



# Guide to Mentoring New Instructors

updated  
November 30, 2015

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# **I. Introduction**

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 he divests himself of all worldly possessions and begins a residency that could take years. During this period he masters a skill, in this case martial arts, but more importantly he learns mental discipline. Before he leaves the master to be on his own, he acquires 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 in training, 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 trainees how to teach OEC, toboggan, 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 trainee with experience that would otherwise take a great deal of time to attain.

## **Coaching vs. Mentoring**

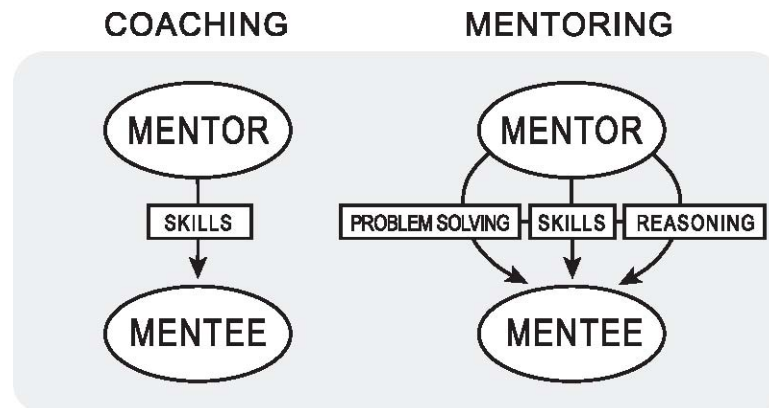
Some concepts of mentoring include coaching as a module. Some treat these two terms as two entirely different entities while others use them synonymously. In education, coaching is generally a part of the mentoring process but the terms do have different implications.

Coaching refers to skill development. It is showing individuals how to do something, and then giving them guided practice until they master the task. If you demonstrate how to teach a braking wedge and your candidate instructor 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 trainee react if a student does everything that was demonstrated and still accelerates while performing the braking wedge? Now he or she 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 trainee must call on information not always found in textbooks. A good mentor will help the instructor trainee 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.

COACHING	MENTORING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Showing</li> <li>• Demonstrating</li> <li>• Training</li> <li>• Directing</li> <li>• Instructing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asking</li> <li>• Challenging</li> <li>• Enabling</li> <li>• Supporting</li> <li>• Nurturing</li> </ul>

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 trainee 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 is a very important part of the entire mentoring process but, nonetheless, it is only a part.

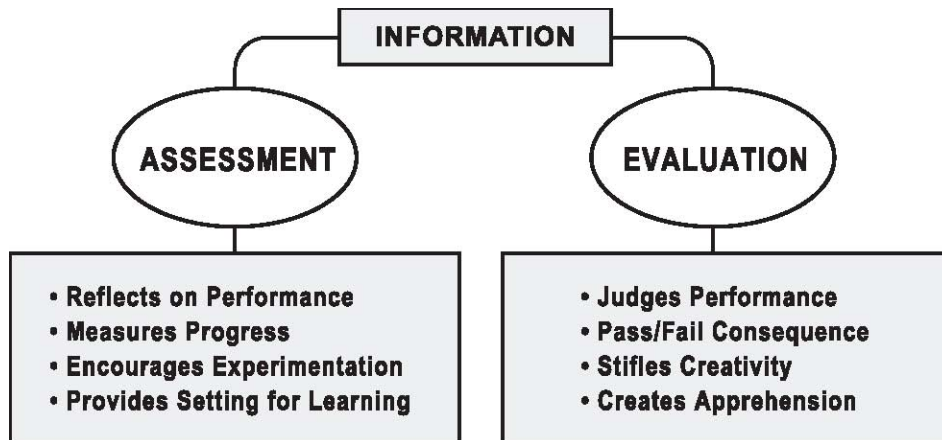


### Mentoring Is Not Evaluating

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 of 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.

