

Mentoring Toolkit

FOR MENTEE SUCCESS

Starting Points

The checklists below will help ensure you and your mentor get off to a good start.

Understanding what's required

There are certain behaviors that could be considered requirements on the part of the mentee and the mentor in a mentoring relationship, including:

- Taking initiative and risks
- Accepting each other
- Agreeing upon and working toward specific goals
- Dealing effectively with unmet expectations or objectives

Preparing for your first meeting

Along with working through this toolkit, think about the following for your first meeting:

- Your goals
- Your background (how have you gotten to where you are now?)
- What you hope to get from the relationship
- What you have to offer
- Questions for your mentor

TIP: IF YOU DON'T HAVE A PRESSING NEED OR QUESTION, ASK YOUR MENTOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE LESSONS LEARNED IN THEIR CAREER.

Establishing norms

Whether you are in a formal, informal, or situational mentoring relationship, it's important to establish norms, or guidelines, for how the relationship will work. Doing this up front can help avoid needing to resolve differences later on. Both you and your mentor should give some thought to the norms you'd like to establish, have an open discussion about them, and come to an agreement. Some things to consider:

- How often will you meet, and for how long each time?
- How you will communicate between meetings?
- Where or how will you meet (in person at a particular location or via a video chat service such as Skype or FaceTime)?
- What will you do if a meeting has to be canceled or rescheduled?
- How will sensitive information be dealt with?

Building a Successful Relationship

There are several ways you can contribute to a productive relationship with your mentor:

- Be willing and able to let your mentor know what you need.
- Be clear with your needs. Don't beat around the bush—your mentor's time is valuable.
- Feel comfortable with your mentor.
- Trust your mentor and be open with them.
- Be ready and willing to develop and change.

Research has shown that effective relationships have similar factors upon which they are built, including:

- Mutual respect
- Acceptance and flexibility
- Honesty and direct communication
- Preparation
- Commitment
- Some shared values
- Trust
- Willingness to work through obstacles

SEE THE FOLLOWING PAGES FOR TIPS ON FEELING MORE CONFIDENT WITH YOUR MENTOR AND BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP.

Effective Partnering

Mentoring is often thought of as a partnership largely because there are obligations, implicit or otherwise, that each party takes on. One key to a successful relationship with your mentor is to be aware of your obligations and take them seriously.

What obligations might you take on as a mentee?

What challenges might arise for you in relation to these obligations?

How can you partner with your mentor to meet your obligations to them?

Building Trust

A mentoring relationship is based on trust. As a mentee, you are placing a great deal of trust in your mentor to provide you with helpful guidance. At the same time, mentors are trusting that mentees will not take advantage of the relationship (e.g., wasting your mentor's time, repeating information not intended for others, asking for favors, inappropriately using the relationship). Building trust can take time; our behaviors can accelerate the time it takes.

What behaviors might help you quickly establish trust with your mentor? What behaviors might impede trust?

Finding Your Comfort Zone

Although peer-to-peer mentoring may be a good option for you, many mentoring relationships pair a mentee with a high-level or prominent leader. Research has shown that these relationships are sometimes slow to develop because the mentee is often uncomfortable with their mentor. Mentees reported that they were afraid to make mistakes or appear vulnerable in front of their mentors; they had trouble viewing their mentors as partners and they considered their own problems and needs as insignificant.

A reluctant or hesitant mentee can be frustrating to a mentor, particularly a mentor who is high-level or prominent, so it's important that you develop techniques to become comfortable early on.

Most of us can become more comfortable in almost any situation by being prepared. Some ideas for preparing for your mentoring relationship include:

- ❑ Having a written list of questions before each meeting
- ❑ Preparing a concrete set of goals and objectives for your mentoring relationship
- ❑ Visualizing conversations between your mentor and you as if you've known them for a long time
- ❑ Researching your mentor's background
- ❑ Preparing conversation points

Remember, if you don't work in or aspire to a leadership position, being mentored by a leader or someone higher up in the organization isn't essential. You may feel more comfortable with, and get more out of, being mentored by a peer or colleague whom you respect and who has more experience than you.

Reciprocating the Relationship

Mentors are volunteers; they do not expect to get paid. They do, however, want to receive some satisfaction from the relationship. In a recent survey, mentors listed what they hoped to receive from a mentoring relationship. One response stood out above all others. Mentors hoped to make "an important, long-lasting, positive change in another person's life, something that would help their mentees move forward into their future."

The only way that mentors can know how they're doing is if mentees tell them. What you have to offer your mentor is your appreciation and an explanation of the impact the relationship has had on your current and future success.

Improving Key Communication Skills

Asking Questions

The basis of a mentoring relationship is imparting information from one person to another. Left to chance, a mentee will get the information, advice, or guidance that the mentor wants to give, or thinks is helpful, which may be enough in many cases. However, since the relationship is primarily for the mentee's benefit, being able to ask for what you want, need, and are curious about is an important skill for mentees. High-quality questions can help you get what you really want from your mentor and make the best use of the time you spend with them.

