

# Mentoring for Translators and Interpreters

## Survey Results – Part 2: Conclusions

This document presents the conclusions of the industry-wide survey on Mentoring for Translators and Interpreters.<sup>1</sup> The survey was conducted by Translation Commons in 2015, to gather real-life information on existing mentoring practices and to determine the optimum desired mentoring elements for Translators and Interpreters. The data was collected to support the project of creating a General Standard of Mentoring Practices for Translators and Interpreters, its purpose being to help freelancers and companies to formulate agreements and manage expectations when providing or receiving mentoring.

In these Conclusions, we comment *Trends from the Mentor's*<sup>2</sup> *perspective*, *Trends from the Mentee's*<sup>3</sup> *perspective*, compare both and outline proposals to increase and standardize mentoring in our industry.

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### **TC Members having contributed to those conclusions**

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**Next step:** Define what a General Standard of Mentoring Practices for Translators and Interpreters should contain to enable members of the Global Translators' and Interpreters' Community to build up a customized, optimum Mentor-Mentee-program according to their specific needs.

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<sup>1</sup> For detailed figures, kindly refer back to the Survey analysis (<http://www.translation-project-management.com/blog/survey-results-mentoring-translators-and-interpreters>).

<sup>2</sup> *Mentor: in the translation market, an entity (translation agency, company client, institution, nonprofit, etc.) or a professional person (translator, interpreter, etc.) coaching a future or current actor on the translation market.*

<sup>3</sup> *Mentee: in the translation market, a future or current actor being coached by an entity (translation agency, company client, institution, nonprofit, etc.) or one or several professional persons (translator, interpreter, etc.).*

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## PART I: MENTOR – Trends from the Mentor’s perspective

Two thirds of the 547 Survey participants from countries of all 5 continents have more than 5 years’ market experience; one third has been active between 1 and 5 years, almost three quarters of them being freelance translators and/or interpreters. Among those with professional experience of more than 5 years, 124 have market experience of more than 20 years. **Yet according to this Survey, only one third (167) has actually acted as a mentor in the past.**

Most became a mentor in the past to help another professional, followed by teachers who took on a mentoring role for their students. According to this Survey, a vast majority of mentors do it because they enjoy helping another freelancer’s career. This is followed by wanting to keep skills updated and creating opportunities for future partnerships.

Survey results seem to indicate that professionals who have acted as a mentor once tend to repeat this role. So, the question to be asked here is **why almost two thirds of the Survey respondents, with professional experience ranging from a minimum of 5 to a maximum of over 20 years, have never acted as a mentor before**, thus not passing on their matured skills, (market) knowledge and insights.

Unclear expectations and risks seem to constitute a real negative attitude for mentoring. An important number of people fear mentoring somebody who does not match their quality criteria; they would like to have the option to choose a mentee from a pool of candidates, or be chosen by a mentee over other mentors.

Also, twice as many professionals are willing to mentor exclusively on translation and interpreting language-specific questions, as are willing to do so in the area of building up a business, invoicing and marketing. Hardly 10% have exclusively mentored in the so-important but apparently heavily neglected mentoring field of business matters.

Out of the two thirds of participants who have never acted as a mentor, **50% also reject taking on a mentoring role in the future, stating – again – unclear expectations as the second most important reason.** In order to attract more professionals into mentoring, a **General Standard could provide better understanding and a standardized framework of what a mentor should do** by listing and outlining all eligible mentoring fields as well as their sub-areas to choose from. **Given that almost 70% of mentors are willing to mentor remotely (meeting on skype and exchanging emails)**, it should also promote the extensive use of new communication technologies.

Analysis of prerequisites to take on a mentoring role **seems to corroborate the need to raise awareness in the Community on the existence of mentoring programs and freelance coaches as an option able to be developed beyond classic mentoring programs** in academic settings, taking into account that **more than 40% of participants state they would act as a mentor if asked to do so.** The second most chosen prerequisite to either becoming or to continue being a mentor was to be supported by other mentors. This was closely followed by *Recognition for the mentoring effort, Getting paid or get some other sort of benefit, Having a program and a standard to follow and Wishing to be part of a controlled mentoring program.* **A legally binding confidentiality agreement** with the mentee seems to be of interest to a considerably lower, yet still significant, number of respondents, which seems to make sense, taking into the account that ours is an unregulated profession.