Isn't a mentor supposed to determine if an instructor trainee has successfully developed the art of teaching or mastered an important skill? Don't mentors evaluate lesson plans and classroom strategies? Again, we have to clarify some terminology. Mentors assess. Supervisors evaluate. What some see as evaluation is actually assessment. Assessment uses information to improve an instructor trainee'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 trainee, and then identifies strategies and resources that will support the instructor trainee'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. These situations can 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?

The NSP mentor is an experienced instructor in the discipline in which the trainee wishes to become an instructor. He or she is appointed by a division supervisor, region administrator, or instructor trainer to provide guidance to an instructor trainee in the same discipline. That's the easy part of defining who the mentor is. What are the qualities the mentor must possess? What are the attributes of an experienced instructor?

Before trying to answer these questions, paint a picture of the best instructor you've ever known. This person probably knew the subject matter as though he or she had written the book. That instructor was 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 make a great mentor. Conversely, the negative attributes we associate with a poor instructor are those that should be avoided in mentoring.

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approachable</li> <li>• Empathetic</li> <li>• Good Listener</li> <li>• Enthusiastic</li> <li>• Motivating</li> <li>• Trustworthy</li> <li>• Receptive</li> <li>• Open</li> <li>• Tactful</li> <li>• Cooperative</li> <li>• Flexible</li> <li>• Supportive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical</li> <li>• Judgemental</li> <li>• Superior</li> <li>• Negative</li> <li>• Rigid</li> <li>• Insensitive</li> <li>• Lackadaisical</li> <li>• Selfish</li> <li>• Egotistical</li> <li>• Indifferent</li> <li>• Biased</li> <li>• Abusive</li> </ul>

## **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 he or she had a technical understanding in that discipline. The same holds true for mentoring. The mentor must have the confidence of the instructor trainee 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 and, most importantly, we know the subject well enough to assess the needs of the instructor trainee 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.

## **Interpersonal Skills**

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 relate that knowledge, and relating is the essence of mentoring. The mentor may have a great picture of where he or she wants to take the instructor trainee 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 is a key factor in the mentor's ability to connect to the instructor trainee 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 to the instructor trainee. How often have you had to listen to someone ramble on and on without hearing a word you've said? That's the point. That person had his or her own scripted agenda and nothing you said had any effect. We can't be empathetic to the instructor trainee'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 trainee is unique, requiring an individualized approach to his or her specific needs. Pay close attention to what the instructor trainee is saying and craft your response appropriately.

## Obstacles to Active Listening

Here are some obstacles to active listening (from Haykin, W., Pierce, A. and Stewart, I. *A Strategy for Appraisal*. Leeds: CCDU University of Leeds).

**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 judgments challenged. Consequently...we may consciously stop listening or even become defensive and plan a counter attack.

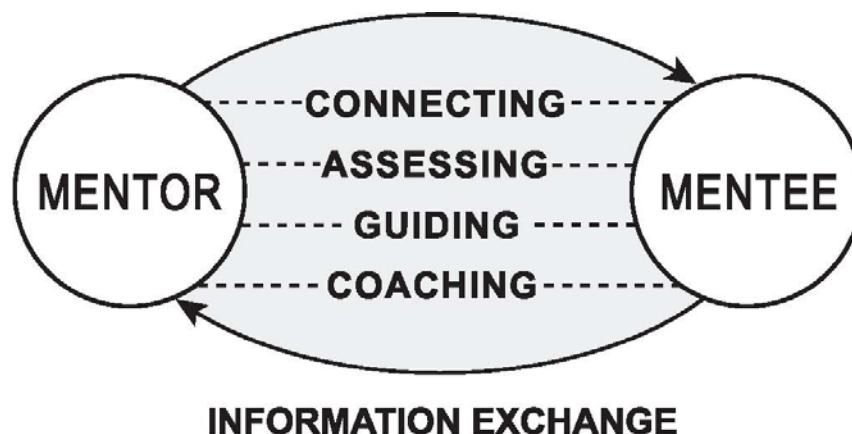
**Being Subject Centered Instead of Speaker Centered:** Sometimes we concentrate on the problem and not the person. Detail and facts about an incident become more important than what people are saying.

