JOURNALISM MENTORING

A Programme for NZ

What follows is a proposed mentoring programme for newcomers to journalism in New Zealand. None currently exists. The justification for creating one now comes from the work of the Public Interest Journalism Fund, whose first tranche of grants to NZ news media included major support for in-house journalism training at some media outlets.

A question arises from that commendable approach – how can long-term benefits be added to short-to-middle term efforts by the Government to assist New Zealand's journalism industry survive the negative impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and endemic pressures from a rapidly digitising media world?

It is contended here that developing a support system for those who emerge from in-house (and tertiary) journalism training will ensure they have a better chance to grow into such a pressured occupation.

It should also support the media industry to look after its journalism employees and encourage them to stay, rather than head for one of the other 20-or-so occupations that benefit from journalism skills.

This document has limitations. It is based partly on what already exists in mentoring, most of which was formulated a decade or more ago, well before recent global influences like #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, Covid-19, and the hastening demise of traditional print media. To that end, the author has recommended a survey be done of NZ media employers, editors and journalists to get a better idea of what will be needed in a modern mentoring programme.

Jim Tucker

Newsroom Mentoring

Setting up a formal mentor programme for NZ news media

1. **Mentors**

Mentoring can be either informal or formal, and most often takes the form of a one-on-one relationship - the mentee/teina learns by engaging with a mentor/tuakana of greater experience. But it may also involve:

• peer-to-peer mentoring (sharing experiences with colleagues at a similar career level) and

• group mentoring (involving multiple mentees/teina and/or multiple mentors/tuakana).

It's important to distinguish mentoring from other forms of professional advice and support, such as:

• Normal coaching or career development advice provided by a line manager.

• An advocacy role.

• Inhouse training done by a journalism teacher.

• A natural continuation of a previous successful supervisor-student or manager-employee relationship.

A mentor should be able to advise on the following:

• Meeting deadlines.

• Handling management's productivity expectations.

• Setting priorities.

• Conducting difficult interviews.

• The writing standards and style expected in their new environment.

• Ethical challenges.

• Forging working relationships – with managers, colleagues, news subjects, sources, and technicians.

• Work-life balance – newsroom versus private life.

• Technology.

The ideal mentor will be someone on staff motivated to take on the role, and who has fresh memories of the struggles faced by newcomers. Mentors will require a modicum of people skills (what successful journalist doesn't?), patience, and a solid background in reporting and writing news. "Solid" will likely mean at least a couple of years, preferably five or more. They will have made the mistakes from which every good news journalist's career is forged. They will have faced ethical and legal dilemmas, the need to balance deadlines with the demands for quality, constant pressure situations, and management expectations that sometimes go unvoiced.

People asked to mentor should also be considered in the light of their regard for the idea. Like any sector of the population, some will be motivated and keen, others diffident, reluctant. If such things are unclear, some or all of the following questions could be asked, either formally or in a conversation:

a. Have you considered being a mentor to newsroom newcomers?
b. If so, would you like to join the newsroom's formal mentoring programme?
c. Are you open to training in mentorship?
d. What ideas do you have about being a successful mentor?
e. What challenges and pitfalls do you see in the role?
f. What support would you like to have?
g. Would you expect to be paid extra for being a mentor?
h. What part would you expect to play in being assigned a mentee?
i. How many mentees would you feel comfortable having at any one time?

One of the crucial questions arises in e) – pitfalls. Recent revelations about workplace bullying and other inter-personal no-go areas mean there are aspects of mentoring relationships between staff that must be carefully proscribed (see below).

What do potential mentors need to think about?

As a mentor, you are expected to set aside part of your time and resources for your mentee, and while the needs of the mentee will be the main focus of the mentoring relationship, there is substantial value and rewards to be gained by mentors as well.

Apart from being a role model and experiencing the satisfaction of helping a new colleague, you can also expect the following:

• To gain new perspectives and a broader knowledge of the newsroom, the media outlet and the overall industry.
• To be stimulated with new ideas in career management.
• To develop better management skills.
• To become a better communicator.

2. Mentees

At present, journalism newcomers are still likely to be Pākehā, young and university-educated, in their early 20s, and more likely female than male (a long-time trend in NZ journalism). In-house training programmes will affect that profile if the initial funding focus on attracting more Māori and Pasifika cadets succeeds. That focus could potentially modify other parts of the newcomer profile, because it may introduce newcomers who are younger (late teens) and older (30+), and introduce more people who, like media audiences, have scant formal education but abundant life experience. That was a balance once provided be the now-defunct polytechnic journalism diplomas. One outcome may be that mature cadets will not welcome being mentored by someone younger and with only a couple of years' experience, no matter how accomplished they are.

