

Guide to Mentoring New Instructors

NATIONAL SKI PATROL SYSTEM

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This Guide is intended to provide background and reference material on the overall mentoring process. Those who have mentoring experience and only wish to understand the sequence used for mentoring NSP instructor candidates can proceed directly to chapter 4.

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Guide to Mentoring New Instructors

Introduction

"Better people produce a better product"

Mentoring is not a new concept. The name itself dates back to Greek mythology and, if we think about it, mentoring was one of the first forms of learning in the early days of mankind. Today mentoring can be found in businesses, organizations, and education to optimize productivity, train staff, and induct new teachers. The goals are much the same, to produce competent, self-assured, overall better people. Better people produce a better product.

The National Ski Patrol has adopted mentoring with a similar goal. Education is our product, so we want premiere education programs. To accomplish this, we need to make the best instructors, ensuring that our students have a positive learning experience. Mentoring provides the focus and nurturing that all new instructors deserve, as well as the flexibility to adapt to busy schedules and geographic limitations. When we create better instructors, we will better serve our members, and ultimately the entire snowsports industry and beyond.

The purpose of this guide is to provide direction for mentoring instructor candidates. By no means does it represent all there is to know about the subject. It is only the essence of the subject, which concentrates on the basics. Every attempt has been made to present this material in a simple, easy to understand, jargon-free environment. A good mentor will only use this as a guide and draw from many sources including life experiences. So, gather all your resources and make some great instructors. ❄



I. What Is Mentoring?

...concerned with individual development

Most of us have seen movies or heard stories of a martial arts expert who, at a young age, climbs a mountain to reside with a great master. Here all worldly possessions are divested, and a residency begins, that could take years. During this period, a skill is mastered, in this case martial arts, but more importantly mental discipline is learned. Before the student leaves the master to be on their own, they acquire the ability to solve problems and cope with the complexities of the world. The martial artist is now equipped to handle whatever life has to offer.

Don't worry, we're not asking anyone to divest of all worldly possessions or even climb a mountain, but the story does illustrate some of the fine points of mentoring. The NSP mentoring program pairs a skilled, experienced instructor with one of less experience or an instructor candidate, with the goal of developing the skills and competencies necessary to be a good instructor. The important thing to remember is that mentoring is not just focusing on a specific skill set. We are not just showing instructor candidates how to teach OEC, OET, avalanche, or MTR skills, or, in the case of our story, martial arts. Mentoring is most concerned with individual development.

Good instructors must learn to relate to their students, be problem solvers, be able to think on their feet, and handle the unexpected. They must have a bag of tricks from which they can pull solutions to difficult situations. Without a mentor it will take years for an instructor to fill that bag. Having a mentor automatically provides the instructor candidate with experience that would otherwise take a great deal of time to attain. ❄

Mentoring vs. Coaching

Some concepts of mentoring include coaching as a module. Some treat them as two entirely different entities. Some use the terms synonymously. In education, coaching is generally a part of the mentoring process, but the terms do have different implications. Coaching refers to skill development. It is showing someone how to do something, and then giving them guided practice until they master the task. If you demonstrate how to teach a particular skill and your instructor candidate is able to repeatedly copy your demonstration to the letter, you have been successful in coaching that skill.

Mentoring, in its purest form, is more abstract. Here we are looking at the whole picture and not just the skill. How will the instructor candidate react if a student does everything that was demonstrated and still cannot demonstrate the skill? Now the instructor candidate must be able to analyze the situation, come up with a solution and relate it in a way the student will comprehend. As situations change, the instructor candidate must call on information not always found in textbooks. A good mentor will help the instructor candidate reason through these difficult situations and promote self-reliance for the future. If

the terminology is still confusing, think of key verbs for coaching and mentoring. Coaching implies showing, demonstrating, training, and directing. Mentoring implies asking, challenging, enabling, and supporting.



Figure 2

As mentors in NSP education it is sometimes difficult to separate coaching from mentoring because we use both, quite often simultaneously. There will be times when the mentor will need to show a skill while helping the instructor candidate figure out how to relate the skill to the student. The most important thing a mentor can learn from this differentiation of terms is that there is more to mentoring than just coaching. Coaching can be a very important part of the entire mentoring process but, nonetheless, it is only a part. ❄

Mentoring Is Not Evaluating

Sometimes we can better understand what a process is by first understanding what it is not. One of the common misconceptions about mentoring is that it is evaluative in nature. This is understandable because evaluating is such a big part of teaching. When all the teaching is done, someone or something has to determine whether or not the student was successful in the learning effort. That is not the role of the mentor.

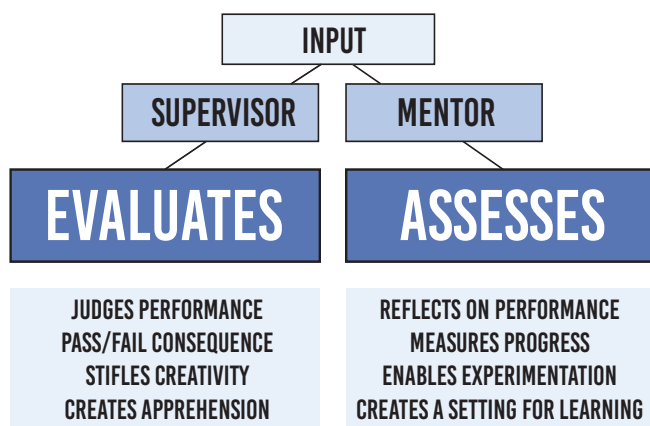


Figure 3

Isn't a mentor supposed to determine if an instructor candidate has successfully developed the art of teaching or mastered an important skill?