**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?

An effective mentoring process consists of many elements. Each falls 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 that have 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 was customized to create a well-rounded NSP instructor.



## Connecting

Many feel that connecting or relating to the instructor trainee 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, and 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 NSP's manual, *Instructor Development: Training the Adult Learner*, 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 trainee.

### **Trust**

Trust is the most essential ingredient in the recipe of making a connection. Think of the difference in the way you behave with someone you trust as opposed to how you behave with 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 trainee have no previous relationship, the instructor trainee 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 trainee prepare a lesson and then switch topics before the presentation.
- Don't put the instructor trainee in an embarrassing situation. If you know his or her 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 trainee what you think he or she wants 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 trainee's statements and questions to his or her 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 trainee to respect our experience and "know how." And, as we progress through the mentoring process, we expect that respect to increase. But what about our respect for the instructor trainee? Do we simply consider him or her as a rookie with a blank slate, just waiting to absorb our infinite wisdom? Hopefully, this is not the case. The instructor trainee 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 can be useful in creating an atmosphere of mutual respect:

- Respect his or her 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 the instructor trainee use some of his or her own ideas.
- Respect the instructor trainee's feelings.
- Respect the instructor trainee's time. Don't waste it.

## ***Empathy***

We have all heard, “I feel your pain” and “Walk a mile in my shoes.” 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 of 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 mentors we must relive the experience. If we haven’t made mistakes, we probably shouldn’t be mentors. The instructor trainee will not think less of us for mistakes we’ve made in the past. On the contrary, our trainees 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 trainee. 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.

## ***Assessment***

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 trainee does or does not know and what he or she 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 and coach later. Acquisition of information takes place throughout the entire mentoring process. Sometimes it is obvious and other times we 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 have to be proficient at information gathering, and questioning, listening, and observing are our tools.

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

- 1) *generic needs of the instructor trainee*
- 2) *individual needs of the instructor trainee*
- 3) *success of the methods employed by the mentor (Self Evaluation)*

### **1) Generic Needs of the Instructor Trainee**

The most straightforward area of assessment is that of generic needs. As the name implies, these are categorical concerns shared by all instructor trainees. 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 NSP Instructor Development course, but how do we address them as mentors? Generic needs assessment tends to be very objective.

Generic assessment questions include:

- 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 trainee teaches the lesson. This way, the mentor can provide the necessary guidance when the instructor trainee 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 effective?" "Is there a better 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 trainee 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 trainee. 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 assure 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 trainee but what we are hearing is most likely a response to our question or prompting. We may observe the lesson plan, but we are 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 trainee has some experience. What was previously theoretical is now real. The trainee's questions and responses have personal meaning. At this stage, the mentor should avoid a direct line of questioning if at all possible and use more of a prompting technique to promote questions from the instructor trainee.

## **2) Individual Needs of Instructor Trainee**

For some mentors, addressing the individual needs of the instructor trainee is 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 his or her ability to listen, and be able to draw on previous experience and analytical skills to gather information from observation.

The instructor trainee's individual needs can be divided into two categories — functional and emotional:

- **Functional Needs**

The way an individual presents material impacts functional needs. NSP instructors of the same discipline should be equally qualified but they function differently in a class situation.

**Instructor A**, for example, presents a lesson and gives demonstrations; **Instructor B** uses identical material, gives the same guided and unguided practice and demonstrations. At the end of the lesson, students taking from **Instructor A** have a high level of understanding, are excited about the material, and are highly motivated to continue, while the students of **Instructor B** are bored, most didn't get "it", and many are ready to move to the next lesson only because they have to.

