

New mentoring programme to help optimise skills development

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The UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB) is launching a new programme this September that will provide leaders with powerful tools to optimise their skills development efforts through mentoring.



Janine Everson

The programme, MENTOR - The Art of Conversation, has been designed by Craig O'Flaherty, director of the GSB's Centre for Coaching, in partnership with the School's Executive Education unit which recently received a global top ten rating from the Economist Intelligence Unit for its executive short courses.

According to Janine Everson, Academic Director of the GSB Centre for Coaching and facilitator of the new programme, mentoring is becoming an important part of a leader's armoury, particularly in South Africa where skills development is crucial to the country's social and economic development.

"For anyone occupying a role requiring the leadership of people today there is a good chance that one's explicit or implicit job description contains the role of mentor. It plays an important role in skills development, retaining valuable staff and developing them for the future, as well as in deepening the understanding for these mentored individuals of the organisation's culture and their valuable role," said Everson.

She added that this value has been recognised globally by acclaimed leaders such as Bill Gates and Bill Clinton, who have noted that mentoring has played an important role in their achievements.

The focus of the new GSB programme, running from 11 - 12 September, is on the processes, skills and qualities needed to be a competent, high-impact mentor.

According to Elaine Rumboll, Director of the GSB Executive Education unit, the drive of the programme will be to enable an active mentoring process.

"The new programme stresses that both mentors and those they mentor take active roles in the mentorship process to get the best results - this requires a unique set of competencies on the part of the mentor," she said.

Everson said that the first core competency required to be an effective mentor is the ability to hold an effective conversation. This calls for a mentor to know how to listen, speak and question so that the mentoring process is fruitful.

"For example, in the area of listening, a mentor needs to ensure that he/she practices active listening - giving their full attention to what the person is saying. A mentor should ask the question: how competitive is my listening - are my responses geared in a win/lose way? Do I only promote my own point of view in the relationship?" she said.

"It is therefore important to maintain neutrality and be alert to the impact of responses. Mentoring also requires a mentor to develop a relationship of trust and confidentiality. The aim is to nurture, guide, develop and advance a person within their chosen field, and these individuals need to be able to express their thoughts in a secure environment."

Because of the powerful role of a mentor, Everson added it is best if the person receiving the mentoring is not directly beneath the mentor in the organisation. A mentor, therefore, should ideally not be involved in line management affairs, such as disciplining and appraising where the mentee is concerned.

"Mentors should also note that the less directive the mentoring the more the mentee will grow and develop - mentoring can become a restricting relationship if it becomes a dependency."

In business, Everson said that mentoring has tangible benefits to the bottom line that should not be discounted.

"This includes improved delivery of services through more informed staff, reduced recruitment and selection costs as a result of higher employee retention, progress towards diversity and equal opportunity in the workplace, support networks for employees in times of organisational change, and more committed and productive staff. Successful mentees also often become mentors and better people managers," she said.

The new programme will also explore other areas of the mentoring toolkit such as aids for planning the first meeting, how to have difficult conversations, ways of recording mentoring meetings, and different styles of mentoring.

For more information on the programme contact Junita Abrahams on (021) 406 1323 or email .

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