Don't mentors evaluate lesson plans and classroom strategies? Again, we must clarify some terminology. Mentors assess. Supervisors evaluate. What some see as evaluation is actually assessment. Assessment uses information to improve an instructor candidate's performance. A good mentor assesses the generic needs (course content, lesson planning, instructional strategies, etc.), as well as the individual needs of the instructor candidate, and then identifies strategies and resources that will support the instructor candidate's needs. The evaluation process uses some of the same information but uses it to judge success or failure.

Evaluation is contrary to the concept of mentoring in several ways. Evaluation can erode trust, threaten confidentiality, stifle creativity, and serve to destroy the mentoring relationship. Most of us don't enjoy performance evaluations. In fact, the very thought of them causes some people to hyperventilate. These situations quickly evolve into "us vs. them," and we certainly can't trust "them." We're also afraid that if we do poorly, someone might find out. We spend the entire performance trying to do what we think the evaluators want to see, never daring to experiment. It should be fairly obvious by now, why an effective mentoring process cannot involve evaluation and why the mentor should not be in a supervisory capacity. ❄️

II. Who is the Mentor?

...think of the best instructor you've ever known

The NSP mentor is an experienced instructor who is appointed by a division supervisor, region administrator, or instructor trainer to provide guidance to an instructor candidate in the same discipline. That's the easy part of "who is the mentor." What are the qualities the mentor must possess? What is an experienced instructor? Before trying to answer these questions, think of the best instructor you've ever known. This person probably knew the subject matter as though they had written the book. They were also able to communicate that knowledge in a way that learning was nearly effortless. The qualities we associate with this great instructor are the same qualities that will make a great mentor.



Figure 4

Conversely, the negative attributes we associate with a poor instructor are those that should be avoided in mentoring. ❄

Knowledge of Subject Matter

It is often said that a good instructor can teach anything and given time, this might be true. NSP education, however, involves a great deal of skill performance. We wouldn't consider sending a good OEC instructor out to teach a toboggan class unless they had a technical understanding and competency in that discipline. The same holds true for mentoring. The mentor must have the confidence of the instructor candidate and, therefore, must be competent in the specific discipline. This does not mean infallible. None of us is perfect. If, to be a toboggan instructor, we could never fall, or to be

an OEC instructor, we could never forget to take a pulse after applying a splint, then there wouldn't be any NSP instructors. Competency means, with preparation, we know the subject well enough to teach it. Most importantly, we know the subject well enough to assess the needs of the instructor candidate we have to mentor. As an extension of this assessment, there will be times when we need to be proficient in demonstrating specific skills. Being technically prepared is a benefit of mentoring that is often overlooked. It refines the skills of the mentor, providing self-imposed continuing education. ❄

There are knowledgeable people in every field of study but that doesn't make them good teachers. Simply possessing knowledge doesn't mean we can effectively communicate that knowledge, and successful communication is the essence of mentoring. The mentor may have a great picture of where they want to take the instructor candidate but, without interpersonal skills, it will be hard to get there. These are what most of us call "people skills." We can find these skills in a physician's bedside manner, the compassion of a good friend, or the empathy of a professional counselor. As a mentor, you will use an array of interpersonal skills, but it all starts with listening.

Active listening will be a key factor in the mentor's ability to connect to the instructor

candidate because it requires specific feedback based on the message we receive. No matter how well we can expound on the art of teaching or how convincingly we can explain our experiences, our efforts could be misdirected if we haven't connected with the instructor candidate. How often have you had to listen to someone ramble on and on without hearing a word you have said in response? That's the point. That person had their own scripted agenda and nothing you said had any effect. We can't be empathetic to the instructor candidate's concerns or situation if we don't know what they are. The need for effective two-way communication will never be more evident than in a mentoring relationship. Each instructor candidate is unique, requiring an individualized approach to their specific needs. Pay close attention to what the instructor candidate is saying and craft your response appropriately. ❄

Obstacles to Active Listening

On-Off Listening: Most of us think about four times as fast as the average person speaks... Sometimes we use this extra time to think of our own personal affairs, concerns or interests instead of listening.

Open Ears – Closed Mind Listening: Sometimes we decide rather quickly that either the subject or the speaker is boring and what is said makes no sense. Often, we jump to conclusions that we can predict what he or she knows or will say.

Glassy Eyed Listening: We almost seem to be listening although our minds may be on other things... We drop back into the comfort of our own thoughts. We get glassy-eyed... We can tell when people look at us in this way. Similarly, they can see the same in us, and we are not fooling anyone.

Matter over Mind Listening: We do not like to have our opinions and judgements challenged. Consequently... we may consciously stop listening or even become defensive and plan a counterattack.

Being Subject Centered Instead of Speaker Centered: Sometimes we concentrate on the problem and not the person. Detail and facts about an incident become more important than what people are saying themselves.