Journalists have long known the key questions to ask to elicit missing or vital information. Use these to prompt productive questions or as a starting point for developing inquiries for your mentor.



Practice

You have been given a lead from your mentor about an opportunity to serve on a committee that you would love to be involved in. Using the journalist's questions as a starting point, write down at least three quality questions to ask your mentor.

1.

2.

3.

Listening Skills

The best questions in the world are useless unless you can actively listen for the information that will be helpful to you.

Here are four points to bear in mind to help you listen:

- **Listen for central ideas.** Listen for ideas that your mentor repeats and provides examples of. Typically, when an idea or concept is core to us, we will repeat and expound upon it to ensure another person understands us.
- **Determine what is of personal value to you in your mentor's conversation.** Once you've identified the central idea, consider how it applies to you. This will help reinforce the learning, since you can now better identify with your mentor's message.
- **Identify and eliminate as many of your "trigger" words as possible.** Almost everyone has certain words that cause an emotional reaction. These emotional reactions can cause us to get off track in our listening and our thinking. To combat these reactions, become familiar with your trigger words. Keep track of your next few conversations to see what words or phrases trigger an emotional reaction in you. Give some thought as to why those words trigger those reactions. Once you've identified those words and phrases, you can be more conscious when you hear them, and you'll find it easier to maintain attention and concentration when you do.
- **Learn to keep pace—speed of thought vs. speed of speech.** Most people can think five to six times faster than another person can talk. Regardless of how interested we are in the speaker, this difference in pace of thought and speech often results in daydreaming or mind-wandering on the part of the listener. Consider ways you can stay engaged when your mind starts to wander.

What can you do to become a better listener?

Resolving Differences

There are disagreements or misunderstandings in any relationship, and a mentoring relationship is no different. Keeping in mind that mentoring relationships are partnerships, it's important to accept that you have a right to express yourself when you want to make adjustments to the mentoring relationship. However, it's just as important to make sure that you resolve differences appropriately, professionally, and respectfully.

Some examples of differences that might crop up in a mentoring relationship include:

- **Getting advice or guidance that you don't agree with.** Instead of arguing with your mentor or just ignoring the advice, approach the situation with a sense of curiosity. Ask yourself and/or your mentor questions about the advice. For example: "That suggestion doesn't feel right, but I'm not sure why," or "My situation doesn't seem quite right for that idea. Can we talk about what doesn't fit and why?"
- **Your mentor doesn't show up for an appointment you had scheduled and didn't call or message you.** This is another time for curiosity. Instead of saying "You missed our meeting yesterday," approach your mentor with the goal of finding out information rather than blaming. "I had put on my calendar that we were meeting yesterday. Did I get confused?"
- **It feels like your mentor is telling you what you should do,** rather than letting you solve your own problems. Often, mentors feel that giving advice is what they're supposed to do and is what is expected of them. You can help your mentor build their mentoring skills by articulating what you expect of them up front. You might say something like this: "I have a situation at work that I'd like to talk to you about. I have some ideas of how to approach it, and I'm hoping you can listen to my ideas and ask me questions to help me get to the right solution."

Remember that you might be able to avoid some frustration or misunderstandings by setting clear expectations from the start. For instance, let your mentor know up front if you don't expect them to know all the answers and instead are looking forward to having someone you can bounce ideas off of and who will help you solve your own problems.

Making the Moments Count

Unless we reflect upon our experiences, we can miss out on the gems in the time we spend with our mentor. Writing a summary of your meeting or keeping a mentoring journal is one suggestion for capturing and remembering the lessons you learn through this important relationship. Here is one format for doing so:

DATE: _____

What did you and your mentor talk about today?

What were the key takeaways? What did you learn?

How might you apply what you heard or learned today?

TIP: YOU MAY WANT TO SHARE YOUR SUMMARY WITH YOUR MENTOR AND ASK FOR THEIR FEEDBACK. ASK THEM AS WELL AS YOURSELF IF THERE'S ANYTHING ELSE YOU'VE LEARNED THROUGH THE MEETING.

Ending the Relationship

There will come a time when you no longer have needs to be met by your mentor. Ending the mentoring relationship well is important to your continued success—first impressions and last impressions are what we remember most about others. Make your last impression a positive one.

Here are some tips for ending your mentoring relationship on a positive note:

- Be clear about why you want to end the relationship. If you've achieved your goals—celebrate! Let your mentor know how they have helped you, and show your appreciation.
- If you're ending the relationship for other reasons, let your mentor know what the reason is. Perhaps the relationship is not moving you forward and you'd like to spend time engaging in other professional development activities.
- Regardless of the reason why you'd like to end the relationship, it's important to give your mentor clear feedback about what they might do differently and what they did well.

Remember a mentoring relationship is not like a marriage or other permanent commitment; the goal is to help you move forward in your career and life goals. If this is not occurring and you do not see adjustments that can be made in the relationship to meet your goals, then you should end it respectfully and honestly.

Regardless of how successful the relationship has been, be sure to thank the mentor for the time they have invested.