

Mentoring for County Commissioners



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Mentoring Matters



What is Mentoring

Mentoring is a personal, reciprocal relationship in which a more experienced person intentionally serves as guide, role model, and sponsor to a less experienced one, supporting their professional and personal development.

Advisor

Transmits information, answers procedural questions

Transactional — no relationship required

Example: Explaining budget processes

Coach

Targets a specific skill or performance gap

Instructional — typically short-term

Example: Walking someone through Robert's Rules

Mentor

Guides through questions and shared experience

Relational, developmental, sustained

Example: Reflecting with someone after a hard vote

What Mentors Do

Career Functions

Visibility and Credibility

Helping a mentee be seen as informed, prepared, and trustworthy

Exposure and Introductions

Bring them into relationships with community leaders and agency contacts — with context

Challenge

Asking hard questions that push their thinking before and after a major decision

Psychosocial Functions

Role Modeling

Letting them see not just what you decide, but how you got there

Acceptance and Confirmation

Helping build trust that mentee questions are legitimate and that they belong

Counseling

Provide support when the pressures of public service become heavy

Competencies of Effective Mentors

Maintaining Effective Communication

Ask more than you tell — mentors overestimate how well they listen

Fostering Independence

Equip them to make their own calls under pressure. Success looks like needing you less

Aligning Expectations

Have an explicit conversation: What are you offering? What does the mentee want/need?

Promoting Professional Development

Help them find their own path, not yours. What kind of commissioner do they want to be?

Assessing Understanding

Diagnose before you prescribe. Where are the gaps including what they're not ready to admit?

Addressing Diversity of Thought

Do not try to resolve differences in values or political philosophy



Psychological Safety

Knowledge sharing

Authenticity

Speaking up

Learning

What Makes Mentoring Work

Trust is a prerequisite for everything else

Competence

Proven through judgment, not credentials. People trust the decisions you've already made.

Integrity

Proven when words and actions match, especially when it's inconvenient.

Benevolence

Proven through small acts that show you're looking out for them, not using them.

Consistency

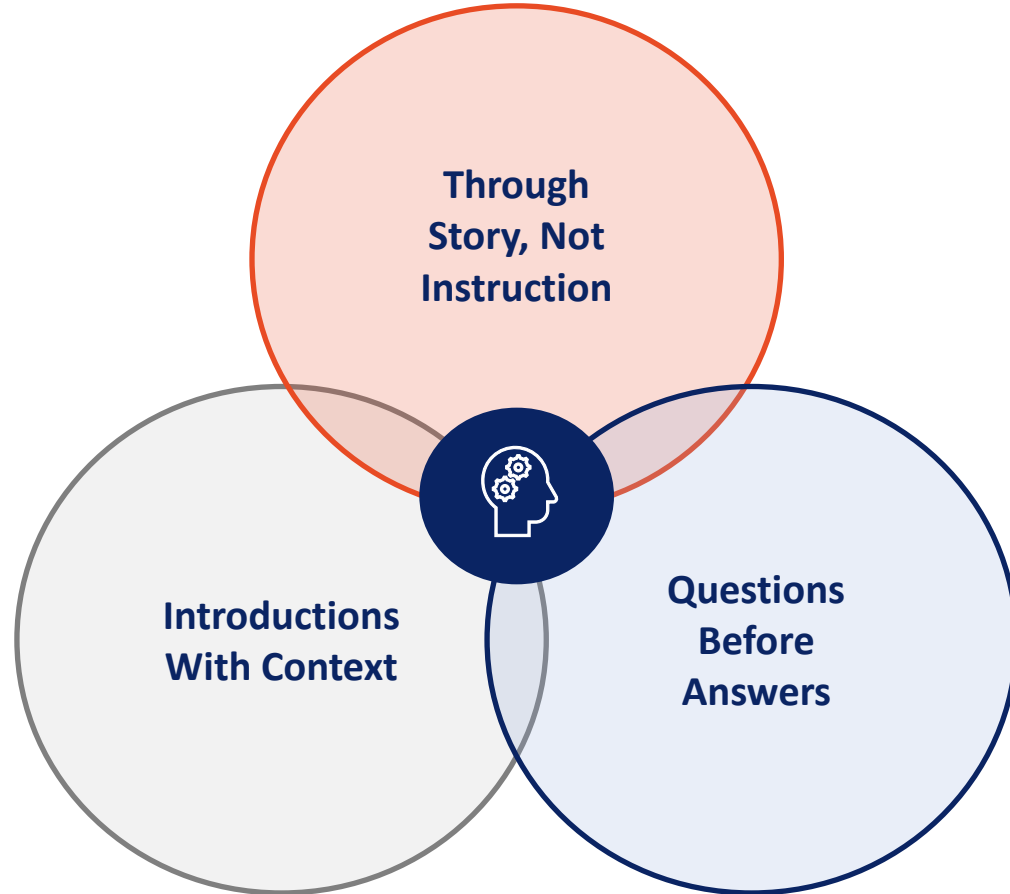
Proven by being the same person across time and context, so behavior becomes predictable.

Trust takes a long time to build and little time to destroy

Knowledge Transfer Tips

Formal orientation transfers explicit knowledge — statutes, procedures, org charts, etc.

Mentoring transfers tacit knowledge — the judgment and relational intelligence that can't be written down



Common Pitfalls

Mentor Neglect — Being Unavailable

Be consistent and available

Breaking Confidentiality

What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas

Mentoring in Your Own Image

You're not the captain of the ship, just a guide

Failing to Let Go

Mentoring relationships end and that's OK

Mismatch — and Not Forcing It

Better to acknowledge a mismatch early

Advising When You Should Be Listening

Avoid the instinct to solve rather than guide

Confusing Influence With Mentoring

Avoid serving your own interests

Practical Strategies for Getting Started

Be Available

Meet right away once you're assigned, then set a regular cadence. Agree on how you'll communicate.

Align Expectations

What does the mentee hope to gain, and what are you able to offer?

Ask Questions

Understanding their needs comes before anything else you do.

Share Your Process

Invite them into how you think. Share failures. If you're still active, bring them into your work when you can.

Make Introductions

Bring them into your professional network intentionally, to serve them best.

Why This Is Worth Doing

Renewed Energy

A reminder for yourself and you why care

Sharper Thinking

Mentoring pushes you to keep learning

Unexpected Friendship

This is not required for success, but happens

Deeper Meaning

New meaning on past experiences

It Changes How People See You

Not just how others see you as a professional — but also as a leader.

Mentoring Begets Mentoring

People who are mentored go on to mentor others. This is how leadership culture is built.



Questions & Discussion

Every experienced commissioner in this room holds knowledge that isn't written down anywhere.

It was earned through hard lessons that came at a cost.

Pass it on!

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