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

No two instructors are the same. Each has 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. The message here is 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 NSP Instructor Development course. Be aware of their importance; 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 trainee habitually fiddling with notes and addressed it as a functional distraction when it may have been actually inspired by fear. You may have seen the instructor trainee 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.

### ***3) Success of the Methods Employed by the Mentor (Self Evaluation)***

*How are we doing as mentors? Have we made a good connection with the instructor trainee? Are our methods working?* The mentor's self-assessment is critical, 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 trainee. Use established methods as alternatives and avoid wild experimentation. Detrimental effects to the instructor trainee's self-confidence can result if the mentor continually guides the trainee 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 trainee. If you have developed a relationship of honesty and trust, you should get an honest answer. Respect the instructor trainee'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 trainee. 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 trainee, 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 trainee, 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 in your areas of concern. Review and discuss the completed form with the instructor trainee 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 trainee just doesn't seem to catch on. The problem isn't necessarily the fault of the mentor or the instructor trainee. 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 trainee's ex-employer. Whatever the reason, know when to say "when." Come to an agreement with the instructor trainee that a different mentor might be in his or her best interest. Don't let your ego get in the way of the instructor trainee's potential success.

## Guiding

The mentor has been called a "*resource broker*" or a "*conduit to information*." This becomes obvious in the guiding phase of the mentoring relationship. Now that we have established the instructor trainee'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 trainee'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 trainee to the answers and potential solutions. There are two benefits to this approach. First, the instructor trainee 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 by which the mentor provides the answer that will be the key to initiating self-reliance.

A typical question asked by the instructor trainee might be, "How do I keep the students in the back of the room from talking and being disruptive?" Rather than giving the instructor trainee the answer that you think is obvious, probe him or her 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 trainee to find the answer. However, as a mentor, you need to know that the instructor trainee does not have access to the instructor resources on the NSP website. It is your responsibility to provide that access and to guide the instructor trainee to the appropriate resources.

The instructor trainee generally only asks questions when a problem is perceived. As the experienced observer, the majority 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 trainee. Ask leading questions that cause the instructor trainee 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 trainee to be his or her 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 trainee. 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 trainee 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 available 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 trainee.

At some point in our mentoring experience, there will be an instructor trainee 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 trainee. 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 trainee to observe an experienced instructor at this time. The heightened awareness of the instructor trainee at this point will make the observation more meaningful.

Another useful tool in both problem solving and positive reinforcement is video. When using videoed presentations of the instructor trainee, it is extremely important to remain positive. Problems and shortcomings usually stick out like a sore thumb on video. Be careful not to embarrass the instructor trainee 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**

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. Where guiding is focused on self-reliance through reasoning and problem solving, coaching is focused on training and teaching.

As stated in the previous section, a good mentor should be able to guide the instructor trainee to answers and solutions to problems. Sometimes the instructor trainee 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 trainee 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 trainee 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 trainee 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 trainee 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 of 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 that the focus of mentoring is to develop a self-reliant instructor. If the only goal was to have instructor trainees 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 trainee demonstrating toboggan transport through moguls, you noticed some problems when the trainee 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 trainee'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.

Coaching can be helpful when:

