



Becoming a Mentor

Mentors are wise and trusted counselors for their mentees (the people receiving advice and support). A mentor's knowledge, experience, encouragement and skills offer the growing leader guidance, advice and small amounts of hands-on training. However, while a mentor can steer a mentee in the right direction to reach his or her potential, a mentor cannot, and should not attempt, to force change against the will of their mentee.

Roles and Responsibilities

Establishing some basic roles and responsibilities can ensure a successful mentor/mentee relationship. The following chart outlines a few roles for the mentor, and a few things that the mentor and mentee should do together.

The Mentor Should:

- Provide guidance based on their past experiences. This needs to be done sensitively. If mentoring is turned into a boring reminiscence session, it will be unsuccessful. Guidance should always be as straightforward as possible, and lead directly from the stated concerns of the mentee.
- Create a positive counseling relationship and climate for open communication. This means, avoiding any resentment at the onset of the relationship by being sensitive to the feelings of the mentee. It is important to avoid treating the mentee as incompetent or incapable. Over the long-term, a positive relationship will be created through a genuine interest in both the mentee and their new role.
- Avoid setting up a situation whereby the mentor is seen to be 'checking up' on the mentee. This means agreeing when contact will be made or sought and where possible leaving it up to the mentee to get in touch at previously agreed times.
- Help your mentee identify problems and guide them towards solutions. This means try to look deeper; if there are symptoms, look for what might be causing them, don't

simply patch things up. If the mentee thinks that something is not a problem, don't force the issue; if you fail to explain why it might be a problem, then leave it.

- Lead your mentee through the problem solving processes. Empowerment is the key to being a mentor. Don't give solutions to problems; this won't 'teach the man to fish' (as the saying goes). Work through problems with the student, even when you are not clear of the answers yourself.
- Offer constructive criticism in a supportive way.
- Share your own thought process with the mentee.
- Assign "homework" if applicable. Obviously this does not mean essays, and if the person you are working with isn't keen, it can't work, but if there is a clear interest at getting better at something, think about how this could be achieved.
- Refer your mentee to others when you don't have the answers. If others can offer guidance or knowledge on certain part of the job in a more effective way, let them.
- Solicit feedback from your mentee. Being a mentor isn't merely about giving; you should be developing your own skills too. If you don't see this, you won't set up a relationship of give and take, which is the most beneficial to the mentee.
- Be prepared for contact from your mentee. Before a phone conversation think about what might come up. If meeting face to face, think about what questions would elicit the responses that would allow you to do your job effectively.
- Keep your eyes open for things that could help your mentee. Look for articles and websites that refer to things that you have discussed. This will allow them to develop as well as shows them that you are interested in their success.
- Be careful to not do their job for them. It is tempting for leaders to step in when faced with inexperience. Resist this temptation wherever possible.

Mentor & Mentee Together Should:

- Identify roles the mentor can play to help the mentee achieve their goals.
- Communicate on a regular basis.
- Refer back to previous conversations to make sure that things have been done.
- Set the agenda for each meeting.
- Cancel only when absolutely necessary.

Becoming a Mentor

1. Identify why you want to be a mentor. See what is motivating you to accept this opportunity in spite of your busy schedule.
2. Analyze what you have to offer your mentee. Be brutally honest with yourself as you consider what influence, skills, knowledge or other contributions you can make. Acknowledge your weak spots.
3. Identify your needs, expectations and limits for your mentor/mentee relationship. Ask yourself what you would like to happen and how much time you are prepared to put in.

Do's and Don'ts for Mentors

Do:

- Be clear about your motives for helping your mentee. If you're not sure yourself, the mentee 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 mentor-mentee cycle requires that the mentee moves on and the relationship either ends or takes a different form.

Don't:

- Don't give up right away if your mentee resists your help at first. He or she 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, he or she will follow them voluntarily. Value the mentee's unique path and where he or she is along that path.
- Don't have a pre-conceived plan for the final outcome of your relationship.

Websites of Support

- www.mentors.ca
- www.mentornet.net
- <http://research.sun.com/SEED/>
- <http://www.cpsd.apsd.ubc.ca/trimentoring/>