

**LABOR AND EMPLOYEE RELATIONS DIVISION
COACHING/MENTORING PROGRAM**



**United States Department of Agriculture
Food Safety and Inspection Service**

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MESSAGE FROM THE ACTING DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR FOR THE OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT, FOOD SAFETY AND INSPECTION SERVICE

I am pleased to present the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), Labor and Employee Relations Division's (LERD) Coaching/Mentoring Program (Program). This Program is designed to encourage the professional development of program participants.

Professional development in the areas of Labor and Employee Relations (LER) has been tasked to each individual agency by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). While OPM runs a four (4) day training program for LER specialists, and various professional and consultant organizations also have training programs, there is no centralized government-wide training or core competency program in these areas. Mentoring and coaching of LER specialists by managers, supervisors, and their more senior co-workers must form an integral part of LER professional development, and is a core aspect of good human capital management.

It is the intent of the Program to have a core group of LERD mentors to help mentor and coach FSIS LER specialists, other employees in FSIS who may be involved in LER, other LER specialists in the Department, and LER Specialists outside of the Department. It is the intent of LERD to become a leader in the Federal LER community with respect to training, mentoring, and coaching LER specialists, and to working with LER professional organizations to foster and encourage the professional development of LER specialists.

The Program is an ongoing developmental Program. This document will guide the Program in its initial stages. The Program will be revised and updated as we learn from experience and get feedback from our Program participants, as well as feedback from the professional associations involved in the Program. I strongly encourage all to review the contents of this Program and to offer suggestions on Program improvements. This Program represents LERD's continued commitment to providing unsurpassed LER services to our Agency, the Department, and to the broader Federal LER community.

Employees and/or Programs interested in participating in the LERD Coaching/Mentoring Program should call (202) 720-5657, or write to:

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FOOD SAFETY AND INSPECTION SERVICE
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Sincerely,

Yvonne Davis

I. LABOR AND EMPLOYEE RELATIONS DIVISION COACHING/MENTORING PROGRAM



The Labor and Employee Relations Division (LERD) recognizes that its participants have a diverse array of knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that help make the LERD a strong and effective Division. These participants are the backbone of the Division, each performing their duties and responsibilities to the best of their abilities. The LERD also recognizes that ongoing employee development is critical to ensuring the LERD staff is capable of providing effective leadership on labor and employee relations matters. The LERD Coaching/Mentoring Program creates employee development opportunities for strengthening, or equalizing the KSAs of, its participants.

The Program takes proactive leadership to a new level, empowered to “professionalize” its participants. The Program’s objective is to provide its participants with the requisite education, training and experience to successfully perform their duties today and prepare them for the challenges of tomorrow.



The LERD Coaching/Mentoring Program helps prepare participants for greater personal success, productivity, and achievement and is designed to improve communication across the organization, at different levels, in different branches of LERD, between the field and headquarters, and among diverse participants. The Program enables participants to establish realistic and realizable goals through a career development plan and to pursue those goals with the help of a coach/mentor who coaches and counsels. Coaches/mentors will find an opportunity to pass on organizational history, values, culture, and knowledge, as well as personal experiences and philosophy.

A. Major Functional Areas and Developmental Opportunities

The Program provides developmental opportunities in five (5) major functional areas of LERD through which the Division carries out its mission. These areas are Labor Relations Branch (LRB), Employee Relations Branch (ERB), Litigation Team, Workplace Violence Prevention and Response Branch (WVP&RB), and Voluntary Dispute Intervention Program (VDIP). The Coaching/Mentoring Program for the function areas within the LERD will require the following:

1. Labor Relations Branch

The Labor Relations Branch (LRB) provides advisory services of a diverse nature and representational services (unit determinations, unfair labor practices, negotiation impasses, third-party hearings and proceedings) before the Federal Labor Relations

Authority (FLRA), the Federal Services Impasses Panel (FSIP), the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS), independent arbitrators on labor relations matters, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), and with the National Joint Council of Food Inspection Locals (NJC), professional and participant organizations, to include advisory and consultation services to senior level officials, managers, and supervisors on labor relations issues.