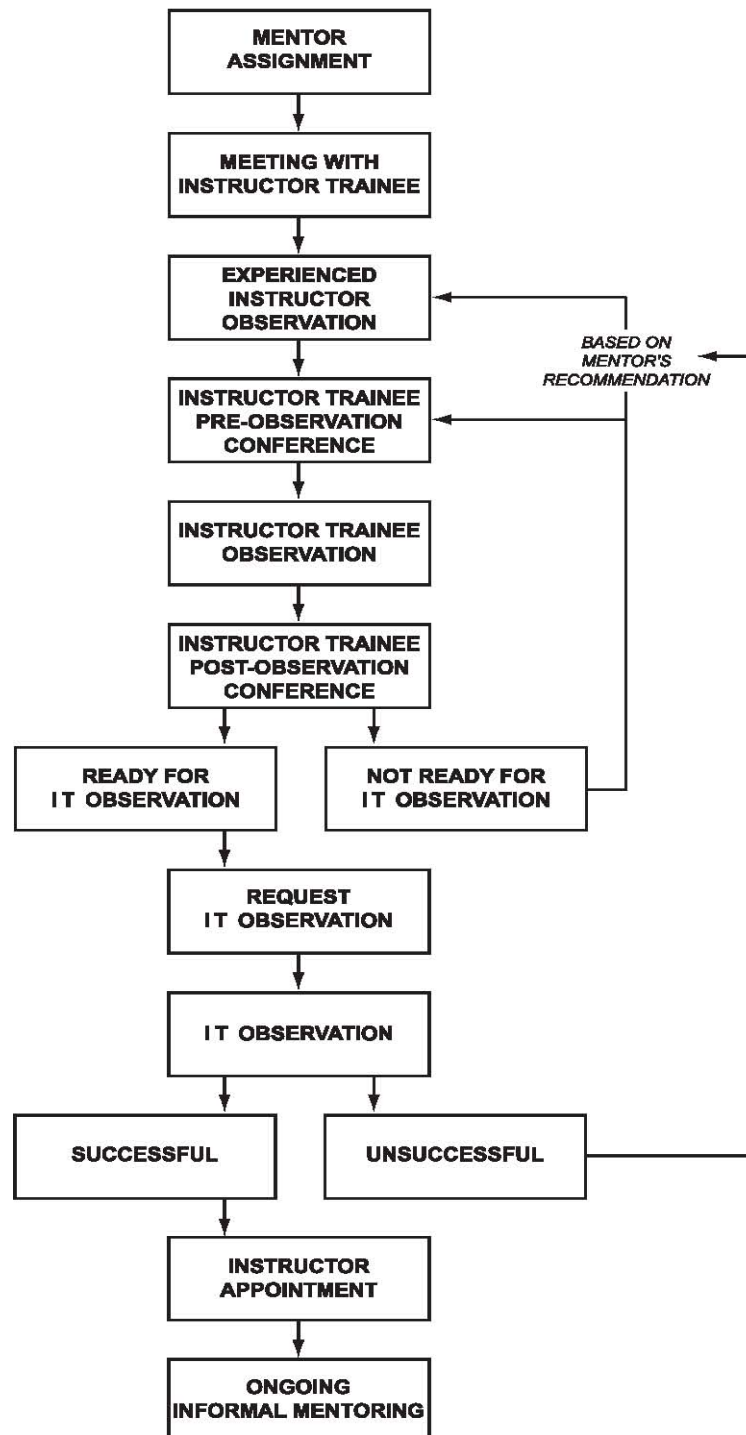
- The instructor trainee has the information but has difficulty applying it.
- Slight refinements in technique are necessary.
- The instructor trainee becomes frustrated.
- Abstract concepts are involved.
- New or scarcely documented material is introduced.
- There are recent changes in protocol.
- There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



## IV. What Are the Steps?

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

### THE NSP MENTORING PROCESS



## **Mentor Assignment**

The method for assigning a mentor to an instructor trainee may vary from division to division and between programs. Availability of personnel, resources and travel distance all contribute to how the process is enacted. 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 trainee can have a significant impact on the success of the new instructor. For instance, a mentor with a highly animated personality might not be the best choice if the instructor trainee is very laid-back and deliberate in his or her actions. The instructor trainee might take months trying to emulate a teaching style that will never work with his or her personality. If an assigned mentor ever feels there is a significant mismatch, a change needs to be made. The supervisor or person responsible for the assignment should be notified.

The NSP Instructor Mentoring Completion Form, found at <http://www.nsp.org> by logging in to Member Services, then selecting member resources and then Instructor Resources, follows the steps of mentoring described below. At each step, the mentor and trainee “sign off” on the form, verifying that that step has been completed. Once this form has been completed (including observations by an Instructor Trainer), it is submitted to the division discipline supervisor along with the completed Instructor Application form. The division discipline supervisor will sign and forward the Instructor Application to the national office. The Instructor Mentoring Completion Form will stay with the division discipline supervisor for their records. A list of all the administrative forms that apply to instructor training and instruction can be found in the Appendix.