Pencil Listening: Trying to put down on paper everything the speaker says usually means we are bound to lose some of it because the speaker's words come out faster than we can write them down. Eye contact also becomes very difficult.

Hubbub Listening: Sometimes there are too many distractions when we listen – noise, movement of people or other matters competing for our attention.

III. How Do We Do It?

...create a “well rounded” NSP Instructor

An effective mentoring process will consist of many elements. Each will fall under one of the primary components of the NSP mentoring model: connecting, assessing, guiding, and coaching. In your travels you may find other mentoring models having slightly different components. Each one has its own merit and has been refined for slightly different goals. By no means is the NSP way the only way. There is benefit in exploring all forms of mentoring. Our model is customized to create a “well rounded” NSP instructor.



Figure 6

Connecting

Many people feel that connecting or relating to the instructor candidate is the most important part of the process. Without it, all other components will be ineffective. At the first thought of connecting, communication skills usually come to mind. It is true that without these skills the mentoring process would be impossible. Understanding the adult learner, adapting to specific learning styles, and mastering both verbal and non-verbal communication have been instrumental to being a good NSP instructor and mentor. These important skills are all well documented in the Instructor Development

textbook and are not the focus of this section.

What is important for us to understand in this section are the personal skills that make the connection work. In our daily lives, we all have someone to whom we relate very well. Think about who that is for you and what makes the relationship work. What are the qualities of this person that create a feeling of ease and comfort? Several may come to mind but trust, respect, and empathy are on just about everyone's list. These same qualities are instrumental in creating a strong connection between the mentor and the instructor candidate. ❄

Trust

Trust is the most essential ingredient in the recipe of making a connection. Think of the difference in the way you behave to someone you trust as opposed to how you behave to someone you do not. When you earn someone's trust, that person is more likely to open up, share genuine concerns, expose insecurities, and ask for advice. The word "earn" is very important when we speak of trust. As adults we carry

many life experiences with us, including disappointments. These disappointments can be instrumental in making us who we are and can often make us leery of accepting things at face value. If the mentor and instructor candidate have no previous relationship, the instructor candidate will most likely approach the mentoring relationship somewhat guarded. For this to change, trust must be earned.

How do we earn trust? As mentors we should make a conscious effort to exhibit behaviors that enhance trust and avoid behaviors that erode it:

- ◆ *Act as peer, not as a superior.*
- ◆ *Be realistic in your expectations. Don't be misleading in time expectations or overzealous in content.*
- ◆ *Don't deviate from a plan. It would be inappropriate to have the instructor candidate prepare a lesson and then switch topics before the presentation.*
- ◆ *Don't put the instructor candidate in an embarrassing situation. If you know their skills are weak in a certain area, don't ask for a demonstration in front of a class until you have had time to coach those skills.*
- ◆ *Recognize and respect the confidential nature of the mentoring relationship. What you see and hear as a mentor is not public information.*
- ◆ *Don't attempt to tell the instructor candidate what you think they want to hear. Give honest and helpful opinions. In the long run your honesty will be respected.*
- ◆ *Be where you say you will be when you say you'll be there. Postponing appointments or being late may not seem like a major problem, but it shows that your priorities are elsewhere.*
- ◆ *Respond to the instructor candidate's statements and questions to their satisfaction before going on to a new topic.*

The development of trust is an ongoing process. We may work very hard to develop it only to regress if we violate it once. It has been said that trust is the residue of promises kept and only lasts until one is broken. ❄

Respect

Although respect can have a role in the development of trust, there are some characteristics that warrant individual attention. After all, it is entirely possible to respect someone without having enough information to have complete trust. Respect comes in many flavors. We can respect someone's ability, we can respect someone's professional stature, we can respect someone's accomplishments, we can respect

someone's opinion, or we can respect someone as a person.

For the mentoring connection to work, respect should be mutual. As mentors, we have likely been involved in teaching or training for many years. We certainly expect the instructor candidate to respect our experience and "know how."

As we progress through the mentoring process, we expect that respect to increase. But what about our respect for the instructor candidate? Do we simply consider them as a rookie with a blank slate, just waiting to absorb our infinite wisdom? Hopefully, this is not the case. The instructor candidate is

a person who genuinely wants to teach. Future instructors would not be going through this process voluntarily if they weren't serious. Respect what they are doing and respect them as people. Like trust, respect can take time to develop but can deteriorate in an instant. The following guidelines are useful:

- ◆ *Respect their opinions and ideas, even though you may disagree.*
- ◆ *Accept criticism without becoming defensive.*
- ◆ *Avoid sarcastic remarks.*
- ◆ *Give real answers to questions no matter how absurd you think they are.*
- ◆ *Allow intellectual freedom. Let instructor candidates use some of their own ideas.*
- ◆ *Respect their feelings.*
- ◆ *Respect the instructor candidate's time. Don't waste it.*

Empathy

We have all heard the expressions “I feel your pain” and “that must have been difficult.” These statements are examples of empathy. Empathy is the ability to communicate to others that we understand the emotions they are experiencing. How often have we heard someone say in desperation, “you just don't understand.” Maybe you've said it yourself. The fact is, there is someone who understands. There is someone who has been through the same situation.

