

PROGRAM: Mentorship Program

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PROGRAM DESCRIPTION: Mentoring is an opportunity for knowledgeable and long-time members of the VFW to work with a newer member and guide that member to the path of Leadership within our organization. It is a truly rewarding experience for the Mentor and one that will be greatly appreciated by the Protégé.

To begin with, What is Mentoring? Mentoring is a collaborative relationship in which a more experienced person or Mentor shares knowledge, perspective, skills and wisdom acquired through the years in order to foster the professional growth and advancement of another person known as the Protégé. Learning is at the core of this relationship. To be successful, mentoring requires active participation, cooperation, and commitment by both the Mentor and the Protégé.

What do Mentors Do?

Mentors are an:

- Advisor/Counselor: acts as a sounding board for the Protégé
- Advocate: offers support, validation, and encouragement
- Coach: helps develop specific skills and competencies, achieve goals, and enhance performance and provides constructive feedback
- Facilitator: helps Protégé discover and achieve their full potential
- Motivator: challenges Protégé to set and achieve goals
- Networker: connects Protégé to experts, mentors and professionals who can assist in developing and advancing their VFW careers
- Role Model: serves as someone who has qualities and skills that Protégé can aspire to have
- Teacher: shares knowledge and skills based on experience

What are the benefits of Mentoring?

For Mentors

- Enhances your coaching, communication, leadership, management, and interpersonal skills
- Introduces you to new and different ideas and perspectives
- Keeps you current on emerging issues
- Challenges you to grow and improve
- Renews pride in and purpose of your work in the VFW
- Allows you to reflect on your own professional life
- Expands your professional development network
- Supports and fosters the VFW and your involvement in it
- Allows you to be an important part of the future of the VFW

For Protégés

- Develops and enhances professional skills and competencies
- Provides VFW institutional guidance
- Develops professional contacts
- Promotes VFW satisfaction and success
- Offers a sounding board for ideas and perspectives
- Builds initiative
- Motivates you to take responsibility for your professional growth
- Builds self-confidence and self-esteem
- Allows you to apply knowledge in a practical, real-world setting
- Provides constructive feedback
- Creates a sense of pride and integrity in your VFW Post/District/State
- Provides an important tool for leadership advancement in the VFW

Please read over the attached materials and begin immediately to implement this program within your post.

Selecting a Mentor

There are a number of factors involved in selecting persons who will serve as mentors – each of which is critical to the success of the program.

The prospective Mentor must possess a keen knowledge of the VFW; its history, its purpose, its Bylaws and Rules. Much of this knowledge is attained through long membership and service in the VFW. Mentors should have a background of leadership in the organization at the Post, District or Department levels. The experience gained in those years of service will be invaluable in nurturing and educating future leaders of the VFW. Prior to every session with the Protégé, the Mentor should study the subject matter of the upcoming session to make sure he/she is expert at what will be covered.

The Mentor must also be personable and able to work closely with his/her Protégé. He/She must possess a positive attitude and be truly interested in the future of his Protégé. He/She must possess good communications skills and be able to convey information well. Equally important is the ability to listen to the Protégé and not monopolize the conversation.

Accessibility is also critical for a Mentor. There is an investment of time in the program and the Mentor must be able to dedicate sufficient time for meetings with the Protégé. It is suggested that at least two hours per month be allotted for mentoring. Additionally, dependability is a must. If the Mentor makes an appointment with the Protégé, then it must be kept. Recognizing that situations may arise where an appointment must be canceled, the appointment should be rescheduled immediately.

Selecting Protégés

In the selection of Protégés, it is important to restrict the number of Protégés to a manageable size, well within the capabilities of your selected Mentor(s). The program should be restricted to those members who have expressed a desire to move up through the post to Leadership positions.

One way to identify members of your Post who qualify for mentorship is to conduct a Future Leaders' Search. This will be an active search for those who are truly interested in taking a leadership position in the VFW.

