case Jeff) assists another person to grow, learn and face new challenges.

Mentoring provides the individuals involved with the opportunity to share both professional and personal skills and experiences and to grow and develop as they go through the mentoring process.

I know this now. I didn't realise this over 12 months ago when I was selected by IAG to go through my own coaching program with Jeff Jarrat. I knew of Jeff, he'd provided services to our company before in regards to fraud and security type issues — was I in trouble?

The saving grace and the one thing that calmed my nerves about the process was the fact that I knew some of my highly respected colleagues were already undergoing coaching of their own. This provided me with a sense of security and allayed my fears that I was not performing well enough and that the "big guns" had been called in to sort me out!

## Starting the Mentoring Program

My first meeting with Jeff was probably awkward and uncomfortable looking back on the experience. I didn't know what to expect or what would be expected of me. Jeff was very pleasant and explained his background and qualifications in the mentoring arena and then went on to tell me that my life was about to change.

I listened tentatively as Jeff advised me to inform my

husband about the mentoring program, as quite often partners and loved ones noticed a definite change in the behaviour of the person being mentored. I was now scared!

Our first meeting involved going over the program: what it involved from a time and emotional investment point of view and what sort of methodology would be used to gain feedback from my managers and peers.

I left the first meeting with a book (*The Naked Executive*) and a commitment to come back to Jeff with some thoughts on the types of personal behaviours or issues I'd like to work with him on improving. We agreed to meet each month for an hour and Jeff was available at any time if I needed to discuss an issue with him.

I read the book and immediately recognised (I already knew), that I needed help to improve my networking (or, as the book called it, "influencing"), skills. I also decided that I'd like to improve in the area of synergising or getting the most out of my people and teams.

In determining how to move forward and grow in these areas I guess Jeff thought that it was important to reflect on my current techniques and skills, both in the areas I'd chosen for improvement and my overall management capability.

## Feedback

It was time to take stock and collect and analyse some comprehensive feedback, a process known as 360-degree feedback. Scary, but necessary to gain a good understanding of whether my own self-perception of how I was performing matched the public perception I was displaying to both my colleagues and my boss.

After a little angst on my behalf, the results were in, and hey presto, what a surprise, the feedback came back on the money. The feedback was largely positive with the areas identified for improvement being those that I had already selected myself. Comments like "needs to be more vocal in meetings", "needs to be more interactive" and the like, backed up my own personal thoughts that I was taking a backseat to some of my more experienced, and vocal, counterparts from other areas of the business.

Jeff and I analysed the feedback and discussed what barriers were holding me back. We discussed techniques that I could utilise to be more assertive and, in particular, we discussed in great detail the opportunities and advantages of networking.

## My Networking Dilemma

My thoughts on networking had been developed over many years of watching negative role models attempting

to network by what, in my mind, I considered to be “egotistical ladder climbing.” My perception was that to be successful at networking or influencing, as it’s now known, you had to be a yes person, someone who was constantly following the boss around or out to further themselves by using their relationships with other people. Not nice I know, but that’s what I believed.

Many conversations with Jeff ensued about the power of networking. Jeff turned my thought processes around by making me understand that networking is not all about what I could get out of communications and relationships but what each party could achieve mutually from the relationship. He taught me to believe that I could assist others just as much as they could assist me.

## Self Worth and Self Confidence

Whilst I believe I have always held a high sense of self worth I believe my self-confidence around my peers, in particular, was lacking. In a one-on-one situation I could exude confidence when necessary but felt under-skilled and, to be honest, intimidated at times by my direct peers, each of whom had vast years of experience in our particular field, unlike myself who had no technical background.

Believing that I had skills and opinions that I could offer my peer group that could add to our core strength was a big leap in the way I thought about my environment and was only brought about by many discussions with Jeff.

Jeff taught me that most people have their own fears and insecurities, we just all hide them in different ways. With Jeff’s help I’ve learnt to overcome my own insecurities and am learning to hold my own and perform as an integral part of my peer group.

## The Opportunity for Assessment

The feedback received from my peers by utilising the initial 360-degree tool was greatly enhanced and reinforced when Jeff and I conducted a three-way discussion with my manager, the head of claims and assessing.

My manager provided really constructive feedback, highlighting my good points and those areas where he felt I needed to improve.

Again, building on my own awareness, he highlighted the fact that he believed I needed to contribute more in meetings and to not feel intimidated by some of my more experienced peers. The session was fantastic in reaffirming my own views of myself and confirming that the issues I had selected to tackle with Jeff were those that would reap the greatest benefit in respect to my own development.

The discussion was also a great opportunity to reset my personal goals with my boss and to boost my confidence in regards to the many areas of my behaviour

that he thought I was doing well.

## Ready for Action

Following on from the 360-degree feedback and one-on-one meeting, Jeff and I discussed methods by which I could improve my networking, synergising and my own self-confidence, particularly in meetings.

We spoke about specific actions that I could take, and over the following months I enacted these and discussed the outcomes with Jeff each month.

With each action and each success came more self-confidence and the ability to push myself further and utilise all opportunities around me to both assist others and in turn improve my own profile, learnings and ability as a manager.

## The Final Tool

After working with Jeff for nearly 10 months, he conducted another 360-degree feedback process, but this time he collected information from different peers, my manager and my direct reports. The second 360-degree feedback was verbal instead of written and allowed Jeff to collect a number of comments about my style and

behaviour.

Jeff presented this feedback to me in a generic form, that is, he didn’t identify which peer or direct report had made particular comments. By and large, the second round of feedback showed that I had narrowed the gap in respect to those issues that I wanted to improve on, however, there were still

some comments that I thought needed some attention, so again it was back to the drawing board in an effort to come up with some concrete actions.

I guess the whole point of learning is that it doesn’t stop or end after a certain point in time. The trick is to realise this and continue to ask for feedback so you can adjust and improve.

## What Next

I believe my mentoring program with Jeff has worked for me. It may not work for everyone as I think you have to be committed to moving outside your comfort zone and giving new techniques and styles a go.

Personally, I feel much more self-confident in my own skills and ability as a leader. I feel as if I can hold my own both with immediate peer groups and in broader environments.

I believe that I am now able to network and inspire my team much more effectively, and I feel that I’ve climbed if not a mountain, a pretty big hill, to conquer some of my previous beliefs and fears.

My motto now is “on to bigger and better things.”

---

*The whole point of learning is that it doesn't stop or end after a certain point in time. The trick is to realise this and continue to ask for feedback*

---