3. Matching mentees with mentors

The choice will sometimes make itself. A newcomer seeking a business-writing career will logically pair with an experienced business reporter, and the same with other specialities. However, the aspirations of some new journalists to specialise immediately are best tempered. Experience shows they will often begin more effectively by starting on general news. If that line is followed, the newcomer should be attached to a senior *general* reporter.
In fact, newcomers are also advised to begin in a small newsroom. As has been observed – murders in Westport are just as significant as those in downtown Auckland. Opportunities for wide news experience are often better at a regional outlet in close touch with its audience.

One of the un-said issues in mentor-matching is how to safely mix genders. There have always been risks with pairing a young reporter with an older one, but while those are now more openly discussed as a result of the global awakening led by Me Too (#MeToo) and sexual harassment cases brought to light in NZ recently, how that is to be addressed in a formal mentoring programme needs careful consideration. We'll come back to that.

4. Keeping track

The obvious thing about a *formal* mentoring programme is just that – the need for paperwork. It should record who is involved, procedures, expectations, a timetable of progress, and forms for recording outcomes.

a. Who

Key parties are the manager(s), the mentor, and the mentee.
The first may be more than one – perhaps the immediate manager in the newsroom (if it's big enough) and one higher up the chain. Editors and group managers are also encouraged to take an interest in the process when it begins at their outlet.

b. Procedures

Here's a guide to what a formal or semi-formal mentoring programme will most likely need to put in writing for everyone involved:

• A written introduction broadly explaining the process.
• An outline of the key parties involved and expectations of each. It may also be possible to list available mentors and their areas of experience.
• Methods and procedures to be followed.
• Timetable.
• Locations.
• Boundaries.
• Avenues for complaint and the process to be followed.

• Forms to be completed at various stages.
• A guide to ending mentoring relationships.

c. Expectations

It should be clear to participants what the programme is designed to achieve for them. That can be embodied in a list of expectations for each person involved. The following lists are probably overly exhaustive but give an idea of possibilities:

Manager:

• Will my employer provide training and guidance on how the mentoring programme should work?
• How will we choose the mentors?
• How will we pair mentors and mentees?
• How much of my time should I devote to overseeing the mentoring programme?
• What should I devote that time to – what is my ongoing role?
• What checks should I be undertaking to ensure the programme is working well?
• What are the signs of success and/or problems?
• How will I resolve issues to the satisfaction of all parties?
• What procedures will I follow when mentorships come to an end?

Mentor:

• Is this something I am required to do as a condition of employment?
• What will be expected of me as a mentor?
• Do I have the experience and skills to be a mentor?
• Will there be mentor training available from my employer?
• How will I work with my mentee?
• How will I know what progress we are making?
• How long will the process take?
• Who else is involved?
• What impact is this likely to have on my job and my employment status?
• What happens if the relationship doesn’t work for some reason?

Mentee:

• Is this something I am required to do as a condition of employment?

• What will be expected of me as a mentee?

• How will I work with my mentor?

• How will I know what progress I'm making?

• How long will the process take?

• Who else is involved?

• What impact is this likely to have on my job and my employment status?

• What happens if the relationship doesn't work for some reason?

d. *Timetables*

To some extent these need to be flexible according to the demands of newsroom life, work pressures and individual mentee progress. If a standard duration for mentoring relationships is not already specified by the media outlet, the manager, mentor and mentee need to agree on an initial timetable, which could be extended if all parties agree. It might comprise a set number of meetings or a period over which mentor and mentee will meet.
Here's a draft programme guide:

• **STAGE ONE – Newcomer introduction**

Two weeks or so during which an assigned staff member makes sure the new staff member is familiarised with basic procedures and expectations. The amount of attention needed is likely to begin intensely and taper off to one or two meetings a day. One aim should be to informally assess who are the best candidates to be the newcomer's first journalism mentor.

• **STAGE TWO – First mentor**

Six months or so during which the mentor and mentee form their relationship and mentoring follows. Apart from one or two daily informal meetings at first, the pair ought to schedule a more formal weekly meeting that entails an element of privacy (perhaps out of the office in a

café or somewhere similar) and gives them a chance to explore issues, discuss progress and preferences for future focus, and set targets.

