

DO YOU WANT TO BE A MENTOR?

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WHAT IS THE ROLE OF A MENTOR—DO I WANT TO BE ONE?

Primarily, a mentor helps the mentee clarify career goals and carry out a plan to reach those goals by sharing insights and knowledge they have gained through their experiences. Think of the mentor as a “learning leader” who facilitates a learning process, rather than as a guru who passes down “the word” to the mentee.

The responsibilities of a mentor are as follows:

- 🌈 provides guidance based on past experience
- 🌈 creates a positive counseling relationship and climate of open communication
- 🌈 helps the mentee identify problems and solutions
- 🌈 leads the mentee through problem solving processes
- 🌈 offers constructive feedback in a supportive way
- 🌈 shares stories, including mistakes
- 🌈 refers the mentee to other business associates
- 🌈 must be honest about business expertise
- 🌈 solicits feedback from the mentee
- 🌈 comes prepared to each meeting to discuss issues

To help answer the question of do you want to be a mentor, you need to identify **why** you want to be one—what is motivating you to accept this opportunity in spite of your busy schedule?

Some do's and don'ts for mentors

Do's

- ✓ Be clear about your motives for helping your mentee. If you're not sure yourself, the mentor will get mixed messages from you.
- ✓ Look after your mentee's needs, but consider your own as well. Be certain about what you want from the relationship and what you're willing to give.
- ✓ Be prepared for the relationship to end. The successful mentee-mentor cycle requires that the mentee move on and the relationship either ends or takes a different form.

Don'ts

- ✗ Don't give up right away if your mentee resists your help at first. S/he may not recognize the value of what you have to offer. Persistence to a point - may help.
- ✗ Don't try to force your mentee to follow in your footsteps. If the footsteps fit, s/he will follow them voluntarily. Value the mentees unique path and where he/she is along that path.
- ✗ Don't have a pre-conceived plan for the final outcome of your relationship.

Analyze what you have to offer a mentee. Be brutally honest with yourself as you consider what influence, skills, knowledge or other contributions you can make. Acknowledge your weak spots also.

Identify your needs, expectations, and limits for your relationship. As yourself what you would like to have happen and how far you are willing to go.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE A GOOD MENTOR?

So, you think that you are ready to take on the role of a mentor—do you have the characteristics to be successful in this role?

Effective mentors share a number of characteristics. The checklist below is based on a synthesis of observations described by many mentees and researchers. While any single mentor may not possess all of the characteristics, effective mentors have many of these qualities. Which of the characteristics do you possess?

<input type="checkbox"/>	You clearly and regularly demonstrate our leadership competencies and public sector values
<input type="checkbox"/>	Your work demonstrates solid or superior achievement
<input type="checkbox"/>	You use a variety of techniques and skills to achieve your goals
<input type="checkbox"/>	You are considered by peers to be an expert in your field
<input type="checkbox"/>	You set high standards for yourself
<input type="checkbox"/>	You enjoy and are enthusiastic about your field
<input type="checkbox"/>	You continue to update your background in the field
<input type="checkbox"/>	You listen to and communicate effectively with others
<input type="checkbox"/>	You exhibit a good feeling about your own accomplishments and about the profession
<input type="checkbox"/>	You recognize excellence in others and encourage it
<input type="checkbox"/>	You are committed to supporting and interacting with colleagues
<input type="checkbox"/>	You are able to role-play others and understand their views
<input type="checkbox"/>	You enjoy intellectual engagement and like to help others
<input type="checkbox"/>	You are sensitive to the needs of others and generally recognize when others require support, direct assistance, or independence
<input type="checkbox"/>	You exercise good judgement in decisions concerning yourself and the welfare of others

Remember that you don't need to possess all of these characteristics. Let your mentee know where you are willing to help and what kind of information or support you can give that you believe will be particularly helpful.

Now that you have decided that you are ready to take on the role of a mentor, you will need to create a mentorship agreement with your mentee.

