As safety professionals, we rely heavily on the collaboration and knowledge transfer of our peers. Sometimes, as chaotic as our jobs can be, we miss the opportunity to act. That is why mentorship is so important; it can formalize the parameters around making sure we accomplish this vital activity in our industry.

**How do you define mentorship as a safety professional?**

types of relationships, Mentor with a capital “M” as defined by the formalized relationships and mentor with a lowercase “m” for the less-formalized guidance are both advantageous in their specific applications. Understanding what kind of relationship is being established will aid in the conceptualization of the social contract that must exist between the individuals involved.

So, we set the parameters of a mentoring relationship, which is important because it sets the understanding of what to expect and helps establish the desired outcomes. Without setting these expectations, mentors and mentees may create their own individual social contracts and create expectations that can lead to disappointment and discouragement. This is unnecessary. Just as the individuals involved in the mentorship are unique, so are the desired outcomes. But it is unreasonable to think that desired outcomes can be achieved without the understanding between mentor and mentee.

Using Dan’s terminology and social contract theory, a strong start to an “M” relationship might look like an organization’s safety and health director and an early career safety professional using their company’s mentoring program as a framework for starting their relationship. During their first meeting, both individuals discuss their desired outcomes; for example, the safety director may state they want to share their extensive knowledge in corporate safety management and the early career professional may desire to learn about what their career may be tracking toward. The two then agree upon how the relationship will work to accomplish the outcomes, thus forming the social contract. Keeping this example in mind, how might the “m” social contract look?

Self-reflection is important and, in relation to mentoring, an exercise we would all be better for performing. The best place to start is to first identify what kinds of (M)entorship (m)entoring relationships you have in your life and determine what the expectation is from those relationships. Once you have completed that exercise, ask yourself, “Are my expectations realistic, or am I living in an undesired (or undefined) social contract?”

### References


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