As seasoned instructors it should be easy for us to recall all the hardships, disappointments, and trial and error situations we have experienced as teachers, but how soon we forget. Our beginnings

as teachers have been so long ago that we have forgotten what it was like to stumble, or we simply have chosen to forget. If we are going to be effective as a mentor, we must relive the experience. If we haven't made mistakes, we probably shouldn't be mentors. The instructor candidate will not think less of us for mistakes we've made in the past. On the contrary, our candidates are banking on the fact that we've made them. Our “less than perfect” experiences enable us to identify with and respond to similar experiences of the instructor candidate. When we find ourselves being overly critical and unbending in our methods, we should take a moment and remember how it was when we were there. ❄

Assessing

By now it should be apparent that a scripted approach to mentoring is not possible. No two people will be the same in their skills or needs, nor will they respond equally to our guidance. Before we can formulate a plan of action, we need to know what the instructor candidate does or does not know and what they can or cannot do. This part of the process is assessment and the information we acquire in this phase determines what we do to guide the candidate.

Acquisition of information will take place throughout the entire mentoring process. Sometimes it will be obvious and other times we will have to probe for it. Have you ever looked back on a situation and said, “why didn't I see that?” A good mentor becomes keenly aware of verbal and visual clues so hindsight will be less of an issue. We will have to be proficient at information gathering; and questioning, listening, and observing will be our tools. ❄

The three areas of assessment specific to the mentoring process are:

- ♦ *Assessing the generic needs of the instructor candidate*
- ♦ *Assessing the individual needs of the instructor candidate*
- ♦ *Assessing the success of the methods employed by the mentor.*

Generic Needs Assessment

The most straightforward area of assessment is that of generic needs. As the name implies this is an area of categorical concerns shared by all instructor candidates. Within any program or discipline, we must be concerned with course content, lesson planning, student assessment,

environmental management, and instructional methods. These familiar items are areas we address every time we teach and are directly from the Instructor Development course, but how do we address them as mentors? Generic needs assessment tends to be very objective.

- ♦ *Is course content in compliance with NSP guidelines?*
- ♦ *Is there a written lesson plan?*
- ♦ *Are stated objectives going to be met?*
- ♦ *Is student progress monitored and assessed?*
- ♦ *Is the environment conducive to learning?*
- ♦ *Are the instructional strategies appropriate?*

This part of this assessment should be made before the instructor candidate teaches the lesson. If the information is obtained now, the mentor can provide the necessary guidance when the instructor candidate needs it most. Wouldn't it have been nice if we as teachers had this opportunity before our first teaching assignment?

Most of the assessment at this point is done through questioning. "Do you think a demonstration would be useful?" "Is this the best area to hold the class?" "Do you think the class is ready for guided practice this early in the lesson?" Questioning initiated by the mentor is very important at this stage because the instructor candidate may not know what to ask. Listening carefully to the answers will indicate the level of understanding in each area. Most, but not all, questioning is verbal and directed to the instructor candidate.

Some questions are asked of ourselves. We should use a checklist, either written or mental, to be

certain all essential material is covered, and that we have provided sufficient information to ensure success. Although there appears to be some crossover into listening and observing at this point, we are essentially trying to answer the questions that we generate. We may listen to the instructor candidate, but what we are hearing is most likely a response to our question or prompting. We may observe the lesson plan, but are we observing it in the questioning mode, establishing its existence and content?

Following the lesson, we continue with the generic needs assessment, but now our questions are based on observation. We are still addressing the same issues; however, our approach will be a bit different. Now the instructor candidate has some experience. What was previously theoretical is now real. The candidate's questions and responses have personal meaning. At this stage, the mentor should avoid a direct line of questioning if possible and use more of a prompting technique to encourage questions from the instructor candidate. ❄

Individual Needs Assessment

For most mentors, addressing the individual needs of the instructor candidate can be the most difficult part of the entire mentoring process. The concept is somewhat abstract, and unlike the generic needs assessment, there is no checklist. Here the mentor must rely on their ability to listen and be able to draw on previous experience and analytical skills to gather information from observation. The instructor candidate's individual needs can be divided into two categories—*functional* and *emotional*.

Functional Needs

Instructor “A” presents a lesson, gives demonstrations, conducts guided and unguided practice; and, upon final evaluation, finds all students have a high level of comprehension, are enthused and highly motivated to continue.

Instructor “B” presents the identical material, gives the same demonstrations, and gives the same practice. At the end of the lesson the students are bored to tears, most didn't get it, and many only want to continue because they have to.

Before reading any further try to come up with some reasons why this could happen.

Instructors of the same discipline should be equally qualified, but they function differently in a class situation. No two instructors are the same. They all have different methods of communication, both verbal and non-verbal. When we think of how teachers communicate with students, speech naturally rises to the top of the list. If two instructors are speaking the same words, how can student comprehension levels differ? We have all heard, “It's not what you say, it's how you say it.” If an instructor speaks too slowly or in a monotone, the students will soon become bored, regardless of the topic. Conversely, if the instructor speaks too fast, student attention will be lost because of the students' inability to keep pace.

Instructors who read from a book or their notes extensively also can lose student attention. The stagnant message they transmit often becomes a bedtime story.

