How to Be a Good Mentor: 7 General Guidelines

Keep an Open Mind: You may have visualized the “type” of mentee you’d be best suited to help, but realize that a mentee doesn’t have to be a younger you in order to learn from the situation. As long as you’ve mastered a particular body of knowledge or skill that your mentee needs, it doesn’t matter if he/she is in a different industry or role.

Only Make Promises You Can Keep: At the beginning of your engagement, you and your mentee should set up a schedule of when and where to meet, and both of you should understand expectations in terms of discussion topics and outcomes. Trust may be the most critical aspect of a mentoring relationship, so once you commit, be reliable.

Listen Actively: While your mentee may be perfectly happy with you doing all the talking, you’ll be more effective if you ask open-ended questions about what he/she’s looking for and listen carefully to the answers. It’s not all about you and what you’ve achieved, but rather how those experiences can be leveraged for the benefit of your mentee’s professional growth.

Criticize Constructively: Many mentors fall into the trap of being either too harsh or too gentle. While you don’t want to lose your patience with your mentee, you owe it to him/her to diplomatically broach areas for improvement. Deliver feedback by first asking for permission to do so, and then saying: “You’re doing such a great job with X. I’d like to see you get even better by doing Y.”

Encourage Action: Ideally, your engagement should help your mentee get from one career place to another. While being a sounding board is terrific, presumably you have a mentorship vision to fulfill. At the end of each meeting, give your mentee a few to dos, and then follow up with him/her about how things worked out.

Learn from Your Mentee: A strong mentoring relationship goes both ways. Even senior executives have much to learn. In some areas, your mentee might have valuable wisdom and advice to impart to you, so don’t discount her ideas for enhancing your business and potential.

Show That You Care: Put yourself in your mentee’s shoes and recall how difficult it was to confront certain career issues. Show that you’re a little vulnerable by sharing mistakes you’ve made in the past, be a positive role model, and consult with others if you don’t have the answers. In other words, give the mentorship everything you’ve got. You won’t regret it.

These guidelines were developed by Alexandra Levit, business and workplace author, speaker, and consultant. She can be found at www.alexandralevit.com.

Essential Questions

Below are essential questions to ask before embarking on your mentorship relationship. Be sure to both ask and answer each question and use these questions to guide a thoughtful conversation about what you want and need out of this partnership. This conversation should end by completing the Mentorship Agreement Form and setting SMART Goals for the mentorship partnership.

1. Have you had a mentor before? What have your mentorship experiences been like?
2. What are your short-term and long-term career visions?
3. What broad learning goals do you have and why are those goals important to you?
4. What is it you need, want, and expect out of this mentorship relationship?
5. Tell me about your personal communication style and preferred communication style.
6. How would you prefer that I contact you?
7. How often should we meet?
8. How should we meet? In person? Skype?
9. How long should each meeting be, generally?
10. How long should we work together as a mentorship pair? Three months? Six months?
Mentorship Agreement

This agreement does not need to be signed by both parties, but rather is a list of talking points. This document is meant to be an exercise to ensure that both the mentor and mentee have clearly defined expectations and goals.

Define Expectations: How will interactions be executed?

1) Meetings – we will meet:
   - In person
   - Skype or another web-cam platform (If other, list here: __________)
   - Phone
   - Email

2) How often would we like to meet/interact (e.g. once a week/every other week/once a month)?

3) How long will a typical meeting or phone call last (e.g. half an hour, one hour)?

4) If an email or voicemail is received, we agree to get back to the other person within:
   - 24 Hours
   - 1 - 2 days
   - 3 - 4 days
   - Other: __________

5) What is the agreed upon duration of this relationship?
The Lockheed Martin Career Development Center suggests that relationships remain active for at least 3 months, a typical duration is 3 - 6 months.

6) If we need to cancel a meeting or phone call, how will that be communicated?

7) When will we meet next?

Define Goals:

Setting clear SMART goals (1 - 3) is critical to the success of a mentorship relationship. Be sure to spend time reflecting and discussing these goals together. Refer to What Is a SMART Goal?, the Goal-Setting Worksheet, and the Essential Questions to Ask worksheet to facilitate the goal-setting process (email careers@uta.edu if you need an extra copy).

1) What are the mentee’s goals for this mentorship relationship?
   GOAL 1:
   GOAL 2:
   GOAL 3:

2) What are the mentor’s goals for this mentorship relationship?
   GOAL 1:
   GOAL 2:
   GOAL 3: