

Class of 2016,

The Academy had a wonderful experience with an *alumnus*, which prompted us to institute a *student mentor system*.

Some time ago one of the HCFM students of the Academy was performing rather poorly and was clearly on a track to failing the HCFM. (Let me refer to this student as the *Struggling Student*.) I had an inkling that the *Struggling Student* did not request sufficient guidance from lecturers, either during contact sessions or by way of e-mail or telephone. The academy offered to assist the struggling student with additional intervention, but the offer was not taken up.

The matter was then taken up with an *alumnus* of the Academy – a former student who had successfully completed the HCFM. I requested the *alumnus* to mentor the struggling student and the request was gracefully accepted. (Let me refer to this alumnus as the *Willing Mentor*.)

The *Willing Mentor*, was not provided with any guidelines other than the requested to assist the *Struggling Student* with the following:

- Study methods - based on personal experience
- A study programme - based on personal experience
- How to approach an assignment – based on personal experience
- Preparing for tests and exams – based on personal experience
- Any other advice based on own experience in completing the HCFM

The impact of the *Willing Mentor* intervention was remarkable. The formerly struggling student performed much better and in the end successfully completed the HCFM.

I cannot report on the exact nature of the mentoring provided, but the *Willing Mentor* indicated that it covered the above issues and general motivation of the *Struggling Student*. I believe that more than any specific advice, it is probably the empathetic interest from someone who has 'been there, done that...', that makes the difference. Distance learning can be a very lonely endeavour and once the results are not that good the motivation also starts to slip. A lot of students take far longer to complete the HCFM than is necessary and it may well be due to this combination of factors.

The Academy can and does provide all the student assistance it can, but we realize that our staff can never have the same kind of impact as the student-to-student mentoring or more accurately, mentoring by a willing *alumnus* to a struggling / unsure / novice student. In view of the above experience the Academy decided to establish a network of *Willing Mentors* in as many parts of the country as possible. Our *alumni* have risen to the challenge and we now have a basic network in place.



If you feel that you need the assistance of a *Willing Mentor*, please mail us at info@a4fm.ac.za and we will try to link you up with one in your area. You are welcome to indicate a gender preference (male / female) or even a language preference and we will try to match this as closely as possible. Any arrangements for a meeting will be between you and the mentor, but we will ask them to have you confirm that the meeting did take place by signing off on the *Willing Mentor* contact sheet, which will be returned to the Academy. This is done to assist us in determining usage and effectiveness of the mentor system and also to compensate the *Willing Mentors* for their time.



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