There are also distractions associated with speech patterns. Have you ever found yourself counting

how many times an instructor says, “uh” or “OK?” These distracting speech patterns are called “beans.” If you are counting beans, you can't be listening to content. Excessive use of these speech patterns also causes a disruption in the organized flow of information.

Some teachers are very animated and command attention with high energy. There are also some who do not possess that energy level, but nonetheless, are very effective because they compensate with higher student involvement. Not everyone is a great public speaker but that doesn't mean they can't be good educators. Correct what you can and compensate for the rest.

Student response can also be affected by non-verbal communication. Quite often, non-verbal communication can have more impact on the message than what is spoken. Eye contact, gestures, posture, and overall appearance all convey a message and are explained in the Instructor Development course and textbook. Be aware of their importance and that non-verbal communication is a powerful primer for the spoken words that follow. ❄

Emotional Needs

If we have never experienced fear, intimidation, nervousness, or a lack of self-confidence when making a presentation, we have very short memories. These are examples of emotional needs and as mentors we must probe a little deeper to assess them. Those we mentor will be very reluctant to admit insecurities so we must look for clues. This is not as difficult as it sounds because often these insecurities are manifested as function. You might have observed an instructor candidate habitually fiddling with notes and addressed it as a functional

distraction when it may have been inspired by fear. You may have seen the instructor candidate pacing back and forth at the front of the room, avoiding eye contact with anyone. That could indicate a lack of self-confidence.

Mentors do not have to be psychiatrists. We simply recognize that emotional issues exist and that they are, for the most part, natural and expected. Most will be self-corrective with time. As mentors, it is our job to provide reassurance and support. ❄

Self-Assessment

How are we doing as mentors? Have we made a good connection with the instructor candidate? Are our methods working? The mentor's self-assessment is critical to the process and should be ongoing. If we find one of our methods isn't quite working, we follow the same course of action we follow when we teach—we try something else.

Mentoring, however, is a little different in terms of other things we try. Mentors should be a bit more conservative when experimenting with the instructor candidate. Use established methods as alternatives and not wild experimentation. Detrimental effects to the instructor candidate's self-confidence can result if the mentor continually guides the candidate down the wrong path.

How do we know if our methods are working? One of the most obvious answers to that question is often overlooked. Ask the instructor candidate. If you have developed a relationship of honesty and trust, you should get an honest answer. Respect the instructor candidate's answer. It may not be what you want to hear. It is important not to become defensive and defend your methods. This is a learning experience for both the mentor and the instructor candidate. We will most likely only need to make minor changes.

Another method of determining success is student

assessment. If we are satisfied with the methods we have used to guide the instructor candidate, and students still lack comprehension, something needs to change. The easiest way to get this feedback is a simple evaluation form. The form should comprehensively evaluate the lesson and the instructor candidate and should be given to the students when there is ample time to complete it. Use the NSP course evaluation form or create a form that is more specific to your areas of concern. Review and discuss the completed form with the instructor candidate and explore methods to improve performance. Use this instrument as a mutual evaluation.

The mentoring relationship will not always work. Sometimes we can do our very best and still be unsuccessful. No matter how many times we alter our approach, the instructor candidate just doesn't seem to catch on. The problem isn't necessarily the fault of the mentor or the instructor candidate. There are times when a mismatch occurs. It could be a mismatch in teaching and learning styles, or it could be a conflict in personality. Maybe you have the same hair color as the instructor candidate's ex-employer. Whatever the reason, know when to say "when." Come to an agreement with the instructor candidate, that a different mentor might be in their best interest. Don't let your ego get in the way of the instructor candidate's potential success. ❄

The mentor has been called a “resource broker” or a “conduit to information.” This will become obvious in the guiding phase of the mentoring relationship. Now that we have established the instructor candidate’s needs, what do we do with the information? Our goal is to create a self-reliant instructor. All that stands in the way are the candidate’s assessed needs. How can we address any shortcomings we have observed? How can we enhance acceptable performances?

Our most effective option is to guide the instructor candidate to the answers and potential solutions. There are two benefits to this approach.

First, the instructor candidate becomes directly involved and will have a vested interest in success. Second, what is learned through “guided discovery” will be retained to a higher degree than simply being handed an answer.

Does this mean that the mentor should avoid answering direct questions? Absolutely not. It is the method which the mentor provides the answer that will be the key to initiating self-reliance. A typical question asked by the instructor candidate might be, “How do I keep the students in the back of the room from talking and being disruptive?” Rather than giving the instructor candidate the answer that you think is obvious, probe them for the answer. Perhaps a good reply would be, “That can be frustrating. Why do you think they were talking?” Follow that with, “How could you occupy their time so they would not choose to be disruptive?” Whenever possible, allow the instructor candidate to find the answer.

The instructor candidate will generally only ask questions when a problem is perceived. As the experienced observer, most of the questions will originate from the mentor. The way we ask our questions is just as important as the way we respond to those of the instructor candidate. Ask leading questions that cause the instructor candidate to think about possible outcomes. Ask, for example,

“What do you want to happen when you...?” “What if it happens this way instead?” Avoid using questions that imply judgment, such as, “Wouldn’t it be better to...?” or “Did you really think that was going to work?” It is much better to allow the instructor candidate to be their own judge by using questions such as “When you did... what student involvement did you hope for?”

