

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. Your mentee should schedule one or two sessions to informally get to know each other before more intense goal-setting. If you sense poor chemistry and worry that it might get in the way of productive mentoring discussions, bring your concern to your mentee and alert an administrator. It is better to discover an imperfect match early.

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, try sharing a little about yourself:

- Jobs, hobbies, and extracurricular activities
- Research, projects, or career-related accomplishments
- Ways of balancing work with your personal life
- Your favorite class in college, favorite book, favorite movie, etc.

As you get to know each other better, your mentee is encouraged to voice concerns regarding their goals. In some cases you may need to take the initiative to help your mentee express these uncertainties. If your mentee lacks the lexicon to discuss certain issues with you, he or she may try to paraphrase. Take care to understand what your mentee is trying to say. Although it might take several online discussions to clarify a point, your mentee will appreciate your patience.

Means to Communicate

There are various ways in which you can communicate with your mentee. These include:

- 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

It is important to set concrete goals with your mentee.

We encourage mentees to take charge of setting pace and direction, and to explore with you how you can help them attain goals. One way you can help is by holding your mentee accountable for developing and recording

goals. After each meeting, you and your mentee should record a summary in order to form new action items and goals.

If your mentee has difficulty expressing goals, you can help by asking 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 formal education, time needed to develop a new skill or competency)

Additionally, take a moment to reflect on your own personal goals. Beyond the rewards of helping to shape another's growth, is there anything *you* wish to develop? Do you want to become a better mentor, communicator, listener, or leader? Are you seeking greater self-awareness and fresh perspectives? You will get more out of mentoring if you keep your goals in mind from the start.

Ideal Traits for Mentors

Several traits will help you to be an effective mentor:

Inspire—Mentors are more effective when they inspire their mentees. By setting an example, you may be able to motivate your mentee towards future paths that are beyond his or her original dreams. Challenge your mentee to find importance in what he or she aspires to do. Help your mentee create a future vision.

Be an active listener—A sign of good listening is that your mentee feels he or she has been clearly heard and understood. Your mentee feels accepted and more willing to place trust in the mentoring relationship. To demonstrate active listening, show interest in things your mentee has mentioned in the past.

Share similar experiences—Mentors are not expected to be superheroes. Most of the time, they are people who have already been through what their mentees now face. Help your mentee feel empowered to embrace challenges by sharing your experiences.

Provide corrective feedback in an encouraging manner—It is not easy to take feedback well. However, hearing it in a motivating and encouraging tone can help your mentee accept and apply feedback readily.

Speak of your mentee in positive or neutral ways—Your mentee needs to trust that your discussions are confidential and that the mentoring relationship is mutually supportive. When speaking of your mentee to others, provide only positive or neutral comments.

Effective Online Communication

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:

- **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, providing a clear idea of the topic you want to discuss.

- **Clear and concise messages**—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 mentee's message? If not, provide an opportunity to restate, elaborate or reconsider the intended message.
- **Investigating assumptions**—What assumptions may have been made, whether stated explicitly or not? To uncover assumptions and prevent misinterpretations, state your understanding of your mentee's message or ask for clarification.
- **Communicating about communication**—It is very important to inform your mentee 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 are more likely to be productive.

Ten Reminders for Effective Mentoring

1. Demonstrate interest, helpful intent, and involvement. When you talk with your mentee, clear your mind of unnecessary thoughts so that you can offer your undivided attention.
2. Establish rapport by learning or remembering personal information about your mentee.
3. Begin by focusing on strengths and potentials rather than limitations.
4. Keep in frequent contact with your mentee. Even a short email or phone call can make a big difference.
5. Be available and keep your appointments.
6. Hold your mentee accountable for commitments and goals. Follow up frequently.
7. Don't be critical of other colleagues to your mentee.
8. Consistently evaluate the effectiveness of your mentoring and adjust your style as needed.
9. Be yourself and allow your mentee to do the same.
10. Remember that active listening is one of the most important skills of a good mentor.

Networking Tips

In your daily life, you probably network all the time simply by meeting, connecting, and keeping in touch with others. You know firsthand that quality relationships can enrich your life and empower you to achieve your goals. Your mentee likely also realizes that it's important to develop and maintain a strong network, and would appreciate hearing your personal approach. Some suggestions on how to help:

- Let your mentee know how networking has helped you advance your career, from landing a job or promotion to finding new clients.
- Share ideas about how to better communicate, making sure to build on your mentee's comfort level with networking. Examples include smiling, eye contact, active listening, body language, complimenting, and finding common interests over which to connect.
- Share your techniques for starting conversations, such as an opening line when meeting people or a list of get-to-know-you questions.
- Share your thoughts on unethical networking practices. For example, you can tell your mentee why it is never a good practice to contact long-forgotten connections only when you need something like a job referral.
- Finally, we hope you will be willing to share a few contacts that may help your mentee reach his or her goals.

Suggested Activities

If you meet your mentee in person, here are some suggested activities:

- Meet for lunch and get to know each other over goal-oriented topics such as favorite classes, career path, and hobbies.
- Introduce your colleagues, especially anyone who may be of professional interest to your mentee.
- Tour the facilities together or introduce some of your favorite places in your city.
- Attend cultural and sporting events together.

Don't Lose Sight of Your Goals

There might be times in your mentoring relationship when progress might stagnate and you need to re-energize. At such times, try the following:

- Revisit the goals that you have set for your mentoring partnership and for yourself. Are you on course?
- Could you have done something better? Enthusiasm can help you and your partner move forward.
- Do you think you need to extend the mentoring period? Learning, as they say, never stops.
- Your partnership will be more successful if you both regularly reaffirm goals and commitment.

Help During Periods of Transition

As the mentoring partnership nears completion, your mentee may wonder whether his or her takeaways will smooth the transition to future endeavors. There may be loose ends yet to tie and some fears about moving on.

It's important to discuss your mentee's transition to post-mentoring endeavors. You may be in a position to help your mentee better prepare for what lies ahead and thus reduce any anxiety about the changes that await around the corner. Your advice could help your mentee realize his or her full potential.

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 with your mentee 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. Your mentee needs your constructive feedback too—and your tactful guidance may even improve the quality of the relationship.