Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

In Greek mythology, Odysseus, King of Ithaca, had his trusted friend, Mentor, help raise Odysseus's son, Telemachus. Mentor became Telemachus's teacher, coach, counselor, and protector while Odysseus was away fighting in the Trojan War. During that time, Telemachus and Mentor built a bond and relationship based on trust and genuine affection.

The Greek word mentor means enduring. The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines mentor as "a wise and trusted counselor or teacher." Today, mentoring programs have similar meanings and purposes. These programs seek to establish a relationship, often on a one-to-one basis or within a group setting, in which more experienced and knowledgeable persons guide and advise others. The ultimate goal is to seek an enduring change in mentees' lives. The relationships may focus on academics, career, social development, or personal growth - all ways to enhance a mentee's life.

In the United States, public attention has focused on the importance and success of mentoring programs, especially for youth. In 1997, the Presidents' Summit for America's Future brought national attention to the needs of America's youth and the country's future. The Summit galvanized the support of corporations, nonprofit organizations, local governments, and volunteers to make a commitment to America's youth. A coordinating organization — America's Promise-The Alliance for Youth — emerged from the Summit with the goal of working with the National Mentoring Partnership to expand quality youth mentoring programs throughout the country.

As the popularity of such programs grows, organizers must be aware of the risks involved in mentoring programs. Although the benefits are potentially substantial, they do not come without risk. One person harmed unnecessarily within a mentoring program can do great damage and minimize all the good generated by successful programs.

A mentoring relationship is one of trust. The elements of trust and personal relationships make mentoring programs different from other social services operations. Mentors strive to help others achieve their full potential by teaching them to read, helping them balance a checkbook, keeping them out of a gang, or simply serving as a positive role model. Because the relationship is built on trust, if either mentors or mentees break that trust, they can potentially harm the relationship. In some ways, a broken trust may be more devastating than a physical injury. Successful mentoring partnerships demand a commitment from both parties.

Success also depends upon a strong organization, a relevant, clear mission, and staff dedicated to supporting the relationship. A loosely organized, poorly managed program can be disastrous. To help facilitate the establishment of effective mentoring projects, The National Mentoring Working Group, convened by The National Mentoring Partnership, developed the following *Elements of Effective Practice* for responsible mentoring programs:

- a well-defined mission and established operating principles;
- regular consistent contact between mentors and mentees;
- support by the families or guardians of mentees;
- additional community support services;
- an established oversight organization;
- adherence to general principles of volunteerism;
- paid or volunteer staff with appropriate skills;
- written job descriptions for all staff and volunteer positions;
- adherence to Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) requirements;
- inclusiveness of racial, economic, and gender representation as appropriate to the program;
- adequate financial and in-kind resources;
- written administrative and program procedures;
- written eligibility requirements for program participants;
- program evaluation and ongoing assessment;
- a long-range plan that has community input;
- *risk management and confidentiality policies;* (emphasis ours)
- use of generally accepted accounting practices;
- a prudent and reasonable rationale for staffing requirements that are based on:
  - — an organization's statement of purpose and goals,
  - — the needs of mentors and mentees, and
  - — staff and other volunteers' skill level.

The foundation of the *Elements of Effective Practice* is good management. Good management requires the consideration of potential harm and the adoption of practices to minimize the likelihood of harm. Risk management is *a discipline for dealing with the possibility that a future event will cause harm*. Therefore, risk management is a subset of the overall management of an organization. Organizations that strive to achieve the best practices for mentoring programs must practice risk management techniques in their operations. Too often, well-intentioned program organizers overlook the need to protect people, preserve assets, and conserve resources. Because of the unique nature of mentoring programs, especially the character of the relationship between the partners, nonprofits that sponsor mentoring activities are exposed to many risks that can cause great harm if left unmanaged.

Because trust is such a critical component in mentoring programs, organizations must strive to avoid violating that bond. One way to protect the trust is to address the dangers or risks that threaten it. The purpose of this book is to help you identify and analyze the risks facing your mentoring program. We will explore these risks and the risk management techniques available to manage them. Any nonprofit's staff, with board direction, can incorporate these risk management strategies into their operational plan. Every program is different, so there is no one risk management plan for all mentoring programs. However, we have identified ten key elements to consider when establishing or evaluating your risk management program.

Chapter One — Risk Management Fundamentals offers a brief introduction to the tenets of risk management. It explains the risk management process and how to apply it to mentoring programs.

Chapter Two — Understanding Legal Liability explains the liability issues a mentoring program can encounter. Despite the various missions and goals, all mentoring programs have similar liability risks—accidental injuries, property damage, confidentiality, intentional acts (abuse, maltreatment), transportation, and loss of reputation or goodwill—that threaten the success and survival of the operation. The severity of the risks depends upon how each program is run.

Chapter Three — Using Liability Shields Wisely discusses the use of waivers, informed consent forms, permission slips and disclaimers as effective tools for protecting your organization.

Chapter Four — Ten Keys to Mentoring Risk Management discusses the key elements of risk management for mentoring programs. The keys explore the nature of the risks and the various risk management techniques available to manage them. We will examine the following key elements:

1. Choose Your Mission, Choose Your Risks;
2. Collaborate With Care;
3. Understand Your Clientele;
4. Select Your Personnel;
5. Establish Boundaries of Appropriate Behavior and Activities;
6. Supervise and Train;
7. Manage Your Administrative Function;
8. Plan for Your Crisis;
9. Evaluate Your Program;
10. Finance Your Risks.

Chapter Five — Where Do You Go From Here? offers suggestions for ways to implement and monitor the various risk management techniques we discuss.

No risk management plan can make an organization 100 percent safe or accident-free. However, risk management programs can help nonprofits be more successful. We hope this book will help you discover that risk management does not divert your attention from your mission, but is a tool for achieving it.