More mentoring hours might be provided by professionals if our Community developed coaching models to facilitate customized, “out of the box”, peer-to-peer mentoring in our Community, **given that lack of time and/or payment is apparently a hindrance, either to providing more mentoring hours or to providing any at all.**

## PART II: MENTEE – Trends from the Mentee’s perspective

Not surprisingly, and in accordance with the data obtained in the Survey’s Mentors section, **the Mentee part also hints at a lack of mentoring in our industry**: two thirds of the 432 professionals who answered the Mentee-section have never been mentees, out of which **more than 55% would not, whereas almost 44% would like to be mentored in the future**. A standard might help to raise awareness among potential mentors and mentees, thus getting more professionals into mentoring. **It might also help** the significant number of respondents who stated *Never having thought about being a mentee so far*, to **understand the value of being mentored**.

The biggest group of former mentees accepted the proposal of a close colleague to help them develop new skills. While having done an internship as part of translation / interpretation studies and having been coached by a trainer from a professional training program also rank high on the list, significantly fewer approached a senior freelancer with a request to help them in their career.

Most former mentees found their mentoring useful for improving their skills and developing their business, but some disliked it mainly because of the mentor’s attitude and/or skills, the content and methods used, the time spent and the lack of payment for work done. **Possibly some of this last group might profit from a Standard offering; a roadmap to set up an adequate, detailed mentoring charter for each case.**

Survey results show a need to conceive **mentoring models that take into account already existing working schedules, time and financial restraints** (lack of payment) of potential mentees; and **possible agreements that are mutually beneficial for the mentor and the mentee**, as well as possible sponsors for such a mentor-mentee relationship.

Former mentees were mostly coached in translation, followed by the next largest group who were mentored jointly in translation and business. Only very few have received mentoring exclusively on business matters. Nevertheless, it must be said here that **it makes a lot of sense, particularly for freelancers, to be mentored not only in linguistics but also in business. This is also shown by an important number of respondents requesting training in Business.**

Most potential mentees are willing to be mentored remotely, through online-meetings and email-exchange.

About a third of former mentees have received mentoring from more than one person at the same time, a still higher percentage would be ready to try that. **The Standard should hint at possible advantages and risks of being mentored by one or several mentors at the same time**, and the need to clearly define each mentor’s role if they act simultaneously.

According to the Survey results, **a lot of potential mentees would rather rely on a mentoring program or standard when confronted with the ambitious task of building a specific, personalized program**. A standard providing the building blocks to such a program could e.g. be divided into sections, to first be discussed with the mentor and help mentees define their goals.

Consistent with the already mentioned need to get more experienced freelance translators and interpreters into mentoring, **many translators and interpreters find it hard to find someone ready to accept to act as a mentor**.

## **PART III: MENTOR AND MENTEE COMPARED – Joint analysis of Mentor’s and Mentee’s trends**

**Both the Mentors’ and the Mentees’ results point very clearly at a lack of mentoring in our industry** and the need to raise awareness about the benefits of mentoring, **especially among the Freelancers of the Translator’s and Interpreter’s Community. A standardized, adaptable framework** providing the building blocks to build up customized Mentor-Mentee relationships **could be a meaningful tool in familiarizing everyone with the issues involved in Mentoring**, considering the high numbers of Survey participants who have expressed they want to be part of a controlled mentoring program and have a mentoring standard to follow.

The need to raise awareness about the value of mentoring in our Community is also shown by the **impressive number of mentors stating they would act as a mentor if asked to do so**, as well as the significant number of mentees stating they *have never thought about being a mentee so far*. Not surprisingly, Survey results corroborate that mentees do not usually approach Senior Freelancers to help them with their career. Maybe more surprisingly, *helping another freelancer’s career constitutes a big motivation for taking on a mentoring role*.