Both should take notes. Audio-recording the meeting would probably defeat the aim of relative informality. But given the later need for formal reports on progress, notes on paper or iPad/phone should be kept for future reference, especially by the mentor. It should be borne in mind that such notes are likely to be legally discoverable in the event of a serious future employment dispute.

The process ends with a meeting between manager, mentor and mentee from which an assessment and report – contributed to by all three – would be drafted and finalised.
If at any stage during the mentoring process any of those involved becomes uncomfortable or dissatisfied with what's happening, a formal procedure for ending the arrangement would be followed. Reasons why the process was ended should be recorded, with appropriate privacy restrictions applied.

• **STAGE THREE – Additional mentors**

No set time can be prescribed for the mentoring that may follow; the procedures would be the same as for Stage 2. The employer, manager, mentor and mentee would meet at the end of mentoring to review its success or otherwise, record issues and remedies applied, and suggest improvements or changes of focus that might be used in future mentoring.

NEWSROOM MENTORING – the process

What follows is detailed advice, from setting guidelines, agreements and boundaries, to what should happen if something goes wrong. First, a summary – drawn from mentoring schemes around the world - of the things journalism mentors and mentees should or shouldn't do.

1. Mentoring do's and don'ts

MENTOR DO's	MENTOR DON'Ts
Be a sounding board.	Don't be dominant – keep in the background.
Listen and be patient; show empathy; be open and honest. Provide advice and counsel.	Do not direct the mentee to take specific actions.
Demonstrate confidentiality and respect.	Don't agree to confidentialities that cannot be mentioned to the mentee's newsroom manager.
Provide mentoring only in your areas of expertise.	Don't make personal requests of the mentee.
Be thoughtful about the mentee's feelings and time.	Don't take on more mentees than is realistically manageable.
Indicate your openness to being a mentor.	Don't gossip about the mentee.
Be accessible to the mentee.	Don't micro-manage the mentee.
Maintain distinct personal and work boundaries.	Don't treat mentees as free labour.
Help the mentee with access to resources and support.	Don't provide answers. Encourage the mentee to find them instead.
Treat the mentee professionally and ethically.	
Agree on clear expectations.	
Model professional journalistic behaviour.	

MENTEE DO's	MENTEE DON'Ts
Agree to specific goals and expectations for the mentoring relationship.	Learn to resolve problems and issues independently of the mentor.
Be thoughtful about the mentor's feelings and time.	Don't expect the mentor to make decisions for you.
Maintain distinct personal and work boundaries.	Don't take advantage of the mentor.
Understand what the mentor expects.	Don't misuse the mentor's time and help.
Be pro-active. It is the mentee's responsibility to maintain contact with the mentor and schedule future inter-actions.	Don't agree to confidentialities that cannot be mentioned to your newsroom manager.
Treat the mentor professionally and ethically.	Don't gossip about the mentor.
Clearly communicate what you want.	Don't take personally a rejection of a mentoring request.

2. Model mentoring agreement

For a formal or semi-formal mentoring arrangement, the mentoring manager, mentor and mentee need to agree on an individual written contract to be signed by all parties before the process begins. Here is a model (used by Downer NZ) that could be adapted.

Mentoring Agreement

Mentee's name:

Mentor's name:

This agreement begins on: **and ends on:**

Our long term goals for this mentoring relationship are:

How we will meet: (place, frequency and duration)

How we will communicate between meetings:

How we will record and monitor our progress:

Confidentiality

We agree to keep everything that is within the mentoring relationship confidential. Nothing will be shared without the permission of the other person.

Mentee: **Date:**

Mentor: **Date:**

Mentor Record

Mentee's name: **Mentor's name:**

Meeting place: **Time:**

What was discussed:

Any action points achieved? *(since last session)*

Any action points agreed?

Comments/feedback from the mentee

Date of next arranged meeting:

Mentee and mentor sign off: *(required)*

Mentee: **Date:**

Mentor: **Date:**

Please send to your local Learning Administrator

3. Getting started

Some formal programmes at education institutions recommend first contact be made at the mentee's initiative, but for a media outlet that responsibility lies more realistically with management. Most likely it will be the newsroom mentoring manager's job to approach first the mentee and then potential mentors. Once the relationship has been set up, the mentor and mentee should work together to establish modes of contact, the options including personal meetings, Zoom, phone, e-mail, text, and so on.

Location

The best location for personal and Zoom meetings is a private, neutral space away from the distractions of phone, email and other colleagues.

Time

Enable sufficient time for the discussion to avoid the mentee feeling rushed or burdensome. Ensure there will be no interruptions during a mentoring session.