## **Meeting With the Instructor Trainee**

The initial meeting with the instructor trainee 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 trainee can establish a foundation. The instructor trainee should feel that this is his or her time and that the mentor is not just squeezing the meeting into a busy schedule. Avoid interruptions and select a location that is as free of distractions as possible. When developing a dialog between the mentor and the instructor trainee, 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 misunderstandings and disappointments later. Formulating a plan is also a mutual effort. The plan should be concise and answer the when, where and how questions. Explain the administrative process using the appropriate NSP forms. 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 trainee to some of the procedural questions involved in becoming an NSP instructor:

- How do you register a course?
- Is it necessary to register for a clinic?
- Why is a release form necessary for NSP-registered courses?
- What is a course completion record?
- Who needs to be notified?
- If fees are collected, who gets them?
- What is a division/region 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.

NSP course materials should be introduced at this meeting. Textbooks, workbooks, instructor manuals, lesson guides and the current *NSP Policies and Procedures* manual should be available for discussion. If possible, demonstrate the use of the NSP instructor website. Show the instructor trainee where to find information from these sources and how to use the information. Show the trainee the various administrative forms that he or she will need. Remember that the trainee will not have access to the instructor resources from the website, so he or she should be provided those materials he or she may need to teach a lesson. 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, etc.

## **Experienced Instructor Observation**

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 trainee and the mentor should view the presentation as a team. Allow the critique that follows to be a free-flowing discussion that addresses both the positive and negative. A good critique at this point will make it far easier when it is time to assess the instructor trainee'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:

- 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. It is the mentor's job to guide the instructor trainee to the correct answers, not just give the correct answers. Encourage the instructor trainee to ask questions as well.

## **Instructor Trainee Observation**

### ***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 trainee 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 trainee 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 by phone. Then, perhaps an hour before the observation, a short meeting can be scheduled to tie up loose ends and serve as a final confidence-builder. It is also a good idea to make sure the instructor trainee has provided a break in the presentation to allow for intervention if necessary.

### ***The Instructor Trainee 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. In most cases this poses a major distraction for the instructor trainee. Simply attend and take notes as any other student would. By all means, do take notes for future reference. This is the mentor's opportunity to find out what the instructor trainee does or doesn't know and what he or she 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 poorly 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 trainee. 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 trainee. 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 trainee 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 of your mentoring at this one conference. This is only a part of the entire process. Take your time and prioritize the issues.

Some inappropriate comments might be:

- Your toboggan demonstration in crud was really 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.

Some better approaches might be:

- 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 trainee how he or she felt about the presentation. In addition to questions, look for clues. Be empathetic and use your past experiences to guide the instructor trainee. Concentrate on instilling confidence, self-assurance and motivation.

### ***The Decision Point***

There will be occasions when the instructor trainee 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 trainee 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 trainee 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 trainee feels it necessary. At the completion of each cycle comes the decision point. When the instructor trainee is ready, the mentor requests an Instructor Trainer (IT) observation.

Normally, the observing IT will be an IT in the discipline in which the trainee will become an instructor. If there is no IT available in that discipline, an IT from another discipline may observe. However, it is strongly recommended that an IT from the specific discipline be identified. In addition, the mentor cannot act as the observing IT, even though he or she may hold the appropriate credentials.

### **The IT Observation**

Help prepare the instructor trainee 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 trainee'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 IT observation, the IT or the mentor will forward the completed NSP Instructor Mentoring Completion Form and a completed (to that point) Instructor Application form to the division or region supervisor or his or her designee. The division or region supervisor or his or her designee will then forward a completed and signed Instructor Application form to the NSP national office and to the instructor trainee. It is recommended that the instructor trainee keep a copy of the completed Instructor Application form in his or her files. Upon verification by the NSP national office, the new instructor will be added to the NSP instructor roster.