To identify those members who display potential, it is suggested that letters be sent out to all new members within the past 6 months advising them of the mentoring opportunity and inviting them to participate in the program. If there are other members you feel would possibly like to move up through the leadership, feel free to invite them as well. Applications should be sent to each and evaluated when they are returned. A sample application is included in the back of this document.

The individuals who attend the orientation represent your first step in identifying potential leaders by virtue of them taking the time to attend. You will also be able to judge a potential leader by his/her participation in the class – questions asked, comments made, etc.

This is a proven way to not only locate future leaders, but to make them feel they are a valuable part of your Post and of the VFW.

Protégés should be selected based on several factors:

- Availability. The Protégé must be able to attend each session with his/her Mentor. At the first meeting, a schedule can be developed that meets the mentor's and Protégé's availability.
- Desire to learn – The Protégé must display a strong desire to learn about the organization and about suggested ways to achieve leadership positions in the VFW.
- Desire to progress in positions – One of the primary purposes of the Mentorship Program is to train and prepare the leaders of tomorrow. The Mentor's efforts must not be wasted on those who have no desire to move up through the leadership ranks in the VFW.
- Reliability – If an appointment is set, it is imperative that both the Mentor and Protégé keep that appointment. Understanding that last minute situations can arise, a trend of missing appointments cannot be tolerated.
- Enthusiasm – The Protégé, like the Mentor, should be excited about having been selected to participate in the program.
- Participation – While going through the Mentor program, the Protégé should make every effort to participate in various Post and District activities, committees, etc.

Beginning the Mentoring Process

Once the Protégé has been selected for the program, the Mentor should immediately schedule a meeting to meet the Protégé and get to know him/her. This first meeting is very important in that it will provide an opportunity for the Mentor to gauge the interest the Protégé has in the organization as well as begin a familiarity between both the Mentor and the Protégé.

The initial meeting will also be needed to arrange for the schedule of future Mentoring sessions. The schedule must be agreed to by both parties to be workable. Make sure that both parties have contact information for the other and advise that if a meeting date or time needs to be changed; to contact the other as soon as possible so arrangements can be made.

Throughout the year, the Mentor should invite the Protégé to accompany him to the various events in our Department of California. For example, the Protégé should try to accompany the Mentor to any Post or District sponsored Community events and, if possible, should participate in them. Other possibilities include all District Meetings and Schools of Instruction and State events such as the Mid-Winter Conference and the State Convention. Both Mentor and Protégé should try to also attend a Council of Administration meeting at one of those events.

Events such as those shown above will allow the Protégé to see first-hand the actual workings of the VFW and will provide an opportunity for the mentor to answer any questions about the events from the Protégé.

Once the initial meeting is held and the schedule is decided, the process begins. What follows is a suggested format for the sessions. It will be up to the Mentor to determine what areas need more time or further sessions to adequately educate the Protégé. It will be noted that, while this is designed to be a 24-session program, the Mentor and the Protégé may decide if the full 24 sessions are needed or if more are required.

Session 1

This session should include a Welcome to the Post by the Post Commander and any other officers who can attend. Remember, you are training the Officers of the Future and it is important all officers and members encourage the Protégé during his/her Mentoring program.

The first session should also include a Course Overview – a review of the subjects that will be covered. It should also list the intent and goals of the Mentoring Program. This is also a good opportunity to see if there are particular areas the Protégé would like to have covered. At the end of this session, the date, time, and location of the next session should be confirmed.

Session 2

Begin by answering any questions or comments from the previous session. If there is an area the Protégé wants more information on, now is the time to fill that request.

This session will be a familiarization of the VFW. It is suggested that if the required equipment is available, the video “History of the VFW” be shown. This is an excellent introduction to the organization and will instill pride in the Protégé. A brief review of the purpose of the VFW as well as its mission and goals can be covered. Once again, reaffirm to the Protégé you are there to provide information on the VFW and he/she should never hesitate to ask questions or make suggestions on topics he/she would like covered. End the session by setting up the date, time and location of the next meeting.