First priorities

If possible, mentors and mentees should have at least one face-to-face meeting relatively early in the mentoring process. At the start, spend time getting to know the counterpart and her or his work. Clarify expectations from the outset, especially those of the mentee, who is at the core of the mentoring process. Revisit those regularly throughout the process. It will take some effort in most cases to build a relationship of trust and openness. When people do not meet regularly in person, feelings are difficult to de-code and on-line facial expressions may be misleading.

Conversation boundaries to agree on

a. **Maintaining confidentiality.**

Confidentiality is of utmost importance in mentoring relationships and is essential for building trust and rapport. If there are situations in which the mentor would not be able to maintain confidentiality, she or he must make those clear in the first discussion with the mentee.

One such might be the mentee revealing something that has legal repercussions (for example, threat of a defamation action, or a breach of privacy) for the media outlet. Such issues must be reported upwards immediately. What is agreed should be written down in the mentoring agreement between the parties. Mentors must ensure records, notes and correspondence relating to mentees are stored and disposed of securely after a standard period set out by the Mentoring Programme.

The media outlet's management may decide to keep some forms of record indefinitely for reasons such as legal responsibility (in which cases, mentors and mentees must be made aware). This suggestion needs to be discussed by the mentoring establishment group for potential wider examination by the media industry.

b. **Conflicts of interest.**

Consider the impact of a mentoring arrangement on other journalism work practices, processes, legal obligations, and relationships. If a conflict of interest exists, mentors may need to set boundaries around what can be discussed. Guidelines for that process should be set out in the media outlet's Mentoring Policy document. If the mentor feels a mentoring arrangement will compromise mentor or mentee it may be advisable to seek advice from the manager, who may decide to move the mentee to someone else.

c. **Mentoring limitations.**

Mentors should be honest at the start about the areas where they can and can't offer support. Mentors are not required to have all the answers. Often, mentees need to find the solutions themselves. If during discussions it becomes clear that mentees need additional information or support from other sources, bring this to their attention and assist them in finding the appropriate support mechanisms.

4. Skills needed by mentors

A mentor's key responsibility is to set up an environment in which the mentee feels able to speak freely, without fear of judgement or repercussions.

Mentors need to ask themselves:

a. What is my purpose in mentoring this person?

b. What do I need to know about the mentee?

c. What does the mentee need to know about me?

d. Do I have appropriate knowledge of Te Tiriti and the expectations of Tangata Whenua, Pasifika and other ethnic groups?

e. Are there any barriers to me being an effective mentor? If so, what can I do to overcome them?

Some things to agree in the first meeting with a mentee:

a. **How progress will be monitored**.

Markers to consider:

- Grasp of working to deadlines.
- Confidence in researching and interviewing for news items.
- Perception of the newsroom's systems.
- Knowledge of different types of journalism content.
- Knowledge of technical skills like digital, grammar, spelling, media style, media law, ethics, and images.
- Understanding of cultural and diversity influences, including the implications of Te Tiriti.
- Relationships with colleagues.
- Job satisfaction.
- Aspirations for the future.

b. **Criteria of success**:

- The time it takes to produce news items.
- Writing skills.
- Accuracy, and understanding of repercussions.

- Productivity. Agree on what is reasonable in that newsroom's circumstances and what management expects, according to the mentee's level of experience.
- Understanding of the implications for the news media of Te Tiriti and other matters of importance to Tangata Whenua, Pasifika, and other culturally diverse groups in Aotearoa/NZ.

c. **How to judge whether the mentoring arrangement is working**:

- The frequency with which advice is sought by the mentee.
- The outcome of an advice session.
- The rapport developed.
- The mentee's progress towards becoming an accomplished and confident journalist in accordance with the above measures.

Mentors should consider:

a. Sharing educational and professional background and their current role at the media outlet.

b. Helping mentees reflect on their experience, skills, and values.

c. Encouraging them to commit to doable actions that will help them make progress.

d. Supporting mentees to become familiar with NZ's diverse cultural influences, especially Te Tiriti.

Examples of key questions to ask mentees:

a. What do you enjoy most at work?

b. What skills do you like to use?

c. What would you like to do that you can't do now?

d. What does success look like to you?

e. What's your goal for your time with this newsroom and beyond?

Other tips for mentors

1. Driving the process

The agenda and goals should be driven by the mentee. The mentor supports the mentees in exploring their ideas and should avoid leading a mentee to a particular conclusion or solution. This is often easier if the mentor is not the line-manager or a close colleague of the mentee.

