



OKLAHOMA
CareerTech



Mentor's Guide

for Supporting the
Employee as a
Workforce of One

Being a Mentor

Key takeaways

- Mentoring is a relationship based on trust and mutual respect in which both partners, the mentor and the mentee, have responsibilities and should benefit from the relationship.
- The role of the mentor is facilitating learning and development and creating and maintaining a supportive environment so the relationship can thrive.
- While it is not appropriate to generalize about people or to assume that we know them, it may be helpful to understand the context of the generation they grew up in and how it may differ from the characteristics typical of the mentor's generation.
- Appropriate closure is important for both parties. Celebration at the end of the mentoring relationship is important; it reinforces the learning that has taken place and helps with transitioning to the next phase.



Objectives

- ◆ Define mentoring.
- ◆ Explain your role as a mentor.
- ◆ State guidelines for being the best mentor.
- ◆ Describe tools of the mentor.
- ◆ Explain how to work with mentor-mentee differences.
- ◆ Describe the value of a mentor's personal journey.
- ◆ Explain the role and expectations of the mentee.
- ◆ Profile the "Starting the Journey" phase of mentoring.
- ◆ Profile the "Building and Nurturing the Relationship" phase of mentoring.
- ◆ Profile the "Working Toward the Goals" phase of mentoring.
- ◆ Profile the "Hitting Our Stride" phase of mentoring.
- ◆ Profile the "Phase-Out/Closure" phase of mentoring.
- ◆ Explain ways to celebrate the mentoring relationship.



Key terms

- **empathetic:** showing an ability to understand and share the feelings of another person

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Definition of Mentoring

Mentoring is a relationship between individuals, with the more experienced individual, the mentor, serving as coach, cheerleader, confidant, role model, devil's advocate, counselor and, when possible, a "door opener" for the mentee. It is a relationship based on trust and mutual respect in which both partners, the mentor, and the mentee, have responsibilities and should benefit from the relationship.

One result of the people shortage is that organizations must prioritize their efforts to grow their own capabilities. One way to do this is through mentoring.

Individuals should seek out the people in the workplace who can perform specific mentoring roles. Traditionally, mentorship involved one, usually more experienced, employee advising another employee on all aspects of work performance and career advancement. The future of work demands more frequent change at a time when fewer people are in the labor force. As a result, individuals must seek to learn very specific things from multiple people. These people may or may not be longtime employees, but they can provide guidance in the more targeted roles of mentorship, sponsorship or apprenticeship.

By thinking about mentorship in terms of its separate elements or functions, organizations and individuals can realize more opportunities for learning within the workplace.



Mentoring is all about learning and growing. At the professional level, both partners in the relationship are adults, so it is important to consider how we learn as adults. Malcolm S. Knowles, a noted practitioner and theorist of adult education, laid out the basic principles of adult learning in the 1970s. He said that critical to effective adult learning is one's own involvement in diagnosing, planning, implementing, and evaluating their learning. In essence, adults like to be self-directed learners. This should be a relief for you as a potential mentor. You need not do all the work. In fact, you should not do all the work.

Most traditional workplace mentoring relationships involve senior employees helping guide the personal and professional growth of more junior colleagues. But age and organizational hierarchy aren't necessarily the most important factors in today's increasingly multigenerational workforce.

It's more important that mentors have experience that can help others learn. This could involve younger employees sharing their expertise with evolving technological tools and trends with older colleagues who may not be as familiar with new developments in their industry. Also consider that mentors can learn from the team members they're helping to guide, so it really is a mutually beneficial relationship.

Source: *How to Future-Proof Your Career*, Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education, 2023

Source: "Exploring the mutual benefits of mentoring in the workplace," Brandman University

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Your Role as a Mentor



The role of the mentor is primarily one of facilitating learning and development and creating and maintaining a supportive environment so the relationship can thrive. The mentee's development should always be at the forefront, with you facilitating self-directed learning by the mentee.

A mentor is not the fixer the mentee comes to for all the answers. In fact, one of the main roles of the mentor is to ask good questions so the mentee produces his or her own answers.