Session 3

It is suggested that the program begin with the National organization – this is where the bylaws and overall management of the organization originate, so it is a natural starting point. A review of the National organization would include the location of the National Headquarters and the Washington office and a description of what goes on in each. Following that, the individual officers’ positions and responsibilities can be detailed including the National Commander-in-Chief, Senior and Junior Vice-Commander-in-Chiefs,

Adjutant General, Quartermaster General, the VFW Store and so on. Again, at the conclusion of the session, verify the date, time, and location of the next session.

Session 4

Begin the session by answering any questions or comments from the Protégé. This session will address the Department of California. Areas to include would be: number of members, number of Districts, number of posts, location and contact information for Department Headquarters. Employees in the Department Headquarters should also be identified, and a description of their duties given. If practical, a visit to Department Headquarters should be arranged. Finally, a description of the Department Officers and responsibilities. End the session with a verification of the next meeting place and time.

Session 5

After answering any questions or comments from the Protégé, begin to cover the information on the District just as was done with the Department session. Topics can include the location of Posts in the District, date and location of District functions and any other pertinent information on the District. If the District Commander is available, this is a good opportunity for him/her to meet the Protégé and welcome him/her to the organization. Complete the session with an agreement on the next meeting date, time, and location.

Session 6

The previous sessions have covered information on National, Department and District. This session will be devoted to the member's actual Post. You should cover those things that are unique to the Post including history, charter, any committees appointed by the Commander for Post activities, membership, etc. Conclude the session by setting the date, time and location for the next session.

Session 7

This session begins your second quarter of the mentoring process. It is a good time to go back and review some of the points covered in the earlier sessions. Also, it is an excellent time to ask the Protégé for feedback on the program. As in every session, an opportunity should be afforded the Protégé to give comments and suggestions and those should be taken with importance. The Mentoring program is a two-way communication between both parties. Use this session to also preview the next quarter of the program and include any other areas that the Protégé wishes to cover.

In every session, attention should also be paid to leadership techniques. As a Mentor, you have a lot of experience in leading our organization and tips and suggestions as well as lessons you have learned in your leadership role can go a long way in helping the young leader. Simply put, you have learned what works and what does not work when leading a Post or a District. End the session by confirming the date, time, and place for your next mentoring session.

Session 8

This session will begin to cover the Post area and the names and responsibilities of the Post officers. Other areas to include would be Post history, regular Post functions (meeting dates and times), upcoming Post events, etc. Talk a little about the different positions in the Post and what their duties entail. As before, end the session with a verification of the next meeting date, place, and time.

Session 9

Begin this session by answering any questions the Protégé may have. Session 8 began to cover the Bylaws, Manual of Procedure and Ritual of the VFW, the Department, the District, and the Post. Make sure you have a current copy of each. While it would take far too long to cover the National Bylaws, Manual of Procedure and Ritual in detail, attention should be given to those sections which have a significant impact on the leadership of the Post or District. It is suggested that a review of at least the following Bylaws and Manual of Procedure sections be included:

- The Congressional Charter (Sections 230101, 230102, 230103)
- Article I (Eligibility)
- Article II (Sections 201, 202, 203, 211, 215, 216, 219, 220)
- Article IV (Sections 403, 415, 416, 417, 420)
- Article V (Sections 502, 503, 504, 513, 516, 522)
- Article VI (Sections 618, 622)
- Article VII (Sections 702, 703, 704, 709, 710, 711, 713, 714, 717)
- Article IX (All Sections)
- Article XIV VFW Ritual

At the end of this session, loan the Protégé a copy of the current National Bylaws to study and become familiar. Make sure you tell him/her to bring it to the next session. Set the time, date, and location of the next session.

Session 10

For this session, the Mentor should have a current copy of the Department and Post Bylaws and a copy of any Post Rules.