The Coaching/Mentoring Program will require coaches/mentors to develop participants on formulating and recommending policies, programs, plans, and procedures governing Federal sector labor relations functions necessary to effectively meet current and long-range Agency needs. Participants



will learn how to prepare and present the Agency's position on unfair labor practices, negotiability determinations, bargaining impasses, and other disputes for presentation to the appropriate third party. Participants will be taught the requirements for reviewing petitions from labor organizations concerning bargaining unit determination and how to evaluate units of recognition that benefit the Agency's goals and objectives. Participants will be

mentored on the skills required to serve as the Agency's chief spokesperson or bargaining team member in the actual negotiation of agreements (including mid-term agreements), to review agreements for conformance with applicable laws, rules, and regulations, and to prepare Agency responses to grievances filed pursuant to negotiated grievance procedures and administrative grievance procedures. Lastly, participants will be trained to become authorities in labor relations to provide technical counsel, guidance, interpretation, and advisory assistance to all program officials, including the Agency's senior managers.

2. Employee Relations Branch

The Employee Relations Branch (ERB) provides guidance, consultation, and assistance to employees, supervisors, and managers on employee relations matters including: problem prevention and resolution, ethics, personnel misconduct investigations, employee conduct and discipline, employee relations training, grievances, appeals, third-party representation, and related matters which involve individual or group relationships.



Participants participating in the Program within the ERB will gain expertise in the area of Ethics including determinations on potential conflict of interest situations and requests for approval of outside employment or activities. Participants will be coached/mentored to become proficient in the processing of requests for disciplinary action and adverse action including analyzing information received from District offices/program managers, drafting of proposed notices, determining the

appropriate level of discipline through the use of case law research and the USDA Table of Penalties, conducting oral conferences, and drafting decision letters in both disciplinary and adverse action cases. Coaches/mentors will also ensure participants are exposed to the requirements to prevail in third party proceedings including applicable appeal rights and procedures. It is highly recommended that individuals participating in the Coaching/Mentoring Program within the ERB further expand their horizons through participation in the Litigation Team portion of the Coaching/Mentoring Program. Such participation would undoubtedly provide the participant with a more overall rounded expertise in the function.

3. Litigation Team (Third Party Representation)

Along with support from Specialists in the Labor Relations and Employee Relations Branches, the Division's Litigation team is tasked with the great responsibility of handling all litigation cases.

The Coaching/Mentoring Program will require the coaches/mentors to develop participants on case preparation to include evaluating the case to assess its merit and value to the Agency. Participants will be taught how to research the law and analyze case theories, draft and file motions, respond to settlement offers, negotiate settlement agreements, prepare trial notebooks, engage in oral advocacy to include direct and cross examination of witnesses, deliver opening and closing statements, draft legal briefs, appeals and exceptions. Participants will be empowered with the knowledge and skills required to represent the Agency in multiple administrative forums to include Merit System Protection Board (MSPB), the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the Federal Labor Relations Authority (FLRA), the Office of Special Counsel (OSC), and the Federal Services Impasses Panel (FSIP). Participants will learn to balance a demanding caseload.



4. Workplace Violence Prevention and Response Branch

An integral part of the LERD's mission is to administer the Agency's Workplace Violence Prevention and Response (WVP&R) program introduced in 1998 to address a variety of workplace issues arising in and because of the work environment. Those issues range from personality conflicts to disagreements to physical threats and/or assaults. All reported issues whether relatively simple to solve or more complex and sensitive in nature are taken seriously and addressed appropriately. Through the Agency's WVP&R program, the LERD has responsibilities that include, but are not limited to, developing policy and guidance on internal and external workplace violence studies to improve the thoroughness and effectiveness of the Workplace Violence Prevention and Response program; responding to actual and/or potential workplace violence incidents; recommending appropriate action to ensure the safety and health of all concerned parties, both

internal and external; and conducting inquiries/investigations and analyses related to workplace violence incidents.