The mentor manages the learning experience and helps the mentee identify goals and set career objectives. The mentor keeps the mentee focused on goals, objectives and learning strategies.

At different points in the relationship, the role of the mentor may resemble that of a coach: giving advice and guidance, sharing ideas, and providing feedback. At other times, the mentor is a source of encouragement and support for the mentee, acting as a sounding board for ideas and concerns, or providing insights into possible opportunities. The mentor may also need to play devil's advocate to help the mentee critically think about important decisions. It is important to understand what role you need to be playing at a particular time to facilitate the learning and growth of the mentee.

Agreeing to be a mentor requires a real commitment, not only in terms of time, but also in terms of opening yourself up for self-reflection and building a meaningful relationship with another person for an extended period. Before saying yes, ask yourself:

- ➔ Am I committed to getting to know this person, investing in her and helping her develop professionally?
- ➔ Am I willing to communicate openly and honestly so that my mentee really gets to know me, and I get to know him so that we understand and respect each other's perspective?
- ➔ Do I have the time over the next year?
- ➔ Do I have the skills to be a good mentor?

Being the Best Mentor



Perhaps the most important thing a mentor can do is to listen.

To facilitate learning for the mentee to provide advice and encouragement, you need to really listen and understand your mentee first. **Great mentors spend much more time listening than they do speaking.**



Be open-minded and compassionate. Work hard to see the mentee's side, her wants, needs, feelings and perspectives. With this empathetic approach, your insights or next questions to help the mentee sort through an issue will be better received.

Be patient and honest. You may need to deliver constructive criticism or honest feedback, being the mirror so that the mentee can better reflect on a situation. In some cases, the feedback may not be heard or accepted, and may need to be reintroduced in another conversation.

Challenge the mentee. Set high expectations of performance and encourage trying. Play devil's advocate.

Care about the relationship. The more you invest in this relationship, the more the mentee and you will get from it. The mentee is likely eager, invested and reading a lot into your availability (or lack thereof) and your tone of voice. When you have scheduled time together, be there, physically and mentally.

Share your experiences and insight, but don't tell the mentee what to do — only what you did. Choose stories that you feel are helpful and appropriate to the issue being discussed. Tell the story in a neutral way, so as not to be directing the mentee. You want to demonstrate that you have also faced issues and challenges, and that it is possible to overcome them.

Tools of the Mentor



Questions

Questions encourage learning and growth by giving the mentee time to reflect and articulate her own thinking.

Ask questions that require thoughtful answers to help the mentee think through an issue. Ask questions that support and challenge the mentee, such as “It seems as though you handled that issue with your colleague well. How might you apply some of what you did in that situation to your issue with the committee you are having trouble with now?”

Also ask questions that spur reflection by the mentee, such as, “Tell me more about what you mean when you say that?” or “Is it possible to look at that in another way?”

Restatements

Often, when someone repeats or rephrases something we have said, we understand it in a different light. As a mentor, you can help the mentee by doing just that.

For example, ask “From what you just said, my understanding is that...” or even more simply, “So what I think I heard you say was...”

These tactics allow you to serve as a mirror for the mentee by reformulating her statement, which can sometimes be the most important tool in your toolbox as a mentor. The goal is to help the mentee hear what she said and then for her to build on those thoughts and feelings that she has just expressed and explore them further.

Summarizations

We are all accustomed to having meeting minutes so that we can remember what took place and verify with those who attended what we discussed and/or agreed upon. Similarly, it is important for you as the mentor to summarize what you have heard/learned during the session with the mentee. This summarization will serve as a reminder of what has just transpired between you and help you and the mentee check on any assumptions. Take a few summary notes, as it will be good to start your next meeting with a quick review of your last conversation.

You will want to simply share what you heard, learned, or accomplished, without judgment and then say something like “Today we spent our time together discussing ... as a result I understand that the following outcomes were achieved ... Did I get that right?”