[Click here to get tips on how to create a mentoring agreement.](#)
[Click here to access the mentoring agreement form.](#)

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIP

You have now come to an agreement and understanding of your mentorship relationship. Before jumping to the next step of accomplishing goals, it is important that you **take time to get to know each other**—this is a critical step that is often skipped. Take some time to become acquainted with one another's interests, values and personal goals. This seems to help mentoring relationship gain a better start than when such activity is given a low priority. You and your mentee should reach a point where you can discuss things openly and honestly.

While working together to achieve the agreed upon goals, there are certain skills which will increase your chances of success—in particular, skills in communication and providing feedback. The lack of effective communication is the greatest barrier to healthy relationships with co-workers, friends, family, and others. You and your mentee must both effectively listen and give meaningful feedback.

There are two types of listening: passive and active.

Passive Listening

When a listener does not verbally respond to the speaker. They may send non-verbal messages through eye contact, smiles, yawns or nods. It is appropriate when:

- 🌈 the person wants to air a gripe, vent frustration, or express an opinion
- 🌈 you want to ease back mentally or be entertained, for instance, the other person relates a joke or story

Active Listening

Active listening involves verbal feedback. Perhaps it is through questioning of additional information or by paraphrasing (e.g., "Let me make sure I'm with you so far," or "What I hear you saying is..."). Then you rephrase the other's ideas in your own words. With this type of feedback, you demonstrate that you have understood the other's concerns, observation, advice, etc.

Regardless of your role in the relationship, either as the mentee or the mentor, listening skills are critical. Here are some tips to help you improve your listening skills.

Tips for Great Listening Skills

- Stop talking.
- Empathize with the other person.
- Ask Questions.
- Be patient.
- Put the talker at ease.
- Be aware of your emotions and prejudices.
- Control your anger.
- Get rid of distractions.
- Get the main points.
- React to ideas, not to the person.
- Don't argue mentally.
- Listen for what is NOT said.
- Listen to HOW something is said.
- Don't antagonize the speaker.
- Avoid classifying the speaker prematurely.
- Avoid jumping to conclusions.

Hold your fire. Learn not to get too excited or angry about the individual's point until you are sure you understand it. Do not immediately draw any conclusions either good or bad. Reduce your emotional reactions.

Listen for the main points. When listening, focus on the main ideas. Make a mental outline of the other person's most important points.

Resist distractions. While listening, try to ignore your surroundings and concentrate on the speaker's facial expression and his/her emphasis on certain words

Capitalize on thought speed. On average, a person speaks 125 words a minute. However, people process what they hear at almost four times that speed. Don't let your mind stray while you are waiting for the person's next point. Instead, try to "listen between the lines." Concentrate on the non-verbal messages.

Listen for the whole meaning. Listen for feeling as well as fact. In other words, try to get inside the other person's head.

Effective listening is a skill that comes from practice and a desire to understand the other person.

In your role as a mentor, you may be required at times to act as a "counselor". The following are some tips and suggestions to help you in this role.

Counseling is helping someone look at a situation from all sides, consider the options, and letting them decide for themselves which option is the best for them. In other words, **a counselor does not tell someone what to do.** During the course of the mentoring relationship, you may be required to counsel your mentee on problems that can stem from conditions or conflicts at work. You may also counsel your mentee on how to make certain decisions. Helping your mentee make the decision that is right for them is your goal when you perform the role of "counselor."

Ideally you would use non-directive counseling. This involves:

- 🌈 letting your mentee discover problems and work out solutions that best fit their value system.
- 🌈 using active listening skills
- 🌈 refraining from passing judgement
- 🌈 being aware of the different values and opinions of your partner
- 🌈 accepting them without imposing your own values and opinions
- 🌈 making your mentee feel comfortable and at ease
- 🌈 showing a genuine interest in their welfare
- 🌈 attempting to get them to “open up”, and
- 🌈 letting your mentee your partner arrive at his or her own solutions

Another key responsibility in your role as a mentor is acting as a “referral agent”.

A quick Q & A for non-directive counseling

Does non-direct mean I should be passive?

No. You should reflect on your mentee’s statements by restating the key points to ensure you understand.