As the previous session covered a lot of information, this can be an interactive session where the Protégé is asked to locate specific parts of the Bylaws, Procedure or Ritual. The Mentor should prepare a list of those areas and, using the copy of the VFW Bylaws, the Protégé should be able to locate those areas. Make sure you use this opportunity to clarify or explain the purpose and meaning of particular bylaws to the Protégé. When that is completed, then cover the Department and Post Bylaws and Rules and answer any questions the Protégé may have about those. Then, set the date, time, and location of the next session.

Session 11

One of the best ways to become familiar with the administrative workings of the Post is by reviewing the Post Status Report. For this session, the Mentor should have two copies of the most recent Status Sheet – one for himself/herself and one for the Protégé. A column by column review and description will help the Protégé recognize where the programs covered in the last session come into play and will also learn of the other required activities of the Post.

Session 12

This session will introduce the Protégé to the Auxiliary units of the VFW. If possible, the President of the Auxiliary, if applicable to your Post, should be invited to give a description of their respective units. At all

times, the Mentor should address the need for cooperation between each unit of the VFW. The President should give a description of the eligibility requirements as well as what the unit does and how it assists the Post. Additionally, coverage of each unit's programs should be included. As always, confirm the date, time, and place of the next session.

Session 13

This will be another review session of the first six months of the Mentoring Program. First, ask the Protégé if there are areas that he/she would like to have reviewed and cover those in detail. Then, it is time to give a "Mid-Term Exam" to the Protégé. The Mentor should prepare a test covering those areas studied in the previous 12 sessions. The purpose of this test is not to penalize or even grade the Protégé. Indeed, this should be an open book test allowing the Protégé to use all notes he/she has taken over the past six months. The goal is to gauge the progress of the Protégé and note any areas that need to be covered again.

Session 14

One of the best ways to learn more about the VFW and to become active in it, is by membership on a Post Committee. In this session, Post, District and Department Committees will be covered. If possible, the Post Committee Chairpersons should be present to give a detailed presentation on their respective committee. As with every mentoring session, the Protégé should be encouraged to ask questions or for more information when he/she wishes. Following the descriptions and presentations on the Post Committees, the Protégé should be asked if he would like to participate in any of them. Between the Mentor and the Protégé, at least one committee should be selected.

Session 15-16

These two sessions will cover, in detail, the VFW National Programs. The Mentor should study for these sessions and be able to fully describe and answer questions about these National Programs. Application processes for certain programs (VOD, Patriot's Pen, etc) as shown in the Department Program Guides should also be covered

Scholarship Programs

- Voice of Democracy - This audio-essay competition annually awards more than \$1.9 million in scholarships to students in grades 9-12. First-place National winner receives a \$30,000 scholarship.
- Patriot's Pen - More than \$1.1 million is awarded annually to students in grades 6-8 in this essay contest. First place National winner receives \$5,000.
- Scout of the Year - Three scholarships are awarded annually to outstanding scouts. Nationally, first place receives \$5,000, second place receives \$3,000 and third place receives \$1,000.

Educational Outreach

- Educational Brochures - VFW produces and distributes a flag brochure and poster.
- Veterans in the Classroom - November is officially known as VFW Veterans in the Classroom Month. Members demonstrate flag etiquette and share their wartime experiences with America's youth.

Youth Activities

Locally, VFW Posts sponsor various youth sporting programs such as baseball and soccer. In addition, many VFW Posts sponsor Boy and Girl Scout troops, JROTC units, drill teams, color guards and a variety of other programs to build good citizenship and exemplary character in America's youth. The mentor should, at this time, also address any Post or District Youth Programs undertaken by the Post.

Community Volunteerism

Each year, VFW members volunteer more than 11 million hours of service to various community endeavors. For Community Volunteerism, the Mentor should describe the parameters of what constitutes Community Service and what reporting procedures should be used.

- Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service - VFW was a charter member in 1946. VFW volunteers donate millions of hours of service annually at VA medical facilities. If a VA facility is nearby, this would be an excellent opportunity for the Protégé to work with the Commander to establish a VA Facility visit from the Post every month.