### **Ongoing Mentoring**

Any mentoring that follows is usually very informal in nature. The instructor may want to draw on your experience to address a difficult situation or may just have questions regarding a form. These types of things can normally be handled by phone, e-mail, or a ride on the chair lift.

## V. Everything Else

### Frequently Asked Questions and Troubleshooting

***Does mentoring have to be registered the same way I would a register for a course?***

The NSP national office requires no notification to begin the mentoring process. Only upon successful completion must the national office be notified.

***Is there a completion form that has to be sent to the national office?***

No. Only the fully completed and signed Instructor Application form is sent to the national office. The Discipline Division Supervisor maintains the *Mentoring Completion Guide Form* for their records.

***What fees are involved?***

In an effort to make the process as easy as possible for all concerned, there are no national, division, or local fees attached to mentoring.

***Are there any prerequisites needed before beginning the mentoring process?***

Prior to beginning the mentoring phase, all patrollers must have successfully completed the NSP Instructor Development course.

***When does the instructor trainee officially become an instructor?***

When the national office receives a completed Instructor Application form from the Division Discipline Supervisor, the new instructor will be added to the national database.

***How long is the mentoring process supposed to take?***

There is no time limit. Depending on the instructor trainee's previous experience and aptitude, the time could be as short as one observation by the mentor and one observation by an IT. All trainees should have as many mentor observations as needed to assure competency and self-reliance. Frequency of available teaching opportunities and geography can also be a factor in the time needed for completion. The process is intended to have flexibility and to allow time for instructor development. The focus is on making a good instructor.

***Is there any way an education professional can have the mentoring process waived?***

All potential NSP instructors can benefit from observation. The process can be minimal but cannot be bypassed.

***If a patroller whose instructor status has lapsed wants to regain instructor status, is mentoring necessary?***

Experienced instructors returning to active status should be observed by an IT for reinstatement. If the observing IT finds areas that could benefit from mentoring, the returning instructor will be assigned to a mentor.

***Can the instructor trainee practice teach without supervision?***

An NSP certified instructor must be present whenever the instructor trainee presents NSP material.

***What is the status of mentoring as a senior elective?***

Successful completion of the mentoring program resulting in instructor appointment counts as a senior elective.

***What if I encounter a "know-it-all" instructor trainee who resists mentoring?***

No one knows it all. The task is to convince the instructor trainee that this is the case. Second opinions from other mentors, experienced instructor observations, videotape and instructor evaluation forms from students can all be useful tools in creating the atmosphere for effective

mentoring. If you are unable to create this atmosphere or you are not able to connect with the instructor trainee, request a change of mentors.

***What do I do if I don't feel the instructor trainee will ever be a good instructor?***

Do the best you can in preparing the instructor trainee and then request a second opinion from another experienced instructor or mentor. If your opinions are in agreement, express your concerns to the supervising IT, who will then observe the instructor trainee. It is the job of the IT to counsel the instructor trainee and dismiss the trainee from the program if necessary.

***Isn't there the potential for mentoring new instructors to become a "good old boys" network, where mentors simply sign off their friends?***

The built-in safeguard is that the mentor cannot make the final determination. The mentor can only recommend the instructor trainee to the supervising IT for observation. The IT has the ultimate decision.

***What if no IT is available in my area to do the final observation?***

In areas where very few ITs are available, an IT from any NSP program can make the final observation.

***How can an IT from another discipline possibly be qualified to approve my trainee?***

The IT is only observing skills generic to instruction. You, as the mentor, are responsible for assuring the instructor trainee is proficient in the skills specific to your discipline. However, it is strongly recommended that the IT be from the same discipline.