On occasion, the mentor will not be able to get the desired response from the instructor candidate. These are the times when the mentor becomes a resource broker. We have an abundance of resources, and it is just a matter of pointing the instructor candidate in the right direction. Refreshers and clinics offer excellent opportunities to observe several different teaching styles and problem-solving techniques. There are also many web-based resources and thousands of pages in traditional form. When it comes to education, there is no shortage of information. The use of multiple sources for information provides a much broader basis for learning than the mentor alone can furnish. It is the mentor’s homework to become familiar with alternative problem-solving tools and to know where to point the instructor candidate.

At some point in our mentoring experience, there will be an instructor candidate who will be hard to convince that there may be a better way of doing something. This can evolve into a difficult situation if not resolved to the satisfaction of both the mentor and the instructor candidate. In situations such as this it is often useful to get a third opinion. Have another mentor or experienced instructor observe the behavior in question. Respect the opinion of the observer even though it may not totally agree with yours. Avoid the tendency to become defensive and territorial. The goal is to solve the problem. It also may be helpful for the mentor and instructor candidate to observe an experienced instructor at this time. The heightened awareness of the instructor candidate at this point will make the observation more meaningful.

Another useful tool in both problem solving and positive reinforcement is recorded video. When using recorded presentations of the instructor candidate, it is extremely important to remain positive. Problems and shortcomings usually stick

out like a sore thumb on a recording. Be careful not to embarrass the instructor candidate or tear down confidence. Be quick to point out the positive aspects of the performance first and use the questioning techniques outlined earlier to plan corrective strategies. ❄

Essentials for Guiding

- ♦ *Always take a positive approach.*
- ♦ *Use open-ended questions to explore multiple solutions.*
- ♦ *Use probing questions when specifics are needed.*
- ♦ *Avoid using judgmental questions or statements.*
- ♦ *Acknowledge and validate answers by restating them in your own words.*
- ♦ *Resist the temptation to give direct instruction or advice.*
- ♦ *Summarize and acknowledge ideas, feelings, and decisions before ending a meeting.*

Coaching

Earlier in this guide distinct differences between mentoring and coaching were outlined. When we think of a coach, we often envision an athletic coach striving to get the best performance from an athlete. By giving specific instructions and requiring repeated practice, skills are mastered, and the coach's goals are met.

Guiding, on the other hand, is focused on self-reliance through reasoning and problem solving, where coaching is focused on training and

teaching. As stated in the previous section, a good mentor should be able to guide the instructor candidate to answers and solutions to problems. Sometimes the instructor candidate will do a great job in acquiring information but will need the mentor's help to put it all together. This will require coaching. Other times, the instructor candidate will lack proficiency in a specific skill. This too, will require coaching. These are the two areas of concern to the NSP mentor. ❄

Coaching As an Extension of Guiding

Experienced mentors know when to coach and when to encourage self-directed learning. If the instructor candidate has legitimately explored potential solutions to a problem and still needs help, by all means give it. Not giving a direct answer or demonstration at this point can cause the instructor candidate to become very discouraged and frustrated. Coaching can also be helpful in refining or enhancing an already acceptable performance. The mentor's years of teaching experience can provide enhancements that the instructor candidate may never discover alone. The key is in knowing when to assume the role of

the coach and teacher. This is not always clearly defined, so be patient and use good judgment.

The "guided discovery" method of learning often takes a great deal of time and still may not meet all the established goals. Coaching can be used to fill in the gaps. Coach at the proper time but use caution. Don't coach when guiding would be more effective. There are times when we all become frustrated and feel like saying, "Step aside and let me show you how to do that." Avoid the temptation. Remember, the focus of mentoring is to develop a self-reliant instructor. If the only goal was to have instructor candidates learn a task, they could take a class. ❄

Coaching Specific Skills

When coaching is needed at this level, it is obvious. If, while observing an instructor candidate demonstrating toboggan transport through moguls, you noticed some problems when the candidate got into heavy snow, what would you do? You could ask, “Why do you think that happened?” or, “What was the difference between the hard snow and the heavy snow?” If that were all you did, you would probably be the recipient of a thrown

object. The questions are nice, but a picture is worth 1,000 words. When the question-and-answer session is coupled with demonstrating and teaching, physical skills become easier to understand and apply. After the instructor candidate’s lesson or demonstration, conduct a one-on-one mini clinic, focusing on the weakness you observed. Resolve one weakness at a time and resolve it to mutual satisfaction. ❄

Try Coaching when...

- ◆ *The instructor candidate has the information but has difficulty applying it.*
- ◆ *Slight refinements in technique are necessary.*
- ◆ *The instructor candidate becomes frustrated.*
- ◆ *Abstract concepts are involved.*
- ◆ *New or scarcely documented material is introduced.*
- ◆ *There are recent changes in protocol.*
- ◆ *There is a deficiency in a physical skill.*

E-Mentoring

Mentoring in outdoor education is often considered as only a face-to-face interaction. Obviously, some skill-based outdoor teaching demonstrations must be in-person, but what about interaction preceding and following the demonstration?