Silence

Silence is an important tool in learning and growing. We need silence to reflect on actions, thoughts, and words that we have spoken, or others have spoken to us. Some people need more silence to think through things. Silence can make a lot of people uncomfortable. Understand that but don't be afraid of silence.

Instead, listen for silence and see if it is being used by the mentee to avoid discussing a particular issue or if she just needs more time to reflect and then will be able to talk further about a particular topic. If the mentee gets silent every time you begin talking about a particular subject, you may need to ask something like, “Every time we start talking about it, it seems to me that you get quiet and seem uncomfortable. Can you share with me what that might be about?”

Working with Mentor-Mentee Differences



While it is not appropriate to generalize about people or to assume that we know them based on where they are from, their gender, their religion, etc., it may be helpful to understand the context of the generation they grew up in and how it may differ from the characteristics typical of your generation. Being aware of one's own generation and the attitudes and perspectives you hold that may have resulted from growing up in that era may help you become a better mentor. Likewise, understanding the context that the mentee grew up in may be useful as you ask reflective questions, listen to her verbal and nonverbal communication, and assist her in clarifying her goals and helping her in a learning and developmental environment.

Generational differences

Working with Baby Boomers

Those born between 1946 and 1964, or the post-World War II generation, are known as Baby Boomers. They tend to be optimistic, competitive and goal driven. While they may put in long hours and their work-life balance may be skewed toward work, many Boomers just want to make a difference in the world. They seek recognition and reward for their efforts and expect the same type of commitment and hard work of others. Based on this traditionalist concept, many Baby Boomers may believe that the right mentoring relationship should be mentor-directed.



Boomers are often asked to be mentors because of their desire to make a difference and because they tend to hold senior positions. Boomers also want and need a mentor at times. When mentoring a Boomer, keep in mind that this generation typically wants to be shown respect, appreciates recognition for their accomplishments and likes to be intellectually challenged. Remember that, while some Baby Boomers are tech savvy, others may be reluctant to use newer technologies since they did not grow up with computers.



Working with Gen Xers

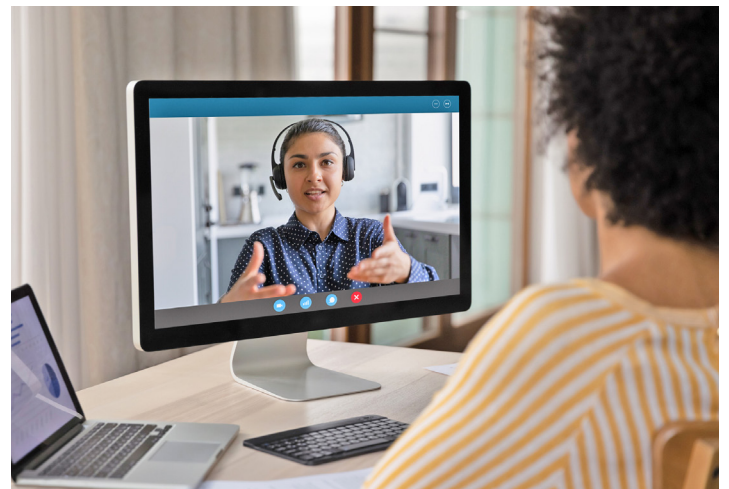
Born between 1965 and 1980, Gen Xers watched their parents work hard to “have it all.” Consequently, this generation typically seeks a healthy work-life balance. The generation is known for being independent and entrepreneurial. They are largely self-reliant but value a diverse workplace. Gen Xers seem to prefer immediate feedback and like to communicate via email.

According to Lois J. Zachary, a recognized expert on mentoring, Gen Xers want a mentor who is not only competent but also one who is direct, yet informal, in their style. She notes in her book, *The Mentor’s Guide: Facilitating Effective Learning Relationships*, that due to their independent nature, a hands-off approach may be best in working with Gen Xers. When mentoring a Gen Xer, Zachary advises mentors to “encourage creativity and initiative” and help “mentees discover new approaches, set expectations, raise the bar and then turn them loose to figure out how to achieve their goals” (Zachary, 2012, p. 52).

