SFSARG Guidelines for Mentors and Mentees

The mentorship program within the SFSARG is a crucial aspect of ensuring the highest quality of personnel are available to conduct SAR operations, while at the same time, ensuring the highest level of safety through preparation, certification, and teamwork.

Mentoring is a two-way street – both mentor and mentee have to invest and participate in the process. A good place to start is to always remember the 3Rs – Responsible, Respectful, and Ready. Both partners in this relationship are responsible for making the relationship effective and being prepared for each meeting. Respect should be a given, both ways. This is no place for a senior/subordinate power trip. Finally, both should be ready – ready to teach, ready to learn, and ready to perform.
Good mentors are willing to teach what they know and accept the mentee where they currently are in their skill level. Moreover, good mentors avoid talking too much about their own experiences and focus instead on how their mentees are doing. Ask them about their experiences, learn from their stories. Good mentors can remember what it was like for them just starting out and bring this to the relationship. The mentor does not take the mentoring relationship lightly and understands that good mentoring requires time and commitment and a willingness to share information and their ongoing support with the mentee continually.
All mentors should be dedicated to the success of their mentees. SAR is not a competition, and we all rely on and help each other in the field. The first and best place this mentality comes through is during the mentorship process – make the most of it!

Mentees – The ability to have a mentor and learn from someone who's been there, made mistakes, learned from them, and became better at what they do is a fantastic opportunity. To make the most of it, practice the 3Rs, but more importantly, be absolutely honest and candid with your mentor and with yourself. Make an honest and candid assessment of your skills in each of the core competency areas – there's no shame in admitting lack of knowledge or ability. Doing so, and having this discussion up front with your mentor, will ensure the mentor focuses on these areas to ensure you get the best training possible before you go into the field. Participating in a mission at 0230 in the morning, in driving rain or snow, is NOT the time to inform your Team Leader that you don't know how to perform a core task. Remember, SAR is not a competition sport – do not rush through, or allow yourself to be rushed, when it concerns your core competency signoffs.

It is highly encouraged that mentors routinely get together, or seek out other mentors, for exchange of ideas and teaching methods to help make the program stronger and more standardized.

Additionally, mentor/mentee co-trainings (where a few mentors and their mentees get together to train on a particular topic) can be a very effective method of teaching while fostering a 'team' atmosphere.

Each Mentorship is Unique
While the material in the Core Competency checklist is relatively stable, each mentee is unique. When you first start out as a mentor, it's important to take the time to assess your own style and readiness to take on this task, and reflect on the different ways to teach the material and provide guidance. Be prepared to meet your mentee with an open mind –

they are unique and will require a unique approach. Get to know them before setting out on the mentorship path.

Set Expectations Together.
Both you *and* your mentee will find it helpful to sit down and go over expectations, especially if you're just getting to know each other. What is the mentee's level of knowledge? How often will you meet? How does the mentee prefer to learn new material? What concerns does the mentee have that can be addressed during this mentorship? What can the mentee expect from the mentor? What should the mentor expect from the mentee?

Active Listening – Show Genuine Interest in Your Mentee
One great way to get to know someone is through active listening. This is easier said than done: It means making a conscious effort to really, truly pay attention to what your mentee is saying, instead of thinking about what you're going to say next. You might worry that you need to come up with something helpful right away, when in fact, the best thing you can do for your mentee is to listen closely to what they're saying, ask open questions to dig deeper, and act as a sounding board. Active listening takes energy. People who listen actively don't simply sit back and allow words to hit their eardrums. They sit up straight. They take notes. They ask questions. They repeat or "mirror back" what they've heard to ensure they've understood it properly. Active listeners are the ones who provide non-verbal gestures (e.g. eye contact, nodding, etc.) that indicate they're following (or not following) what is being said. "If you're always talking, you're not listening. And if you're always doing, you're likely not teaching."

Provide Guidance and Constructive Feedback
One of the key responsibilities of a good mentor is to provide guidance and constructive feedback to their mentee. This is where the mentee will most likely grow the most by identifying their current strengths and weaknesses and learning the core competency skills that will help them be confident and successful in the field. A good mentor possesses excellent communication skills and can adjust their communication to the personality style of the mentee. A good mentor will also provide the mentee with challenges that will foster their development and provide a feeling of accomplishment. As the mentee, it's crucial that you listen to the feedback, don't take it personally, but actually consider it. Remember, this feedback is coming from the right place. You don't have to do everything your mentor says, but you should at least consider it.

Be Very Forthcoming About the Mistakes You've Made
Mentors should be open to sharing their own mistakes and failures; this is one of the best gifts a mentor can give. Not only is it helpful information for problem-solving purposes, but it also helps build trust, gives mentees permission to share their own mistakes, and strengthens the relationship overall.
New and possibly inexperienced people don't always feel comfortable owning up to a mistake or admitting that they're struggling in a certain area. By freely sharing your failures and struggles, you make it safe for them to share theirs with you. Hearing how someone else approached a challenge is always helpful for someone going through it for the first time. Even if your problem solving approach is different than your mentee, it's always useful to hear multiple perspectives.

Celebrate Achievements
Whether it's the act of tying a knot correctly or passing the state field certification test, celebrating your mentee's successes and achievements helps to build their confidence, reinforces good behavior, and keeps them focused and motivated.

Keep the Door Open
Most mentees inherently have less to offer because they're typically less experienced. It can be hard to ask for help if you feel like you're a burden on someone else. Giving advice or help freely, and making it clear you're happy to do so, is a huge help to easing those anxieties.

It Doesn't End with the Call-Out List
Work with your mentee as if you'll be their mentor forever. That mindset will make it easier for you to give them long-term guidance, which will help them make decisions that outlive their time with you. Also, realize that the relationship formed between a mentor and mentee is an enduring one – that individual will likely always feel more comfortable approaching you with issues than they will other team members.

Lead By Example
Last, but *certainly* not least, be a positive role model. Your mentee can learn a lot from you by simply observing how you behave. They'll pick up information about your ethics, values, and standards; style, beliefs, and attitudes; methods and procedures. They are likely to follow your lead, adapt your approach to their own style, and build confidence through their affiliation with you. As a mentor, you need to be keenly aware of your own behavior. Practice what you preach!

Last Thought
People are people, and we need to understand that not all personalities are compatible. There's nothing wrong in that, it's just a fact. If that happens to be the case with a mentor/mentee pairing, it is not wrong to ask for a change, and either party can initiate this request. No ill will shall be generated from this.

Last Last Thought
Not everyone is cut out to be a ground pounder. That too is just a fact, and that too is ok. That does not mean there is not a place within the organization for the mentee to be of service. Talk with them about opportunities to support incident base, or opportunities to be a champion for the organization through community outreach and social media. Help them to discover how they can contribute.
It can be very difficult and uncomfortable to tell someone they are not cut out to be in the field. However, as a mentor, and the final authority to have the individual placed on the calling tree, you must consider the greater good of the team as well as the safety of the individual in your decision. Therein lies your ULTIMATE responsibility as a mentor. Please, do not take it lightly.