2. Separation from other work processes

To enable the mentee to speak freely, mentoring arrangements should be kept distinct and separate from other departmental processes (probation, performance management, appraisal, progression). Information learned in mentoring discussions should be used to inform other work situations and processes only with the formal agreement of both mentee and mentor.

3. Listening effectively

In all mentoring discussions, mentors should listen rather than talk. To gain deeper insight, mentors should be active listeners – taking in not only the mentee's words, but also the delivery.

Pay attention to:

- tone of voice
- non-verbal signals
- cultural sensitivity
- body language.

Mentors can demonstrate they are listening through body language, asking questions, and by reflecting back to the mentee what they've heard to check their understanding. Mentors need to be sensitive to the mentee's cultural experience as it may have been shaped by upbringing, education, expectations, use of language and such modern influences as Te Tiriti, Me Too, Black Lives Matter and other recent societal changes.

Mentors should consider what environment they need to maximise their ability to listen attentively. That's where a quiet, private space away from other distractions comes to the fore. Do both turn of their phones? That might be appropriate in other occupations, but never in journalism. However, agreeing to answer only calls from recognised callers would be useful. The time of day will be important – when can the mentor realistically give a mentee full attention? Anything within an hour or two of a deadline is unlikely to work. Mentors should also be aware of how their own thoughts and emotions might affect the ability to listen objectively.

4. Questioning effectively

Being able to formulate and ask the right questions is a key skill for an effective mentor (or any experienced journalist). An appropriately phrased question can unlock new ideas, challenge limiting assumptions and bring about new insights. Good questions in mentoring are simple and generally require open-ended responses (that is, not closed questions inviting yes/no answers).

Mentors should ask questions from a place of curiosity and avoid leading questions. The best ideas and solutions will come from mentees themselves, therefore questioning should not lead them to a pre-determined conclusion. A mentor should be guided by the mentee and trust intuition when it comes to questioning. If a mentor is genuinely interested in mentees and their development, the questions will inevitably be useful to the individual.

5. Offering constructive feedback

A mentor might be involved in providing feedback to the mentee if:

- the mentee asks directly for feedback on their work or professional activities;
- during mentoring discussions, the mentor spots an opportunity to give feedback.

In the second case, be careful to first ask the mentee if they would like some feedback. In most instances, the mentee will welcome it, but take care not to break the mentee's concentration or unnecessarily complicate the matter under discussion.

6. Providing support not direction

It can be tempting to direct mentees immediately towards solutions that have worked for the mentor, especially when a challenge is similar to one the mentor once faced. However, with the right prompting the most appropriate ideas and solutions may be those mentees generate for themselves. It's the mentor's role to support mentees in developing their own ideas and solutions through rapport-building, active listening, effective questioning, and constructive feedback. The following three steps are good rules of thumb:

1. Listen without judgement

Give the mentee space to outline the whole issue. However tempted mentors may be to offer a solution, they need to hold back. Jumping in too early might mean missing some vital information. Often just the act of articulating an issue out loud is enough to provide clarity for a mentee.

2. Ask questions

Mentors should try to draw ideas out of the mentee by using insightful questions rather than immediately offering solutions. Brainstorming techniques can be used to get mentees to generate a range of options they can select from.

3. Explore a range of perspectives

Get mentees to imagine themselves from the perspective of others. Ask them: 'what would your best friend/colleague/manager say to you?' Once mentors are confident they have been through steps 1-3 above, it may be appropriate to offer insight into their own experiences.

Avoid being directive

Mentors should ask mentees if they would like to hear what the mentor would have done to overcome a similar situation. In most cases they will say yes, but if they say no, that decision must be respected; instead offer support to mentees to come up with their own ideas. Going through the other steps might already have generated a solution.

Mentors should give advice with the caveat that what worked for them might not be the right course of action for a mentee. Mentors should provide advice only on subjects about which they are confident. If it is beyond their experience or knowledge, the mentee should be encouraged to find other sources of advice. Mentors need to remember they are not expected to have all the answers.