Both Mentor and Mentee view mentoring relationships as an opportunity for building future partnerships, as well as improving/keeping their skills updated. While mentees fear the mentor might lack their professional outlook and/or up-to-date skills, or might treat them with condescension, mentors mostly fear mentoring somebody who does not match their quality criteria. **Both seem to have a strong interest in receiving support from their peers while acting as a mentor or mentee, as well as in establishing a probation period**. In addition, an important number of mentors as well as mentees would like to have **the option to choose a mentor/mentee from a pool of candidates**.

There seems to be a **need to develop mentoring models that take into account already existing working schedules, time and financial restraints** (lack of payment) primarily of mentors, but also of mentees. More mentoring hours might be offered and taken up in our industry if our Community developed new coaching models to facilitate customized, “out of the box”, peer-to-peer mentoring in the Freelance Community, given that lack of time is apparently a hindrance either to providing more mentoring hours or to providing any at all.

It seems to be that **potential mentors do not necessarily or exclusively seek financial compensation for their efforts, but wish for recognition or some other kind of benefit in a non-monetary form**, a detail that should be taken into account in the setting up and practical implementation of this Standard.

Most mentors and mentees **are willing to be mentored remotely**, through online-meetings and email-exchange.

## **PART IV: Proposals to raise awareness and increase adequate, customized mentoring in our community**

A General Standard of Mentoring Practices should provide a reference system and the building blocks for a successful Mentor-Mentee experience, to help our Community's Freelancers and companies build up their own **customized** program, given the great variations among translation markets, languages and industries. It should explore all the possibilities and lay the groundwork for individualized Mentoring Charters. To this end, it should list all areas and aspects of mentoring, explaining their different possibilities. This would enable mentors and mentees to set up their personalized program according to specific language/market/specialization/mentoring needs.

To get more professionals into mentoring, the Standard should help tackle the most common fears and unclear expectations – both among mentors and mentees – and provide guidance as to what a mentor should do, by outlining not only all eligible mentoring fields but also their sub-areas to choose from. This would improve the prospects for newcomers to achieve professional excellence at an earlier stage of their careers.

The Standard should explicitly explain the value of mentoring, especially among our industry's Freelance Community. **Standardized and customized mentoring models allowing for flexible adaptations according to the varying needs of specific mentors and mentees, are of the utmost importance for all professionals within our Global Community of Translators and interpreters.**

A General Standard on Mentoring for our Global Translators' and Interpreters' Community should also hint at the existence of different, often scattered and highly heterogeneous mentoring programs in the different countries, as offered by institutions, associations, universities or other actors/stakeholders, **as well as Freelancers/Coaches working on an individual basis but adhering to a Standard.** Given the impossibility of listing them all, it could provide guidance regarding the different mentoring landscapes existing in different countries and markets.

The Standard should encourage the **development of mentoring models** which take into account already existing working schedules, **time and financial restraints primarily of mentors, but also of mentees.** More mentoring hours might be offered and taken up in our industry if our Community developed new coaching models to facilitate customized, "out of the box", peer-to-peer mentoring in the Freelance Community, given that lack of time is apparently a hindrance either to providing more mentoring hours or to providing any at all.

Consequently, such a Standard should envisage the possibility of receiving **sponsoring** from third parties for Mentor-Mentee-relationships to tackle the mentor's wishes of payment as well as strong time restraints. It should also contemplate the fact that **an important number of mentors does not necessarily or exclusively seek financial compensation for their efforts, but wishes to receive recognition or some other kind of benefit in a non-monetary form.**

It should take into account all necessary technologies required to build up adequate, standardized and **customized** Mentor and Mentee profiles and charters, to match up eligible mentors and mentees and to establish coaching relationships and networks across our Global Translators' and Interpreters' Community (whereby the risk of direct market competence some mentors fear could also be tackled).

Conclusions drawn from practical implementation and experience of this Standard should be assessed and necessary modifications possibly made. **Our Global Community's Translators and Interpreters are invited to join us in this effort.**

Furthermore, such a Standard should promote cross-disciplinary cooperation with other specialist communities (e.g. Computational Linguists) to create customized, tailored solutions for our industry's needs.

Last but not least, it should specifically hint at the lack of and need for mentoring among our Global Freelancer Community in the field of business and break down eligible mentoring aspects in this field.