Working with Millennials

Those born between 1981 and 2000 are called Generation Y or more commonly, Millennials. This generation also craves a work-life balance. They tend to have high expectations of their workplaces, desire flexible work hours and telecommuting, and prefer communicating electronically. They are known for being entrepreneurial and goal-oriented, and desire to make a positive difference in the world. Those in this generation grew up multitasking, being social and feeling confident. Generally, Millennials appreciate instant feedback and recognition. Millennials’ top priority seems to be growth and development.

According to Zachary, Millennial mentors should offer hands-on experience that will empower the mentee to take the next step. She states, “They [Millennials] prefer positive, collaborative, achievement-oriented mentors who take them seriously” (2012, p. 53).





norms, beliefs, values, and universal human needs.

Culture is like water to the fish, essential yet not often noticed until the fish is taken out of the water. Culture gives context and continuity to our movements and, like water, buoyancy to our world.

Source: *Working with Differences in Communities*, Oregon State University Extension Service

Cultural differences

In addition to generational differences, it may be helpful to consider cultural differences, as these differences may impact the mentoring relationship. If this is the case, you may wish to discuss with the mentee what mentorship means in each of your cultures. Explore how giving and getting advice might be different across cultures, especially if you work at different levels in the organization.

For example, in some cultures, directives are expected from people in senior positions, while a suggested range of options might be baffling. Some cultures expect some type of criticism, while others bristle at hearing anything negative.

If you are entering a mentoring relationship with someone from another culture, learn everything you can about how your differences might affect your relationship. Take this knowledge into account as you build the relationship.

Every one of us is a cultural person. Just as a frame around a painting focuses attention and brings out the features of the painting, a frame around the self can focus attention and bring out the features of an individual. This frame around the self is our culture.

Our cultural frame includes language, art and artifacts, traditions, and social customs. It also goes much deeper. Culture includes

Other differences

Differences can be good in a relationship, yet it seems to be best if we understand those differences in each other so that we can keep things in context. In addition to generational differences and cultural differences, other differences can impact any relationship, including the mentoring relationship. Age, race, gender, religion, upbringing, and life experiences are all factors that influence how we see the world, how we behave, how we react to people and situations, and how we interpret things.

It is important to keep in mind that the mentoring relationship exists within this context of the two individuals from different life experiences in some ways. As a mentor, you need to work to get to know and then respect the context of the mentee's life and then consciously try to use it, sensitive and respectful of the mentee's needs that may be very different than your own, based on his or her life experience.



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Value of a Mentor's Personal Journey



To best help someone else learn and grow, it is important that we know ourselves and understand where we have been and how we grew into the person we are today.

Take the time to look back over your life as an adult and examine those significant life events, both personal and work-related, that influenced you. Write down the events, milestones and transitions that have had the most impact on who you are today. Both positive and negative events play an important role regarding who we are, so list both. Then, think about who helped you grow. Finally, consider what you learned and how your direction or thinking changed because of these influential events and people.

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Role and Expectations of the Mentee

The relationship exists primarily for the growth and development of the mentee. As such, the mentee should be proactive in approaching the mentoring relationship with an agenda in mind and coming to each mentoring conversation prepared with topics to discuss. It is up to the mentee to inform the mentor how she best learns and communicates, and what her objectives and vision/dreams are. The more insights into her learning and communication styles and goals, the better the mentor can assist her in her growth and development.

The mentee should be the one planning and managing the direction of her professional life. It is the mentee who should take responsibility for her own development, learning and professional growth. As mentor, you may need to support her as she grows into this role.

The mentee should have a clear understanding of why he has a mentor. He should understand that the mentoring relationship is confidential so the mentor will feel free to share personal experiences with the mentee. The mentee should be able to clearly express his expectations of his mentor so there can be a conversation and agreement upon those expectations at the start.