5. Tips for mentees

a. **Prepare:** To get the full benefit, mentees need to be clear on what they want from the relationship, and be realistic about what a mentor can do for them.

b. **Take ownership:** Mentees are responsible for their own professional growth and development. They should set clear objectives and expectations, take an active role in getting there and make an effort regarding the relationship.

c. **Be curious:** Asking questions is an opportunity to learn as much as they can from a mentor. Mentees should prepare for their first meeting by arriving with a series of open-ended questions that will help stimulate the discussion and enable they learn as much as they can about the mentor's field of work.

d. **Listen:** Mentees should listen actively, make the most of feedback, and take advantage of the mentor's expertise and experience. Since the mentor could have a different approach to the issues being discussing, mentees may at first feel he or she is not answering questions in exactly the way expected. That's normal, especially at the beginning of the relationship.

e. **Make the most of the mentor's time.**

a. **Expectations:** A stronger idea should emerge after the first encounter on what a mentee and mentor can expect. It's a good idea to check those aspects regularly so both have a similar understanding of how things should proceed.

f. **Take notes**: It may help to keep a learning journal to ensure continuity from one meeting to the next. A written account of what has been discussed can be useful to look back on.

b. **Plan ahead:** Arrange a tentative date and time for the next encounter, as well as what to discuss.

Questions mentees can ask mentors

a. **What would you do if you were me?** Mentees shouldn't waste time looking to impress the mentor with how smart they are. They need to tell the mentor about specific career interests and ask for recommendations.

b. **What useful experiences/skills have helped you get where you are today?**

c. **What do you wish you knew at my stage?** It could be eye-opening to hear about challenging experiences the mentor has had and recommendations to avoid similar mistakes.

d. What are the toughest problems and decisions with which you must cope?

e. **Is this where you thought you would end up?** Few people tend to go straight from point A to point B. How they got there is usually an interesting tale with mistakes and revelations. Learn from them.

f. **What used to be your biggest weaknesses?** A good answer reveals the number one trait of a great mentor - self-awareness.

g. What are the best daily habits to develop and commit to?

h. What do you do to live a balanced life?

i. **What career opportunities do I have here?** What suggestions does the mentor have if a mentee wants to find another position within the newsroom or outlet?

j. Who else would you recommend I connect with? This question might be better suited for later meetings when there is more trust. It can exponentially expand a mentee's network.

SUMMARY CHECKLIST for first encounters

1. **How do we meet?** In-person, Zoom, email, text, phone, etc.

2. How long will each session last?

3. What would we like to know about one another? a. Background – home place, education, previous jobs, interests.

b. Reasons for entering and staying in journalism, aspirations.

c. Skills and qualities, achievements.

d. (Mentee) Learning focus, knowledge and skills sought.

e. (Mentor) Job and mentoring experiences.

4. What will make this mentoring relationship satisfactory and useful for both?

5. What expectations do we have of one another (values, rules, boundaries)?

6. Should we have an agenda for the next encounter?

7. When, how and how often should we have contact?

8. When an email, text or voicemail is received, how quickly should we get back?

9. If we can't make the next arranged encounter, how do we alert the other?

6. Looking ahead

Many people are lost to journalism in the first years of their careers. One of the most positive aspects of mentoring is the chance it gives experienced journalists to help newbies look ahead into a worthwhile news media career and to start planning for it.

Here's what the United Nations mentoring programme calls its "Career Conversation Model" that a mentor can use to that end with a mentee:

START from where mentees are	Ask questions to establish where the mentee is at and what she or he would like help with.
LEARN from past experiences	Help mentees identify what they already know about developing their career in journalism.
OPEN up future possibilities	Assist the mentee to discover the general direction she or he wants to take, and the variety of routes to get

	there, whether with the current employer or elsewhere.
COME back to the present	Work with the mentee to identify small changes and doable actions that can make big differences to current work and effectiveness.

7. Failure of the mentoring relationship

What happens if one or more parties feels it isn't working? For a start, the mentor should discuss apparent issues with the mentee to see if they can be resolved. Or the reverse, if it's the mentee who has the doubts

If mentor and mentee cannot resolve matters:

- The mentor must advise the mentee of the option to raise concerns with the appropriate manager.
- If the mentor wishes to raise the matter with the manager, the mentee must be advised first.
- If problems can't be resolved through the manager's involvement, the manager must move the mentee to another mentor.

Signs that a mentoring relationship isn't working

Mentoring arrangements can encounter problems despite everyone's best efforts. Things to look out for:

- Mentee/mentor cancels appointments, fails to turn up or regularly rearranges at the last minute.
- Mentee/mentor consistently fails to make progress on actions identified in meetings.
- Mentee/mentor appears distracted in sessions or cuts sessions short.