The WVP&R coach/mentor will provide participants with hands on experience in dealing with actual reported incidents of potential workplace violence at the time they are reported. Participants will work closely with their coach/mentor to learn how to



handle the various types of situations that are reported to the program. Participants will be taught how to do a threat assessment on calls or situations that have the potential of becoming violent. This will include learning to identify the likelihood of imminent danger and the appropriate response in those situations. Participants will be empowered with the knowledge and skills required in handling a potential threat with recommendations and support to expedite a peaceful resolution.

Individuals participating in the WVP&R portion of the program will work closely with the Employee Relations Branch as these types of situations frequently involve ERB issues. Last, but not least, the participant will be challenged to identify any suggestions they may have to help improve this fairly new and very important program for the Division and the Agency.

5. Voluntary Dispute Intervention Program

Responsibilities involve developing, coordinating, and maintaining the program utilizing field specialists, managers, supervisors, etc., to improve relationships between participants and to identify and resolve problems before they escalate to the point at which formal corrective action becomes necessary. In addition, the VDIP conducts Conflict Management Workshops and Team Building meetings.

Participants will be coached to ensure a general understanding of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) principals, recognize the correlation between the nature of conflict and third party intervention, the dynamics of the VDIP mediation model, and mediator orientations in a non-directive approach to mediation.



Participants will learn to assess intervention requests/referrals for appropriateness, how to prepare parties for an intervention, schedule interventions, and facilitate interventions. As an observer and co-intervenor in at least three interventions, the coach/mentor will empower participants with the knowledge and skills essential to facilitate mediation sessions. Participants will better understand the LERD as a mediation advocate and

support the VDIP through marketing strategies.

The Coaching/Mentoring Program will guide participants through each discipline throughout the Division. This approach requires that participants be assigned meaningful work within the discipline where they are being coached/mentored.

Participants will be led through the process to become effective in the program area. This process involves the participant gradually emerging from a passive observer to an active participant in the work. The initial stage of the Program will allow participants to work closely with their coach/mentor. Participants will be held accountable for the work they are assigned after being given the tools to succeed.

It's the vision of the LERD to develop participants through coaching and mentoring, to improve upon the quality service already provided to its customers, and to build the LERD into a recognized, credible premiere labor and employee relations division upon which other agencies may model. Additionally coaches/mentors would have invaluable opportunities to train or coach/mentor other USDA and agency labor and employee relations specialists through outreach activities such as giving workshops at conferences.

B. Achieving the Vision through Coaching and Mentoring

The Coaching/Mentoring Program is an important catalyst for making the LERD's vision (of employee development, improve customer service, and become a premiere labor and employee relations model) become a reality. The coach/mentor and participant will become successful in their respective roles by being *results-oriented*. Each pair defines its own goals in a contract at the beginning of the coaching/mentoring relationship, and is responsible for evaluating whether they are making progress toward those goals.



The coaching/mentoring pair will recognize how important their individual roles are toward achieving the goals of the Division and the Agency. They increase their *accountability* by incorporating the knowledge and skills obtained during specialized training, and continually improving upon their successes during the coaching/mentoring tenure.

Each individual will grow toward developing a *positive, credible reputation* with Agency-wide personnel. There will be numerous informal and formal opportunities where communications and actions will have significant impact on the character of the LERD and its staff.



The LERD is dedicated to achieving a *highly motivated and fully-trained staff*. In order to gain the most from the Program the participant must be ready to make a serious effort to set career goals and achieve them. The participant must be committed to take the initiative to foster a positive relationship with their coach/mentor; listen to their coach's/mentor's suggestions, evaluate them and take action; and be prepared to commit the necessary time to working toward the goals, in addition to the official

time for the coaching/mentoring relationship. Everyone has something to gain as a participant, and to offer as a coach/mentor, regardless of grade level or profession.