## **Guidelines**

This list is intended to aid mentors in the preparation and observation of NSP instructor trainees. Use it as a reminder of items to address, but remember that not all items will be applicable to all teaching situations. It may also be shared with the instructor trainee to outline expectations. It should not be used as an instrument of evaluation although it might be useful as a tool to pinpoint areas of weakness that need to be addressed following an observation.

No reference has been made to any specific discipline or program. ***Please refer to the most updated instructor manuals and/or textbooks for any specific program requirements.***

## **RESOURCES**

### ***NSP Materials, Policies and Procedures***

- Review textbook, appropriate instructor's manual and other NSP course materials.
- Review program objectives.
- Review applicable policies and procedures.
- Review registration forms, completion forms, evaluation forms and other pertinent training forms.
- Explain differences between courses, clinics, refreshers, and continuing education.



## THE LESSON

- Use written NSP lesson guide.
- State objective clearly.
- Create and use a lesson plan in which the content meets the stated objective.
- Incorporate content from previous lessons as a transition to new material.
- Plan instructional time to adequately cover all relevant material.
- Allow time flexibility to address difficult or abstract concepts.

### ***Competency and Subject Matter***

- Teach material based on NSP guidelines and objectives.
- Display competency in knowledge of subject.
- Demonstrate appropriate skills competently.
- Align material presentation to a realistic expectation of student abilities.

### ***Teaching Methods and Techniques***

- Use a variety of methods appropriate to student needs and subject matter (i.e., lecturing, discussion, modeling, questioning, role-playing, etc.).
- Use appropriate instructional aids (video, audio, demonstrations, etc.).
- Address all learning styles with an adequate mix of auditory, visual and kinesthetic material.
- Address the specific needs of the adult learner.
- Provide opportunities to learn through experimentation and discovery.
- Monitor student understanding during the learning process.
- Assign a variety of activities that require application of skills and concepts taught.
- Provide time for guided and independent practice.
- Summarize each major phase of the lesson as well as the lesson as a whole.
- Demonstrate the ability to communicate verbally and non-verbally.
- Use effective active-listening skills.

### ***Use of Instructional Time***

- Begin instruction promptly.
- Avoid unnecessary interruptions and distractions.
- Pace instruction according to lesson plan.
- Monitor student time on activity or skill performance.

### ***Motivational Skills***

- Provide challenge appropriate to material being taught.
- Provide opportunities for self-realized student success.
- Encourage assisted and unassisted problem solving.
- Give constructive feedback frequently and promptly.

### ***Student Evaluation***

- Use questions appropriate to student needs.
- Maintain skill performance at appropriate level.
- Maintain objective-based evaluations.
- Provide the opportunity for remediation when necessary.

### ***Environmental Management***

- Organize learning space to match instructional plans and student needs.
- Ensure that information can be seen and heard by students.
- Provide student comfort level for optimal learning.
- Consider all risk management factors.
- Use release forms when necessary.

### **MENTOR'S SELF EVALUATION**

- Did I communicate effectively with the instructor trainee?
- Was I empathetic when observing and counseling?
- Did I relate to the instructor trainee on his or her level?
- Was I aware of the instructor trainee's most effective learning style?
- Did I guide the instructor trainee to the desired outcome?
- Did I coach the instructor trainee when necessary?
- Did I provide adequate time for the needs of the instructor trainee?
- Did I encourage problem solving?
- Was I successful in motivating the instructor trainee?
- Was I careful to assess and not evaluate?
- Was my feedback immediate and constructive?
- Was I available?
- Was I careful not to rush the process?

## **VI. APPENDIX**

### **Administrative Forms**

The following Current administrative forms, unless noted, for instructors and instructor trainees can be found at <http://www.nsp.org> by logging in to Member Services, then selecting member resources, then Instructor Resources.

- Instructor Application Form and Packet
- Instructor Mentoring Completion Form
- Release Form
- Six-Pack Reference Form
- Course Completion Record
- NSP Student Feedback Questionnaire
- Division/Region Expense Report Form can be found on Division/Region website