Troop Support

- Military Assistance Program (MAP) - The link between the VFW and the military community has provided over 2,200 grants to VFW Departments and Posts for morale-boosting events since 2005, hosting more than 2 million military members and their families at these events. For this area, the Mentor should contact the Department Adjutant/Quartermaster for actual examples of how the MAP has assisted veterans.
- Adopt-a-Unit - More than 2,500 units and ships have been adopted through VFW Posts since 2007. VFW National Headquarters adopted the USS Cole in 2002.
- VFW Unmet Needs - This program administers emergency financial grants to military families to help cover basic expenses like mortgage payments, childcare, food and more. Since 2004, more than 10,000 grants have been issued totaling more than \$5 million.
- VFW "Sport Clips Help A Hero Scholarship" - Introduced in 2013, this program awards scholarships of up to \$5,000 to qualifying veterans and service members. The program provided 1,606 veterans and service members with scholarships totaling \$7.2 million since January 2014.

Session 17

This session will cover some of the “nuts and bolts” of the operations of the VFW. For example, the Protégé should be asked to approach you as a prospective member of the VFW and “recruit” you. This would include how the Protégé should explain the purpose of the organization, determine the person’s eligibility, be ready to explain the different levels of membership and the costs, etc. By doing so, the Protégé will become familiar with the different aspects that are involved in membership. While it is not the intent to make the Protégé a salesman, he should become familiar with the opportunity and requirements to find and sign up new members.

Session 18

The purpose of the Mentoring Program is to train future leaders. This session will begin to address Leadership styles, procedures, practices, and principles. For this session it will be necessary for the Mentor to research general Leadership techniques as well as be prepared to describe what Leadership style he/she, the Mentor, found most useful and effective in his/her VFW positions. This is the beginning of the time when the Mentor will give life experience to the Protégé with anecdotes, situations and problems. The Mentor can create scenarios and ask the Protégé how he/she would handle them. In this way, the Mentor can better gauge the leadership qualities of the Protégé. It must be understood that, in most cases, there is no right or wrong answer to many situations but what the person feels would work best for him/her.

Session 19

Attendance at the State Convention is an excellent learning tool not only for the actual attendance at specific events at the Convention, but for the networking that is available. If possible, both the Mentor and the Protégé should attend. The Mentor should introduce the Protégé to key officers and members in the Department and encourage the Protégé to visit with other members to learn new things about the VFW. This session will occur at the appropriate time during the year.

Session 20

This session should be spent on a review of what has been learned and a recap of any areas the Protégé requests.

Session 21

In this, the next to last session of the Mentoring program, the Mentor and Protégé should discuss things learned over the past year. If there are areas that the Protégé wants more information on, this is an excellent opportunity to cover them and review what the Protégé has learned during the year. At this point, the Mentor should also inquire concerning the Protégé’s plans for his/her future in the VFW.

Session 24

As this is the final session of the mentoring Program, it should be a special occasion. If possible, the meeting should take place away from the Post and may be held over a cup of coffee or a dinner. It is, in effect, the “graduation” of the Protégé and the culmination of a year’s effort. At the next Post meeting, the Mentor should announce that the Protégé has completed the program and appropriate recognition should be given.

Conclusion

This completes the formal Mentoring program. It has, hopefully, been a productive and educational experience for both the Mentor and the Protégé. For the Mentor, it is another opportunity to show his/her expertise on all matters pertaining to our organization as well as the dedication to the VFW and the desire to see it grow and remain viable. For the Protégé, it has given him/her the tools to move on through the organization and has hopefully spurred an interest to do so.

While the formal program is completed, the Mentor and Protégé should continue to enjoy a good relationship. The Mentor should periodically visit the Protégé and check on his progress and do everything possible to assist.

Now, it is time for the Mentor to select another Protégé and continue the education of our newer members. In doing so, the future of our organization will remain bright with new leadership.