It is important for a mentee to remain flexible in changing expectations and plans. He must be able to create goals and milestones and remain focused on achieving what has been agreed upon in the mentoring sessions. A mentee also needs to be a good listener, setting aside time for self-reflection. He must be able to accept constructive criticism and have the courage to provide feedback, both positive and constructive, to the mentor to maintain a healthy and productive mentoring relationship.



Preparing for Initial Contact

Once you have made the decision to be a mentor and have the name and contact information of the mentee, you may have some anxiety about where to start, what to say and what to do if the two of you don't immediately hit it off. You can be sure that the mentee is having similar anxiety.

It is usually the responsibility of the mentor to make that initial contact. First impressions are important; they can set the tone for a relationship. It is important for you to have an agenda for that first contact.

Agenda for Initial Contact

Whether via phone, email, or a virtual meeting platform, the following suggestions may leave a good first impression and facilitate the development of a good relationship. While this first contact is mostly task-oriented, it will lay important groundwork.

- ➔ Introduce yourself, let the mentee know how you prefer to be addressed and learn how to pronounce the name of the mentee and find out how he wishes to be addressed.
- ➔ Tell the mentee a little about yourself and ask the mentee to do the same.
- ➔ Discuss the needs, expectations, and limitations that each of you may have. For example, you may mention that you will not be available on weekends or the last week of the month due to your meeting schedule.
- ➔ Agree upon a regular meeting schedule and how you will meet.
- ➔ Talk about the respect for each other's time and how best to cancel or reschedule a meeting. Commit to doing your best to keep changes to a minimum and ask that the mentee do the same. Agree on how to communicate the need to make changes in the schedule. Is an email, text or call the best way to convey the need to change a meeting or to speak in between meetings if advice or support is required in a crisis?



- ➔ End the call on a positive note, noting that you are looking forward to getting to know the mentee better and working with her.
- ➔ Ask the mentee to develop an agenda for your first official meeting. Suggest that it may be beneficial to discuss how each of you sees your roles and responsibilities.

Remember, relationships take time, and they take work. The first few months of your mentoring experience should focus on building a trusting, respectful relationship.

The typical lifespan of a mentoring relationship is six months to a year and often follows the phases below:

- ➔ Starting the Journey
- ➔ Building and Nurturing the Relationship (approximately two months)
- ➔ Working Toward the Goals (approximately two months)
- ➔ Hitting Our Stride (approximately four to eight months)
- ➔ Phase Out/Closure

Building and Nurturing the Relationship



Expectations for the first two months

This is a critical time as you lay the groundwork for your mentoring relationship. It is important that you spend the time getting to know one another, preferably meeting as often as every two weeks, if possible. This is the time to get clarity about each other's expectations regarding the relationship, and for you and the mentee to understand your own skills and gain an understanding of each other's contexts. Do not rush through this phase; it is critical to the long-term success of the mentoring relationship.



Meeting focus

While the mentee should be developing an agenda for each session, it is important that both of you have a clear idea of what that agenda should look like. You want to engage the mentee in meaningful conversation from the start, going beyond job responsibilities and titles and focusing on each other as people—your histories, cultures, what you like/dislike, etc.

Hopefully you have completed your self-reflection/personal journey exercise (discussed above), so you have some insights about yourself: how you got to where you are, who helped and supported you along the way, and what/who was most effective in influencing you on your life journey. You can begin to share some of that with the mentee and continue to do so throughout your journey as a mentor.

Ask the mentee to describe where he sees himself headed in his career and in broad terms, what his development goals are. Ask questions about how his goals align with where he wants to be. Try

to gain clarity but be careful not to come across as judgmental. Talk about each of your personal communication and learning style preferences. Determine what the mentee wants from this relationship and explain to the mentee what you want from this relationship.

Before concluding each meeting, together review the agenda and what you accomplished at the meeting. Talk openly about whether you each believe that you had substantive versus superficial discussion and whether you each feel that you are advancing in your level of trust. Finally, agree on next steps and the next meeting agenda. This is a time that you can suggest a reading or an assessment to the mentee in preparation for future discussions.

Remember the goal of this phase is to build a strong foundation of trust and understanding of each other. This will take multiple conversations.