It is an opportunity for pairs to meet and plan career strategies. Coached/mentored participants may have several assignments to work on each week, such as (but not limited to) revising their resumes, conducting interviews, report writing, planning and conducting meetings, learning more about the systems that affect them.

The participant is responsible for defining a goal and a career strategy with the help of their coach/mentor. The participant is responsible for meeting or speaking with the coach/mentor up to an hour a week for the duration of the Program, developing a contract with the coach/mentor, evaluating their progress in writing on a monthly basis, networking with other participants, and sharing what they learn with others at their work site.

Apart from the satisfaction of helping someone else and seeing them reach toward goals they've set, coaches/mentors see the world from a different perspective, learn more about the LERD and the FSIS, and become aware of their own paths and values. The coach/mentor must be able to serve as a role model and resource person for a participant. The participant will depend on the coach/mentor for advice on how to achieve full potential. The coach/mentor must demonstrate patience in working with others; be able to offer constructive criticism on career and personal issues that would impede a participant's career; be a good listener; and exhibit tact, diplomacy, and sensitivity in working with others who may be of a different age group, background, or culture.

Coaches/mentors are asked to dedicate regular time to meeting or phoning their participants (up to an hour a week), to listen, be a resource for career development and planning, and to provide the participant with objective and positive information, contacts, and support that will help them make sound decisions. The coach/mentor is there to provide structure and suggestions for the participant.

The Program pairs participants with experienced, trusted, and knowledgeable coaches/mentors who will provide personal support, counseling, and coaching for up to six (6) months to help individuals plan and realize their career potential and goals. The Program can assist participants in identifying strengths, improving performance, and setting developmental goals. It is an opportunity for pairs to meet and plan career strategies.



Long distance pairs have some considerable advantages; they help both people learn what it's like in a different environment, and provide exposure that you just wouldn't get otherwise. Long distance pairs works well if both parties are committed to meeting regularly by phone, as well as exchanging e-mail. A minimum of contact every

two weeks is recommended. Experience has shown that regular contact is even more important when people cannot meet in person.

A coach/mentor is a coach and counselor who help the participant discern and build on their strength and skills. Coaches/mentors provide objective and positive information and suggestions on anything, which affects the participant's career and marketability. Coaches/mentors also use coaching and feedback to boost morale and send productivity soaring, and create a positive, energized work environment. It is up to the participant to take the initiative to achieve career success. Coaches/mentors offer information, support, feedback, contacts, and ideas – but the participant has to take it from there.

Supervisors benefit by having participants participate in the Program as either coaches/mentors or participants. Coaches/mentors develop stronger coaching and counseling skills, and expand their networks and diversity appreciation through the training provided and by meeting with the participants.

Participants develop a stronger sense of direction and often show more motivation on the job when they have a goal, whatever it may be. Participants who take advantage of the LERD Coaching/Mentoring Program have the opportunity to develop thoroughness, attention to detail, pride and overall awareness of their important role, and participate and share in the Agency's vision of FSIS of being a premiere public health regulatory agency.

II. COACH/MENTOR

A. Role and Responsibilities

The role of coach/mentor involves unique responsibilities. A good coach/mentor serves the interests of the agency in developing its participants by coaching them to greater personal development and achievement. The coach's/mentor's responsibilities fall into five categories: communication, strategic planning, mentoring, serving as a resource, and coaching.

B. Communication

Frequent, regular, face-to-face communication is critical to the success of the Coaching/Mentoring Program. All parties need to develop a trusting relationship with one another, and coaches/mentors must communicate that the interests and success of the participant are top priority. Honesty and openness are essential. Coaches/mentors should:

- work with the participant to establish a schedule of regular meetings with sufficient time to discuss issues and concerns (meetings that involve the interchange of views and the communication of the current status of related projects, then you should be generous with your time),



- listen actively, seeking to understand the participant's perspective,
- communicate clearly by asking questions and summarize what was heard,
- uncover assumptions and correct misperceptions,
- convey an interest in the full life of the participant - on and off the job, and be willing to share personal experiences,
- help participants see how their positions and actions will be seen by others,
- help participants adapt to the organizational culture of FSIS, and LERD,
- make no promises regarding assignments or promotion opportunities.