What about sharing the lesson plan? Can some of these things can be done through video conferencing? When possible, immediate feedback is always best, but most mentors and mentees have demanding schedules making frequent face-to-face meetings burdensome. It may also be difficult to schedule a meeting immediately following a presentation, especially if the mentor is one of the class instructors. In addition to convenience, there are other logistical barriers such as geographic proximity that can also complicate the mentoring process.

The solution to many mentoring barriers may be as close as your computer, tablet, or smartphone.

Many asynchronous and synchronous solutions exist and are readily available. Lesson guides and the final lesson plan can be reviewed with the mentee in real-time, utilizing video conferencing. If other questions arise prior to the teaching demonstration, they are easily answered with additional online meetings. Following the demonstration, video meetings can take place on an as-needed basis. Digital communication is just another tool to help facilitate the mentoring process.

If digital communication will work for pre- and post-observation functions, couldn’t it be used for the observation itself? It is something to be considered, especially for classroom presentations when scheduling conflicts or other obstacles exist. This method is frequently used in business and post-secondary education where hybrid presentations are the norm, but it may not be the best solution for face-to-face, hands-on presentations. A recorded video of the demonstration might be an option in these instances. ❄

IV. What Are the Steps?

Quick Start Guide

The following steps provide guidelines...

The recommended chronology for the mentoring process will be the same for all NSP programs. The following steps provide guidelines for an orderly, effective mentoring relationship. We realize that some mentors with previous experience will want to jump right to this procedural section and use it as a Quick Start guide, so some of the material from previous sections is restated where it is relevant.

Mentoring Assignment

The method for assigning a mentor to an instructor candidate may vary from division to division and between programs. Availability of personnel, resources, and travel distance will all contribute to how the process is enacted and matures. It is the responsibility of division supervisors to establish the most effective means within that division. Ultimately, the person who assigns the mentor could be a region administrator or a local instructor trainer.

The importance of this phase of the process is very critical. Matching the right mentor to the right

instructor candidate can have a significant impact on the success of the new instructor. For instance, a mentor with highly animated personality might not be the best choice if the instructor candidate is very laid-back and deliberate in their actions. The instructor candidate might take months trying to emulate a teaching style that will never work with their personality. If an assigned mentor or the instructor candidate ever feel there is a significant mismatch, a change might be necessary. The supervisor, or person responsible for the assignment, should be notified immediately. ❄

Meeting with the Instructor Trainee

The initial meeting with the instructor candidate sets the stage for what is to come. It should be a face-to-face meeting with sufficient time allowed so the connection between the mentor and the instructor candidate can build a foundation. The instructor candidate should feel that this is their time and that the mentor is not just squeezing the meeting into a busy schedule. Avoid interruptions and select a location that is as distraction-free as possible. When developing a dialog between mentor and instructor candidate, a favorable environment goes a long way.

Goals and expectations need to be clearly defined at this point, and making this a mutual process will help to eliminate misunderstanding and disappointment later. Formulating a plan is also a mutual effort. The plan should be concise and answer the when, where, and how questions. Allow some room for flexibility but make every effort to stick to the original plan.

The remainder of the meeting can be spent introducing the instructor candidate to some of the tools needed to be an NSP instructor. Explain the administrative process.

- ◆ *How do you register a course?*
- ◆ *Is it necessary to register a clinic?*
- ◆ *What is a course completion record?*
- ◆ *Who needs to be notified?*
- ◆ *If fees are collected, who gets them?*
- ◆ *What is an expense report form?*

Even though some of these questions may need to be reviewed when they are applicable, they should be introduced at this point.

The NSP course materials should be introduced at this meeting. Textbooks, workbooks, instructor manuals, and the current NSP Policies and Procedures manual should be available for discussion.

If possible, demonstrate the use of the NSP website. Show the instructor candidate where to find information from these sources and how to use the information. In addition to NSP materials, any outside sources that the mentor has found useful can be explained. These could include such things as CPR/AED manuals, PSIA publications, wilderness training guides, videos, related websites, etc. ❄️

Observing the Experienced Instructor

Observing an experienced instructor can be one of the most valuable parts of the mentoring process. Quite often the armchair quarterback can see what the actual quarterback cannot. For this observation to be most effective, both the instructor candidate and the mentor should view the presentation as a team. Allow the critique that follows to be a free-

flowing discussion that addresses both positive and negative. A good critique at this point will make it far easier when it is time to assess the instructor candidate's presentation. Explore different methods that could have been used and figure out which would be the most effective. A few typical questions that might emerge from these critiques are as follows:

- ◆ *Were the students getting it? How do you know?*
- ◆ *What did you think of the learning environment?*
- ◆ *How did the instructor motivate the students? How would you have done it?*
- ◆ *What is the one thing you remember most about the presentation?*

Different situations will inspire different questions and, hopefully, many more in number. The important thing to remember is that the mentor's job is to guide the instructor candidate to the correct answers,

not just give the correct answers. Encourage the instructor candidate to ask questions as well. Again, whenever possible, guide to the answers. This type of collaborative effort enhances retention. ❄️

Observing the Instructor Trainee

Before the instructor candidate makes their first presentation, the mentor must ensure that they have the best chance for survival. This begins with a generic needs assessment:

The Pre-observation Conference

- ◆ *Curriculum (course content)*
 - *Does the material adhere to NSP guidelines?*
- ◆ *Lesson Planning*
 - *Is there a written lesson plan?*
 - *Are objectives clearly stated?*
 - *Is it adaptable to a change in student needs?*
 - *Is there an effective means for student assessment?*
 - *Is time an issue?*

♦ *Instructional Methods*

- *Are they appropriate to the material being taught?*

♦ *Environmental Management*

- *Is the physical space suited to facilitate learning?*
- *Are visual aids and/or other resources available?*
- *Is there a “plan B” or “plan C” if necessary?*
- *What are the risk management considerations?*

The individual needs will be better assessed after the observation, when more information is available; however, it is important for the mentor to encourage and motivate the instructor candidate before the presentation. Positive reinforcement is a great confidence-builder at this point.