Working Toward the Goals



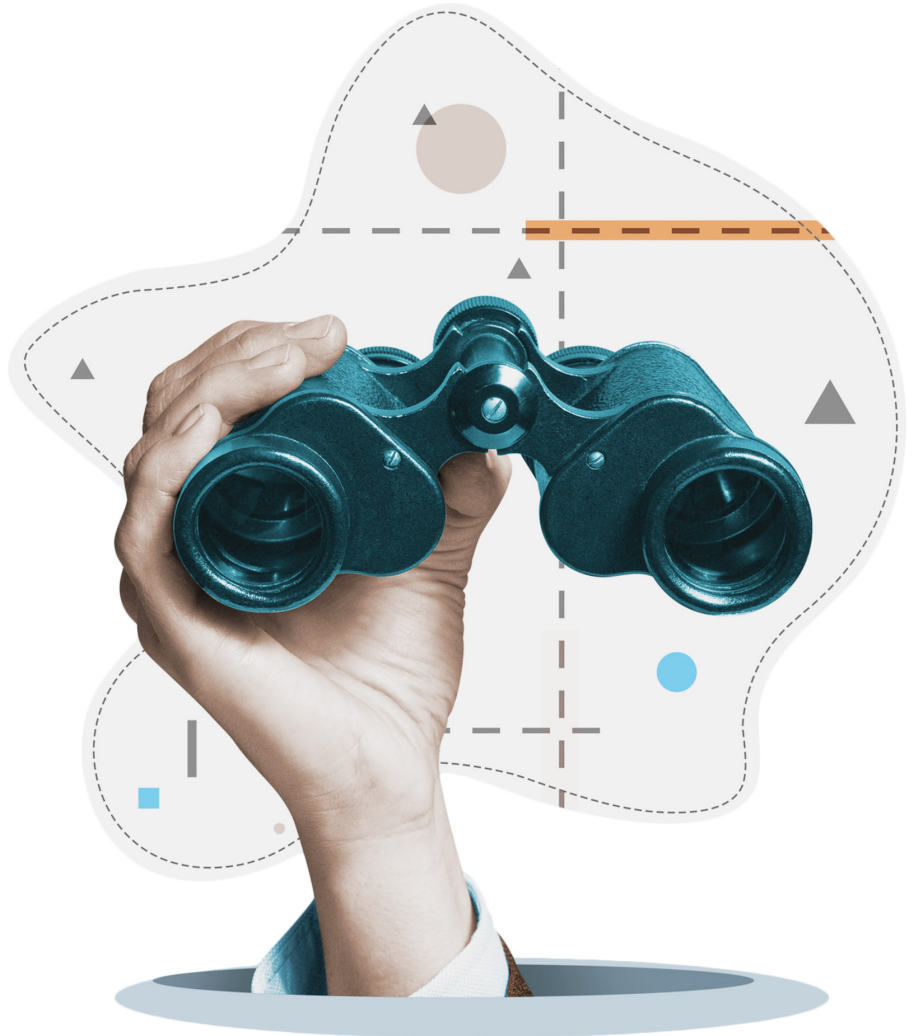
Expectations for the next two months

If you have made it this far in your mentoring relationship, you and the mentee are committed to continue. In this phase, you are working as much on the relationship-building as you are on the task of addressing the mentee's developmental goals. This is the phase to assist the mentee in clarifying goals, developing a plan to tackle these goals, and beginning the work. Your objective during this phase is to develop commitment to a set of goals and an approach to moving toward those goals.

Meeting focus

While it is important to continue building the trusting relationship, now is the time to begin building the plan. While some mentees come to the relationship with a clearly defined goal, most come with only a broadly defined goal. As mentor, it is important for you to understand the mentee's goal. If the mentee already has a specific, well-defined learning goal, ask clarifying questions so that you come to understand exactly what the mentee means and where the mentee wants to go.

For example, the mentee may say her goal is to move into a position with a better title, higher salary, and location closer to her family within the next year. Rather than assuming you know what she means, you need to begin asking questions such as "Could you describe what a 'better title' means to you?" and "What do you think is needed in order to reach that goal?"