C. Strategic Planning

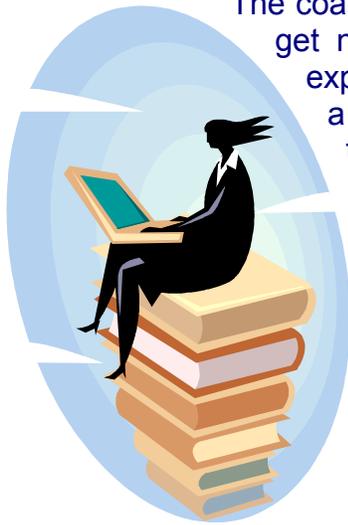
Personal development can be coincidental, but it is almost always incomplete and longer coming if pursued in an unplanned manner. Participants need help in developing a plan for their career, i.e., envisioning their future and constructing a strategy to achieve their goals. The coach/mentor plays a key role in this strategic planning by:

- helping the participant outline a basic strategy which will ensure useful work experiences, personal contacts, and exposure to a variety of agency activities,
- helping to identify options and strategies on next steps,
- working with the participant to develop a time line which includes periodic evaluations, and
- helping the participant evaluate the implementation of their own strategic plan and to incorporate lessons learned back into their strategic planning.

D. Mentoring

The coach/mentor is a successful, experienced individual who possesses a wealth of information regarding FSIS and LERD activities, history, culture, and operating philosophy, as well as how things get done within both the Agency and the Department. Mentoring involves facilitating the participant's development in becoming an experienced member of LERD.

E. Serving as a Resource



The coach/mentor knows to whom the participant should talk, where to get necessary information, how to approach an issue, and what expertise is needed for a particular problem. Coaches/mentors are a resource for the participant – the person who steers them in the right direction. Here are a few of the ways a coach/mentor can be a resource.

- Help the participant develop a network of contacts, both within and Department and Agency as well as in the federal Labor and Employee Relations community, by suggesting who the participant should get to know,
- share information on the availability of training and developmental opportunities,
- provide business expertise,
- offer appropriate advice and assistance, and
- provide the right help at the right time.

F. Coaching

Good coaching leads to a level of independent action. Participants should progress from a stage where they are taught and directed, through a stage where they are coached as they attempt things on their own, to a final stage of independent responsibility and reaching out to coach/mentor others. A coach will:

- provide constructive, frank, and honest feedback and evaluation of the participant's progress,
- encourage the participant to confront challenges, take reasonable risks, seize opportunities, recognize and overcome problems, and build on strengths, and
- empower participants to act independently and make their own decisions.

The language of effective coaching includes:

- Could (open and inviting) vs. Should (directive)
- I or We (personal ownership and teamwork) vs. You
- And (feels inclusive and respectful) vs. But (discounts previous information and is argumentative)



- Sometimes vs. Always or Never
- Won't vs. Can't (I always do what I want to)
- Learnings vs. mistakes

G. Feedback

A coach's/mentor's feedback should have the impact it deserves by the manner and approach the coach/mentor uses to deliver feedback. The feedback can make a difference to a participant if you can avoid a defensive response.

- Feedback is communication to the participant regarding the effect his or her behavior is having on another participant, the Agency, the customer, or the LERD team.
- Positive feedback involves telling someone about good performance. Make this feedback timely, specific, and frequent.
- Constructive feedback alerts an individual to an area in which his or her performance could improve. Constructive feedback is not criticism; it is descriptive and should always be directed to the action, not the participant.
- The main purpose of constructive feedback is to help the participant understand where he or she stands in relation to expected and/or productive job behavior.
- Recognition for effective performance is a powerful motivator. Most participants want to obtain more recognition, so recognition fosters more of the appreciated actions. Recognition is honest, timely, and appropriate to the activity being recognized.