How do I get them to open up?

Use phrases like: “I see, would you tell me a bit about it?” “Would you help me better understand your feelings about that?” “ok.. What happened?”

What do I say if I am asked for advice?

Preface your statements with: “From my experience,” or “The way I view the situation, “ or “If I were in your situation, I would consider..”

What do I do if they stop talking?

You may feel pressure to break the silence, but it is better to let your mentee restart and continue the conversation at their own pace.

What do I do if they become emotional?

Let them work through the feelings. Afterwards they may feel embarrassed. If the mentee wants to discuss it, let him or her talk freely.

Your mentee may have career issues that require more information that you have. It is therefore important that you learn about other available resources. Remember, you are providing professional guidance.

Never try to professionally counsel someone having personal problems.

It is a good idea to keep a referral list hand with telephone numbers that a mentee might need. For example, the number for the Employee Assistance Program where employees can receive counseling and assistance with personal issues.

If your mentee who trusts you come to you with a problem more personal than professional, be supportive, but refer. Know your limitations.

HELPING YOUR MENTEE LEARN

Before we move into learning strategies that you can use with your mentee, it is important to understand how adults learn. Learning can take place in so many different ways for adults. In terms of adult learning, keep in mind the following.

Adults are:

- 🌈 relevancy oriented—they need to know why they are learning something
- 🌈 autonomous and self-directed
- 🌈 goal oriented
- 🌈 practical and problem-solvers, and
- 🌈 have accumulated life experiences that shape their learning.

There are a variety of activities that can be used to meet the learning needs.

LEARNING STRATEGIES			
<p><u>Workplace Activities</u></p> <p>Job shadowing: follow an experienced person as s/he goes about their daily work and observing the way they work. Discuss what has been observed to draw out the learning.</p> <p>Trials: select an idea or process and set up a situation in which the idea can be tried out and evaluated before being implemented.</p> <p>Job Rotation: move into another position for a time with a view to learning new skills and/or finding out if the area is suitable for a future career move or switch jobs with a coworker for a short period of time.</p>	<p><u>On-the-Job Activities</u></p> <p>Project work on site: become part of a project team set up for a purpose that is in line with the partner's development needs. This may be for the purpose of gaining new knowledge, or to learn how to work as part of a team.</p> <p>Coaching: work with a more experienced person with the coaching skills to pass on their knowledge.</p> <p>Experimental Learning: learn on-the-job, reflect on the experience and regularly discuss this with the mentor. This could include representing the team at meetings or assuming lead person responsibilities.</p>	<p><u>On-the-Job Activities</u></p> <p>Acting Positions: assume a role while someone is out of the office i.e., on vacation or on business travel. Think of development assignments, rather than future promotions, as a way of synthesizing thoughts about next steps in the organization.</p> <p>Mentoring: become a mentor for a junior employee.</p> <p>Presentations: give presentations on various topics or teach a course.</p> <p>Research: write an article for a company/ association newsletter, magazine, or professional publication.</p>	<p><u>Off-the-Job Activities</u></p> <p>Visits off site: see examples of good practice in other areas of interest.</p> <p>Literature: introduce the partner to articles, books, journals, other publications, web sites, etc. and set aside time to discuss what has been learned and how it may be applied.</p> <p>Consultants: arrange for the person to visit and/or work with experts in their area of interest.</p> <p>Participation: participate in professional associations or participate on a Board of Directors.</p> <p>Community Service: volunteer in an organization.</p>

THE GOALS ARE ACHIEVED--WHAT NEXT?

You and your mentor should individually complete and then discuss the following questions¹ This will help you decide if your mentoring relationship should continue, if perhaps it is time for a different mentor, or if you don't require a mentor at this time.

1. What have you valued most from your mentoring relationship?
2. What else do you want to say 'thank you' for?
3. Should we continue our mentoring partnership?
4. If yes, how does our agreement need to change?
5. How will our relationship be different this time?

¹ These questions are from "mentoring Partner's Handbook, Center for Coaching & Mentoring, Inc. Check out <http://coachingandmentoring.com/>