

Tips for Building a Successful Mentoring Relationship

How to be a good mentor

BE A RESOURCE, a facilitator, an idea generator, a networker and an inspiration for your mentee.

BE APPROCHABLE, facilitative, empathic, non-judgmental and supportive. Provide appraisal and constructive feedback when necessary.

BE PREPARED for your meetings; make a list of things that you would have wanted to know when you were in the position of your mentee. Your list might include information about you (as the mentor), about the organization or position, about what it was like to be starting out and about what it was like to be in a new organization.

BE AN ACTIVE LISTENER. Having an exploratory conversation with your mentee will reveal your mentee's expectations and goals, as well as where and how you can be helpful. Take notes and ask questions to make sure all shared information is clear.

COMMIT to meeting your mentee at least once a month. The most effective mentors are the ones who are dedicated to the idea of making their relationship work.

ASSIST your mentee in understanding the larger sociopolitical environment of the department, and how best to navigate in this environment. A good mentor cares about the organization and its people, and has a desire to see his/her mentee succeed.

STEP OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE. Be prepared to consider a different point of view, try new things, gain a new and diverse perspective and think outside the box.

INFORM your mentee about your busy schedule, when you will be out of town, and when you will have limited access to email. Sometimes a short note acknowledging receipt of a message from your mentee saying you'll get back to him or her later will suffice to reassure your mentee during a busy time.

BE GRATEFUL. Remember to say thank you after each session and give appreciation for specific insights or examples that helped you. This information will let your mentee know more about what you value and how he or she is making a difference for you.

How to be a good mentee

BE ENGAGED. Since the mentee is responsible for the items in every meeting agenda, you are in a position to set up the conversation in a way that provides the most relevance and value for you. It is important for mentees to share the different experiences and skills they would like to improve and acquire from their mentors.

BE OPEN. As the mentee, the success of your mentoring relationship depends on you! If you are serious about learning from your mentor, your frame of mind should be open to learning and absorbing, and to be open to new ideas. Mentoring may be short term or may turn out to be a life-long relationship.

BE PROFESSIONAL in your mentoring meetings by being prompt, prepared and by maintaining a professional attitude. Be well organized and ready to give a brief update on recent progress and development. You should prepare an agenda with the topics of your meeting and you might even email the topics to your mentor ahead of time, if needed.

SHARE your hopes, fears, ideas and goals openly, even if your mentor has quite a different background or style. Do share your life situation, as well as your professional goals. Your mentor will then be able to assess the situation and provide advice accordingly.

BE REALISTIC in your expectations and focus on building a relationship, not obtaining a particular kind of help from the mentor. Your mentor's role is not to get you another job.

RELAX AND ENJOY getting to know another person. Asking curious questions such as, "What was that like for you?" or "How did you feel at the time?" Ask a question or two at the start of each session to get to know your mentor's experiences, such as, "I'd love to learn about your career path..."

KEEP A MENTORING JOURNAL and write down ideas and insights during the session, and in between sessions. Do capture the commitments that you and your mentor make to each other so that you are able to follow up appropriately.

BE RESPECTFUL. Most mentors have very limited time to engage with mentees outside of the scheduled mentoring sessions. Be careful not to overwhelm your mentor with emails or phone calls outside of the session. Respect the time boundaries of the session and do all you can to end at the agreed upon time.

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