The timing of the pre-observation conference should be such that it allows ample time for the instructor candidate to make any changes or modifications

deemed necessary. Obviously, this conference is best held face-to-face but if available time or travel is an issue, the initial lesson plan can be sent to the mentor and discussed online or by phone. Then, perhaps an hour before the observation, a short meeting can be used to tie up loose ends and be a final confidence-builder. It is also a good idea to make sure the instructor candidate has provided a break in the presentation to allow for intervention if necessary. ❄

The Instructor Candidate Observation

For the most part, the mentor should be as inconspicuous as possible. Sit in the back of the room or stand off to the side if it is an outdoor presentation. Some observers are intent on giving hand signals and other forms of non-verbal communication, to the point where there appears to be a mime in the back of the room. This could be a major distraction. Simply attend and take notes as any other student would. Definitely, take notes for future reference.

This is the mentor's opportunity to find out what the instructor candidate does or doesn't know and what they can or can't do. Observe the students as well. Look for signs of comprehension. Are the students bored or restless? If the presentation is going sour or if there is an error in content, wait until the break to provide help or correction. If it is a toboggan class or other outdoor presentation, use the lift ride or student practice time for this purpose. ❄

The Post-observation Conference

This conference should be held immediately following the presentation, when the visual picture of the presentation is still fresh in the minds of the mentor and the instructor candidate. Now is the time to review the generic needs outlined before the observation and to take a closer look at the individual needs of the instructor candidate. Make it a positive experience.

When reviewing generic needs, remember that you are a mentor, not an evaluator. Correct by suggestion,

not by command, and always give a detailed explanation of why a correction is needed. Target one area at a time and be specific. Prompt the instructor candidate for questions that lead to your comments. Be sure all questions are answered by the conclusion of the meeting and skills are coached when necessary. It is important not to try to do all your mentoring at this one conference. This is only a part of the entire process. Take your time and prioritize the issues. ❄

Inappropriate Comments

- *Your toboggan demonstration in crud was ineffective.*
- *The knot you used was not very effective.*
- *I don't ever want to see you teaching something that's not in the OEC textbook.*
- *Your students weren't getting it, but you kept on going.*

Better Solutions

- *Getting the toboggan through heavy snow is tough. When we go out this afternoon, I'll show you a couple of methods that work for me. You decide which is best.*
- *The knot you demonstrated held adequately. I can show you one that's even stronger.*
- *You met your stated objective but stay more in line with the OEC textbook. This is the reference material your students will always have and use. Using other material could also result in a liability issue later*
- *Other than what you had in your lesson plan, what are some other methods for assessing your students' comprehension?*

Individual needs are more abstract and far less quantifiable than generic needs. Putting content aside, ask the instructor candidate how they felt about the presentation. In addition to questions,

look for clues. Be empathetic and use your past experiences to guide the instructor candidate. Concentrate on instilling confidence, self-assurance, and motivation. ❄

The Decision Point

There will be occasions when the instructor candidate will come into the program with previous experience in adult education. There may be no need for further observations by the mentor. In this case, the appropriate administrator or instructor trainer can be notified for a final observation.

In most cases, additional mentor observations will be necessary. If information is being given to the instructor candidate in digestible chunks, it will take time to assimilate. Don't feel pressure to complete the process in one or two observations. The goal is to make a good instructor, not to make

an average instructor quickly. Each observation should be easier than the one that preceded it. As the mentor and the instructor candidate become more comfortable with each other, things get easier. As instruction methods become more refined, conferences become less formal and shorter in length. Each observation cycle will always include both pre-observation and post-observation conferences, and an experienced instructor observation if the mentor or the instructor candidate feels it necessary. At the completion of each cycle comes the decision point. When the instructor candidate is ready, the mentor requests an IT observation. ❄

The IT Observation

Help prepare the instructor candidate for the final observation in much the same way as the first observation. Give helpful reminders, check the lesson plan, and give plenty of encouragement. By all means, be present at the observation. In the presence of the

instructor trainer, the mentor is the new instructor candidate's advocate. If the IT has questions during the observation, the mentor has the answers. This is the final step in the formal mentoring process, and if you did your job well, congratulations will be in order. ❄

Instructor Certification

At the completion of a successful observation, the instructor trainer will forward a standard course completion record to the national office, as well as the appropriate region and division staff (the most recent course completion record can

be found on the download section of the NSP website). An instructor trainer other than the mentor must make this submission, even if the mentor holds those credentials. Upon verification, the new instructor will be added to the NSP instructor roster. ❄

NSP Mentoring Flowchart

