

UCT course helps leaders master the art of mentoring

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The UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB) will run a powerful mentorship programme this June to give leaders and managers the tools to become high-impact mentors.



The benefits of a mentoring environment, from an improved bottom line to informed and productive staff, have been recognised globally. According to Janine Everson, director of the course, this has led to an increased expectation that leaders and people in senior positions must play a mentoring role in the workplace. They are presumed able to provide expert advice, to guide and develop staff, and to be a role model.

However, being an effective mentor does not necessarily come naturally to people. It requires a core set of competencies and tools in order to gain the most value from a mentor/mentee relationship.

“There is an assumption that because one has been in a job for a certain amount of time, or one is older, that one can automatically be a successful mentor,” said Everson, who is also Academic Director of the Centre for Coaching at the UCT GSB. “But in reality, one often has to be taught how to develop this critical skill.

“Mentoring is not about simply meeting once a week for a chat – it’s an in-depth process which, if managed correctly, can have extremely positive results,” said Everson. “These can include improved delivery of services by more informed staff, higher employee retention, a deepened understanding of an organisation’s culture, and better people management.”

But unless a mentor has the necessary skills to develop an effective relationship with his or her mentee, the process is worthless. Without a clear set of ideals and the means to carry them out, most mentorship situations will flounder.

“Many people don’t know how to build and maintain a strong mentoring relationship,” said Everson. “Although it is a crucial part of the way we operate, and there is a huge demand for this type of skill in South Africa, there is not enough emphasis placed on learning how to mentor properly.”

The UCT GSB course, called Mentor: The Art of Conversation, is an intensive two-day event that is designed to identify and develop the core competencies essential for building a healthy mentoring environment.

Top of the list is learning how to listen and hold effective conversations. Everson said that while in an earlier age mentoring was traditionally seen as the passing on of information from a more experienced source, it is nowadays seen as a two-way process of learning – a dialogue, in essence.

“Mentoring is also about mutual trust and respect. Without this, mentors and mentees will be restricted in their freedom of expression,” she said.

Other attributes necessary for becoming a high-impact mentor include focused analytical skills, goal clarity, a commitment to learning and growing and the ability to articulate clearly. And ultimately, one should let mentees learn their own way, as opposed to foisting directives on them.

Delegates to the programme will leave with a clear understanding of mentoring, an ability to recognise openings for mentoring, and confidence that mentoring efforts will result in impactful interventions. In addition, the ability to create effective conversation, to explore different styles of mentoring, and to identify barriers and obstacles will be developed. Delegates will also build up a mentoring “toolkit” comprising such aids as planning the first meeting, how to have difficult conversations, and ways of recording mentoring meetings.

“Mentoring isn't about doing someone else's job for them, imposing ready-made solutions that worked somewhere else, or telling people what to do. It is about the art of conversation, and a willingness to listen and learn,” said Everson.

“Essentially we're looking at a life skill, one that applies to one's personal or social space as much as the workplace.”

For more information contact Dudu on (021) 406 1268. The course website is www.gsb.uct.ac.za/mentoring.

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