How a mentor can move things forward if the relationship isn't working

a. Get feedback

The mentor should ask the mentee for feedback on how she or he is finding the mentoring arrangement. They may have similar concerns. Either way, the mentor will have more information to help decide how to proceed.

b. Acknowledge the issue openly

The mentor should be honest at the next meeting and tell the mentee that she or he feels something isn't working. Factual examples should be given; for example: 'You've cancelled a number of appointments.' They should jointly explore whether there are things they could both do to get the relationship working more effectively.

c. End the mentoring relationship constructively

Some mentoring relationships just don't work out. Mentors shouldn't leave a mentee hanging, or prolong the arrangement unnecessarily. They should have a constructive discussion about how the mentee can progress beyond the mentoring arrangement. The mentor should inform the scheme manager so an alternative mentor can be arranged (with consultation with the mentee).

8. Relationship hazards

The Me Too# movement began in the US in 2006 when Tarana Burke - a woman describing herself as a survivor and activist - started a community of advocates determined to "interrupt sexual violence wherever it happens". After modest beginnings, the campaign spread globally in late 2017 as a hashtag on social media following the exposure of sexual-abuse allegations against American film producer Harvey Weinstein. As in most other countries, the campaign has had widespread impact in New Zealand, its public face being a number of inquiries and revelations in a variety of employment areas such as sport, law, news media, religion and government.

Few if any public or private enterprises have been able to ignore such a massive mind-shift in workplaces that once ignored bullying and sexual harassment/violence or stifled its frequent semi-surfacing. Existing mentoring schemes – mostly formulated earlier this century – rarely mention the subject. Now, it's highly doubtful any mentoring programme can be without a section detailing the hazards of inter-personal work relations and outlining ways to deal with them. The following attempt is a first rough draft that will need input from a cross-section of wise heads:

a. Avoiding risk

Meeting places

Every mentoring programme recommends the mentor and mentee find somewhere quiet to meet regularly – which contravenes most advice given by counsellors on the hazards of harassment.

That "quiet place" needs also to be public, or at least within sight and ear-shot of regular passersby. Cafes seem an obvious choice. In the office, it might be a room separated from the newsroom by glass. The door should be left open. The mentee is probably best seated closest to the exit. The meeting place needs two chairs and a table big enough to preserve personal space.

Personal space

Nobody likes to be crowded. The Covid pandemic has cemented the idea that two metres in separation are a minimum if people want to avoid the aerobic transmission of germs. That's a useful guideline for mentor/mentee "contact".

Physical contact

There can be none. The days of the hugs, the hongi or the air kiss to each ear are gone as a result of Covid, and that needs to apply to meetings in the mentoring space. Handshakes have been replaced by the elbow touch, but the question arises why contact of any shape or form should ever be required.

Appearance

This is a minefield whose implications were demonstrated recently when rugby star and commentator Sonny-Bill Williams, a Muslim, was sat close to a woman commentator whose bare legs affronted him enough for him to turn away in his chair. The next time they appeared on Sky Sport to analyse an All Blacks rugby match, her legs were covered. Everyone has the right to dress as they like within the customs of their workplace, but mentors and mentees would be wise to consider unintended provocation.

Gender

With more than two genders now fully recognised in society, the question of gender inter-personal relations within a mentoring set-up has never been more potentially complicated. Same-sex combinations seem the safer choice but may be no less sensitive than any other arrangement. It's recommended those responsible for managing newsroom mentoring raise the matter early with mentors and mentees before a pairing is suggested. Preferences must be respected.

Verbal language

Bullying and sexual harassment are often subtle phenomena that use verbal inference, innuendo, double entendre, and suggestive language to achieve the desired effect. The intent may seem harmlessly comic to perpetrators within some male-dominated workplaces, but lead to private hurt, quiet distress.

Language used by mentors especially must be professional, neutral, non-personal and acceptable in any forum where respect is foremost. The mentoring process by its nature encourages the exchange of accounts of personal experiences, but anything approaching the risqué, the off-colour, the intensely private is off-limits in a mentoring exchange.

Commenting on appearance also has significant risk, as do questions about the other person's private life. Stick to the business of news and how it is to be dealt with. However, that should not exclude discussions about a mentee's ambitions and future plans…so long as they are confined to journalism.

Body language

Some people seem unaware that coming within breathing space of another is likely to be uncomfortable for the subject and at worst, intimidating. Physical gestures can be misinterpreted. Those wishing to dominate can use intense eye contact, leaning forward, various facial gestures and grimacing, a loud voice, swearing, and physical posturing to coerce.

A mentor and mentee need to be comfortable in one another's presence and quickly work out what is appropriate for a relaxed conversation. Both will achieve that if they bear in mind that some of the inter-personal behaviour in workplaces of the past has long-outlived its acceptance.

