

# Mentee Handbook

## GETTING ACQUAINTED

*“Fit and chemistry must be considered when pairing the mentor and the protégé. If the two don’t get along, it matters little what each can offer the other in terms of knowledge and skills.”*

—Michael Zey, Building a Successful Formal Mentor Program

An important part of getting acquainted is determining compatibility. Schedule a few sessions to get to know each other before setting goals, and alert your admin if you do not feel comfortable interacting with your mentor informally and having intimate discussions on sensitive topics. It is better to discover an imperfect match early on than to waste time in an unproductive relationship.

To begin getting to know each other, online messaging is an unthreatening, flexible approach. Many people find it easier to open up to someone new in writing. Your Mentoring Area includes a messaging component where you can get to know each other, plan meetings, or even discuss progress on tasks and milestones. To break the ice, ask your mentor questions and share a little about yourself, such as:

- Jobs, hobbies, and extracurricular activities
- Classes you have taken, projects you have worked on, or career-related interests
- Your favorite class in college, favorite book, favorite movie, etc.

As you progress to more serious topics, you are also encouraged to voice professional concerns and challenges. If you find it difficult to discuss certain topics in technical terms, try to paraphrase your questions the best you can. You may find these discussions easier face-to-face or on the phone, but online communication can work if you are deliberate and thoughtful. Although it might take several online discussions to clarify a point, your mentor is likely to appreciate your interest and your passion to learn.

## MEANS TO COMMUNICATE

There are various ways in which you can communicate, including:

- Email
- Discussion boards
- Audio or video conversations using Skype
- Meeting in person

When in-person interaction is not possible due to distance and time, we strongly encourage you to use the rich online communication mechanisms found in the mentoring portal, including the messaging feature in the Mentoring Area.

## SET GOALS AND SUMMARIZE SESSIONS

To have a successful mentoring relationship you must:

- Understand your needs
- Set your goals
- Convey your needs and goals to your mentor
- Discuss how you can accomplish your goals
- After completing a discussion session, write a summary to form new action items

For a good start to the first two, answer the following questions:

- **What are your goals for this mentoring relationship?** (e.g., competency development, career advancement, leadership skills development, gain knowledge in a particular topic area, etc.)
- **How will you know if you reached these goals?** (e.g., improved performance, promoted, attained a new credential, etc.)
- **What challenges can you anticipate?** (e.g., availability of advancement opportunities, need to further your formal education, length of time needed to develop a new skill or competency)

Make the best use of your time with your mentor: take the time now to define goals.

## ONLINE COMMUNICATION TIPS

Communication is a two-way process that includes just about any type of interaction with another person, from subtle to overt. Poor communication can leave us feeling angry or worried.

In person or on the phone, you can use voice modulation, facial expressions, and hand gestures to convey meaning. Because those cues are absent in writing, written communication is a skill and an art. The better people can express themselves, the more the relationship will deepen.

When communicating through writing, the following tips will help prevent miscommunication.

- **Use a meaningful subject line**—A good subject line ensures that the recipient recognizes the importance of your message and doesn't delete it accidentally. The subject line should also serve as a summary, conveying a clear idea of the topic you want to discuss.
- **Be clear and concise**—Take the time to write clear, concise messages. Correspondingly, if you receive messages that are not clear and concise, take the time to get clarification. Do you clearly understand your mentor's points? If not, provide an opportunity to restate, elaborate or reconsider the intended message.
- **Investigate assumptions**—What assumptions may have been made, whether stated explicitly or not? To uncover assumptions and prevent misinterpretations, state your understanding of your mentor's message or ask for clarification.
- **Communicate about communication**—It is very important to inform your mentor of your schedule well in advance. This prevents the unnecessary frustration of a communication breakdown.

Online messaging has its challenges, but it also has advantages in many situations. If you use the messaging section of your Mentoring Connection Area liberally and thoughtfully, you'll be more productive.

## NETWORKING TIPS

Networking is a learned skill that takes time and practice to improve. Your mentor has likely leveraged a network of contacts at various times in life. Learn how your mentor built his or her network. Appreciate the effort that goes into maintaining these quality relationships. If your mentor is willing, ask for an introduction to contacts who may be able to help you reach your goals.

When you approach your mentor or any of his or her contacts, be sure to follow this networking etiquette:

- **Ask politely**—When asking for a favor, ask politely. Examples of ways to ask are: "Perhaps you can point me in the right direction," and "Maybe you could help me..."
- **Follow up**—Use the 48-hour rule. Respond to phone messages and emails within 48 hours, and send thank-you or nice-to-meet-you notes or emails after a meeting within 48 hours.
- **Mention your referrer**—When calling a person to whom someone referred you, mention your contact's name. For example, "John suggested I contact you about..."

We wish you the very best in building your network of contacts!

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES FOR MENTORS AND MENTEES

Here are some activity ideas if you are planning to meet your mentor in person:

- Meet for lunch and discuss lighthearted topics such as favorite classes, career paths, and hobbies.
- Meet your Mentor's colleagues and expand your network of contacts.
- Tour the facilities together or visit some of your favorite places in your city.
- Attend cultural and sporting events together.

## DON'T LOSE SIGHT OF YOUR GOALS

There are likely to be times in your mentoring relationship when progress might stagnate and you need to re-energize. Try the following:

- Revisit your goals. Are you on course?
- Could you have done something better? Take responsibility for driving success. Self-actualization and enthusiasm will help you and your partner move forward.
- Do you need to extend the mentoring duration? Evaluate how long you will need to achieve your goals. Set a specific date—time-bounded goals are more likely to be realized.

The point is to continually reaffirm goals and commitment. Your mentor will follow your lead.

## GETTING HELP DURING PERIODS OF TRANSITION

As you near the completion of your mentoring partnership, you may wonder whether your takeaways from the mentoring relationship will smooth your transition into future endeavors. You may have some loose ends to tie or some fears about moving on.

We encourage you and your mentor to discuss your transition to life post-partnership. Your mentor may be in a position to help you better prepare for what lies ahead and reduce any anxieties you have about the changes that await.

Nothing can replace experience!

## NEED FOR A GOOD CLOSURE

When mentoring partnerships end, some do so with goals accomplished. Some do not, for a number of reasons. Yet even unproductive mentoring relationships can benefit from good closure. A successful exit strategy includes five steps:

1. **Processing conclusions**—Process the learning that took place while working towards goals.
2. **Integrating what was learned**—Discuss how to apply and take learning to the next level.
3. **Celebrating success**—Plan a mutually satisfying way to celebrate achievement and new beginnings.
4. **Redefining the relationship**—Talk about whether the relationship is to continue, and what it will look like: will you become a colleague, a friend, or something else?.
5. **Moving on**—Both partners let go and identify ways of keeping in touch, if appropriate and mutually desired.

## PROVIDE REGULAR FEEDBACK

It is important to provide regular feedback on your mentoring experience and your mentoring relationship to the program administrators. Please complete any surveys you receive. Your feedback will help your administrators learn how to serve you better. In addition, provide your mentor with constructive feedback as you go, to improve the quality of the relationship and to support your mentor's future mentoring endeavors.