If the mentee comes to you with only a broadly defined goal, your job is to assist in thinking through the goals and helping to make those goals as specific and quantifiable as possible. A great way to start is by asking a series of key questions that will assist the mentee in creating and aligning developmental goals with a current role and/or aspirational role. Ask the mentee to complete the "Mentee Developmental Goal Assessment" (next page) and work with the mentee on examining the gap between his or her requirements and what an employer or role offers, as well as examining what the mentee brings to the table in relation to what an employer or role requires.

MENTEE DEVELOPMENTAL GOAL ASSESSMENT



Your requirements for work/life fulfillment What are my values and interests? What do I need to keep my life in balance? What are my developmental needs?	Contributions to your work/life fulfillment from your current or desired role What is the culture of the organization? What benefits will help me achieve this life balance? What are my growth opportunities?
Contributions to your current role or desired role How do I deliver value? What are my skills and talents? What is my competitive advantage?	Requirements for success in your current or desired role What is the mission and key objective for the organization? What skill sets are needed to achieve success? What changes may impact the organization's requirements?

This gap analysis can form the basis of a work plan and can frame discussions for the next phase of mentoring. Mentoring is all about learning and growing. A work plan can keep you and the mentee focused on this learning, growth and development and may help keep the relationship on track. A work plan typically includes objectives, action plans, resources needed, and target dates.



Expectations for the next four to eight months

You have made it to the best part of the mentoring relationship. You have laid a foundation for trust and open communication, agreed upon how you will work together, laid out ground rules and expectations of one another, and have a mutually agreed upon work plan in place. Now, it's time to put the plan in motion. During this phase, you will likely want to meet less frequently with brief updates in between.

Your role as mentor during this phase will focus on supporting the mentee, challenging her and providing the vision for her that will help her grow and develop. As the mentee begins implementing objectives from her plan, it is likely that she will often need your support. This support may involve listening to your mentee or being that safe, nonjudgmental person with whom she can speak freely:

- ➔ Ask the mentee questions that will cause her to reflect and articulate her own thinking.
- ➔ Share some stories from your personal journey that relate to what she is experiencing.
- ➔ Express positive encouragement such as “I know that this is a very difficult time for you, but knowing you, I trust that you will do a great job in managing this situation that you just shared with me.”

For the mentee to learn and grow, he will need to consistently move forward. A good way to help the mentee sustain that forward momentum is by challenging him. This can take the form of setting tasks such as, “I think it would be good for you between now and our next meeting to arrange an informational interview with ... to get her perspective on ...”

Other ways to challenge the mentee include asking “what if” questions based on different scenarios,

engaging in discussions with your mentee and setting high standards for the mentee that will also demonstrate you believe in him or her. Sometimes, the role of a mentor is that of a cheerleader. During this phase, the mentee may lose sight of the vision. As mentor, it is your job to help inspire, motivate, and encourage the mentee to continue to move boldly toward the future. Also recognize that it may be time to help the mentee step back and re-evaluate goals and objectives and to reframe them.

Feedback is critical to this phase of the mentoring relationship. It is the most powerful way for learning to occur. Remember to provide your feedback honestly, but in a supportive, encouraging way. Your feedback needs to be relevant, practical, and specific, and aimed toward the growth and development of the mentee.

Hopefully, at this point in your relationship, you are invested in the success of the mentee and — although it may be difficult at times — you will not allow these teachable moments to be wasted. Staying focused

on the issue or the situation rather than the person is best. Your goal in this phase is to help the mentee achieve his or her learning objectives.

Meeting focus

Your meetings should switch focus from what is the goal to how are we doing in reaching that goal. Each meeting should begin with a quick review of what was accomplished at the last meeting, how each of you felt it went and what could have been done differently now that you both have had time to think about it.

Next, have the mentee update you on the current situation, particularly as it relates to the plan and any progress made: what is working, what is not working, how is the mentee feeling about it, etc. Stay focused on the plan and on the purpose of the relationship, which is the growth and development of the mentee.