Cultural insensitivity

It should be obvious to those entering journalism that there have been significant and positive changes to the way in which Tangata Whenua, Pasifika and other ethnic groups can expect to be addressed in modern NZ. Nevertheless, racist behaviour and comments, inadvertent or otherwise, are still commonplace in NZ, and would be particularly harmful in such a close personal relationship as mentoring.

Mentors and mentoring managers must make serious efforts to understand Te Tiriti and the growing use of Te Reo, and their significance to Tangata Whenua. Similarly, an effective mentor will have demonstrable knowledge of Pasifika and the cultures and expectations of other ethnic groups in NZ's increasingly multi-cultural society. That advice applies equally to mentees, but more importantly each mentee, no matter what their ethnic background, must feel comfortable and supported in the context of each mentorship.

b. Danger signs

All parties to a formal mentoring arrangement must be made aware of the avenues open to them if they start to feel bullied or sexually harassed. Mentees are probably most at risk, while mentors are open to false accusation. Both should be aware of suspect behaviour on the part of the other, things like:

• Inappropriate comments or behaviour of a sexual or bullying nature of the kinds described above.

• Racism.

• Ignorance of modern NZ societal expectations, as embodied in Te Tiriti and the values held by Tangata Whenua, Pasifika people and those from minority ethnic backgrounds.

• Personal contact.

• Lack of space between mentor and mentee.

• Feeling hemmed in physically by a closed door, the positioning of seating, a blocked out interior glass panel, or some such.

• Questions that intrude on personal privacy.

• Regular insistence on extra meetings beyond the mentoring plan timetable.

• Requests for meetings in private settings.

• Breach of confidence.

• Personal criticism or improper comments concerning colleagues or managers.

c. Available actions

Few in a newly established mentoring relationship will want to abandon it because of a careless comment or action from which an apology is forthcoming without bidding. However, if one or more of the above danger signs are noted, something like the following resolution procedure is recommended (in ascending order of significance):

1. If possible (it may not be) raise the matter of concern with the other party during a scheduled meeting.

2. If that has no effect, advise the other of continued concern and the intention to raise it with the mentoring programme manager.

3. Arrange a meeting with the mentoring manager – it should be the mentor's or mentee's (whoever is raising the matter) choice whether the other party is present.

4. All parties at such a meeting (and any subsequent ones) should take notes. Audio recording might seem preferable but initially the effect of that may be to suppress discussion (all journalists know the effect that producing a voice recorder has on news subjects who have no media training).

5. If the manager does nothing as a result of the first meeting or is unable to resolve the matter to the complainant's satisfaction, an immediate end to the arrangement should be requested from the mentoring manager.

6. The manager is advised to ask the two parties to the failed arrangement to submit written reports explaining what happened.

7. The manager should report the process and outcome in writing to upper management. All parties must have access to that report; it is advisable to show it to the mentoring pair prior to submission.

8. The news outlet's management is advised to have a written procedure for mentoring complaint cases, a plan that deals with the possibility of eventual public disclosure. As recent cases show, the supposed protection of employee-employer confidentiality agreements is constantly open to legal challenge.

9. The outcome of a complaint should lead to an internal review of the outlet's mentoring programme and its subsequent improvement.

10. Any Mentoring Agreement should have a 'No Fault' clause, which (when appropriate) enables the mentor and/or the mentee to end the mentoring relationship without any formal blame attached.

9. Formally ending the mentoring

While some mentoring relationships will have a long life, others will be short term; some relationships pause temporarily, and others run their course. It's important to consider how the mentoring association will end. In certain situations, an end date is agreed during the initial meeting; but it is not always possible to identify such a clear point.

A mentor should discuss with the mentee the reasons for ending. They can vary:

• The programme is coming to a scheduled close.

• The relationship has achieved its objective.

• The mentor feels the mentee is confident and ready to move on.

• The relationship isn't working successfully and both parties wish to move on.

Once a mentoring partnership is formally completed, mentor and mentee should revisit the goals discussed when the mentee first joined the programme and compare them with actual outcomes. That allows both parties to review progress made and to acknowledge what was achieved.

It's often useful to encourage mentees to find another mentor for the next stage of their journey, and the mentor may be able to suggest individuals the mentee could approach.

Mentees ought to come away with a clearer understanding of potential career paths within the media outlet or elsewhere, while mentors should take time to evaluate how they themselves have developed during the relationship and what lessons have been learned.

Mentors should use the experience to consider mentoring others and perhaps refining their leadership skills, if that is the path they see ahead.