III. PARTICIPANT

A. Roles and Responsibilities

A participant is motivated and interested in advancing his/her career and the program mission of their organization. A participant is an achiever willing to take the initiative for his/her own development and make the most of available opportunities. The participant's responsibilities fall into four categories: taking initiative, assuming responsibility, networking, and communicating.



1. Taking Initiative

A coaching/mentoring process promotes career planning and job enrichment. A participant must be willing and sincerely interested in enhancing his/her career and take the initial step in setting career goals. Participants must:

- work proactively with their coaches/mentors to assess their strengths and weaknesses and identify career goals,
- complete assignments to research options and gather feedback,
- develop a plan of action to achieve goals and improve job skills, and
- take the initiative to make things happen.

2. Assuming Responsibility

You are responsible for your life and your career. You must be willing to actively take the responsibility for setting career goals and developing a plan of action to achieve your goals. Participants must:

- fulfill official work assignments,
- maintain a personal momentum and professional enthusiasm,
- seek opportunities to experience new responsibilities relating to their job and career development plan, and
- take the lead responsibility for developing knowledge, skills, and abilities.

3. Networking

Networking is critical to getting information and identifying resources. Developing contacts within and outside the Agency can prove to be very valuable.

Participants are encouraged to:

- work with their coach/mentor to identify a list of key contacts,
- establish a network of contacts within and outside their organization to gain different perspectives,
- be willing to share information in return, and
- become members in professional associations, i.e. Interagency Labor Relations Forum (ILRF), Society of Federal Labor & Employee Relations Professionals (SFLERP), Industrial Relations and Research Association (IRRA), Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM) or other professional organizations.



4. Communication

Frequent, regular, face-to-face communication is critical to the success of the Coaching/Mentoring Program. Both the participant and coach/mentor have a responsibility to create a trusting and committed coaching/mentoring relationship. By

developing open lines of communication participants can develop a constructive, trusting environment within which the objectives of the LERD Coaching/Mentoring Program can be achieved. Participants are encouraged to:

- work with their coaches/mentors to establish a schedule of regular meetings with their coaches/mentors allowing sufficient time to ask questions and discuss issues openly,
- be willing to share information and ideas,
- continuously seek feedback in order to understand and clarify issues or questions, and
- listen non-defensively, expecting and accepting open and constructive ideas for change and how their actions/relationships affect others.



5. Being Receptive (Coachable)

Coaching is an on-going collaborative partnership built on taking action. Being receptive (or rather coachable) to the feedback and progress evaluation of the coach/mentor is very important. In this powerful alliance, participants find themselves:

- doing more than they would on their own,
- taking themselves more seriously,
- creating momentum and consistency,
- taking more effective, focused actions,
- becoming more balanced and fulfilled, and
- learning the value of teamwork through being receptive to coaching.



IV. PARTICIPANT'S AND COACH'S/MENTOR'S SUPERVISORS

A. Role and Responsibilities

The participant's supervisor's role is to support their participant's participation in the LERD Coaching/Mentoring Program. The coach's/mentor's supervisor's role is to support the Coach/Mentor's participation in the program.

B. Responsibilities

- Be flexible about time so that the pair can meet up to the agreed limits (up to an hour a week).

- Listen responsively when the participant or the coach/mentor comes back with suggestions, goals, and potential steps for improving the program.
- Provide the participant with feedback that will be helpful in the coaching/mentoring process, concerning their performance and self-presentation.
- Provide support and recognition to the coach/mentor for the person's important role in the LERD Coach/Mentoring Program.
- Provide encouragement in the participant's development within the Program and in the participant's eventual evolution into a coach/mentor for other participants in the Program.



U.S. Department of Agriculture



**Food Safety and Inspection Service
Labor and Employee Relations Division
Office of Management**