See the sample agenda below:

AGENDA	CONVERSATIONS
Start of each meeting (past focus)	➔ What did we do at the last meeting? ➔ How do each of us feel about it? Are there things we might have said or done differently now that we have had time to think about it? ➔ Review any action items that you both had agreed upon.
Majority of each meeting (current focus)	➔ Ask mentee to provide update on her current situation, particularly as it relates to the plan. ➔ Ask mentee to provide progress report on action plan items. ➔ Discuss what's working and what is not working relative to the action plan as it relates to achieving the goal. Discuss how the mentee is feeling about her progress and the plan. ➔ Revise objectives and action plan if needed.
Ending each meeting (future focus)	➔ Agree on actions to be completed before the next meeting. ➔ Discuss expectations regarding open and honest feedback with one another and ask for that feedback at the end of every meeting. ➔ Agree upon next steps and the next meeting agenda.



Closing out the relationship

Although closure usually comes after you and the mentee have developed a trusting, respectful relationship, closure may come at any point during the relationship. The agreement to have a mentor-mentee relationship requires both parties to openly evaluate how the relationship is working and, if there is a thought or desire to stop the relationship, whether it be one or both of you, that you will have a discussion.

Both parties go into a mentoring relationship with high hopes. Sometimes the relationship just doesn't work out. No matter when one or both of you come to the realization that it is time to end the relationship, it is important to discuss it together.

Closure even after a successful mentoring relationship can be challenging and stressful. Sometimes, it may be that one person in the relationship has experienced a life or job change that shifts the mentee's attention and ability to focus on a mentoring relationship. Or it may be that you or the mentee is afraid to bring up the topic of closure to avoid hurt feelings. Although the relationship may have been professionally fulfilling for both, it may have run its course or achieved the agreed upon goals. One or both of you may find it more comfortable to maintain the status quo than to engage in an awkward discussion.

No matter the reason, appropriate closure is important for both parties. To set the stage for the end, it is best to discuss the end at the beginning and periodically throughout the relationship.

You may wish to add an item to your agenda after every few meetings, such as "How is each of us feeling about this arrangement? What do we think about the value and longevity of this mentoring effort?"

Just because the mentoring relationship ends, that does not mean that you can't maintain a relationship



as friend or colleague. Work to have an honest conversation: Provide the mentee with your rationale for ending the mentor-mentee relationship, listen to what the mentee says carefully and respond to his or her thoughts in a non-defensive, nonjudgmental way.

As the mentoring relationship is one of learning, growth and development, the relationship's end should serve as a learning conclusion. The ideal ending conversation should focus on the learning that took place during the relationship—not just the mentee's learning, but what you, as a mentor, learned. We all learn from good experiences as well as from the not-so-good experiences. Look at the pluses and minuses of the relationship. As the mentor, it is up to you to make every effort to have the ending be as positive as possible.

Celebrating the Mentoring Relationship



Summarizing the learning

The healthy discussion at closure provides you and the mentee with the opportunity to evaluate the learning outcomes and discuss how the mentee might build on the learning. As the mentor, you play a major role in facilitating this conversation. Start by asking the mentee to look back over the goals that you developed early in your mentoring relationship. Then, ask the mentee for an assessment of what was learned/accomplished relative to each objective.

For example, if one of the mentee's objectives was to position herself for a position with greater responsibility, ask her to describe the progress she felt she made toward that objective. Listen carefully to the response and ask follow-up questions such as, "Based on the progress you have just shared with me, what do you think are the implications for you as you look ahead?"

Your questions need to focus on the learning that has taken place, including what each of you learned because of the mentoring relationship itself. You may be surprised at what you have learned about yourself through mentoring. Share with the mentee what you have learned. Offer your analysis of the learning that has taken place based on your perspective and ask the mentee if your perceptions are similar to his or her own.

Most of us have had mentors at different points in our lives. Many of them have remained a friend

or colleague that we touch base with periodically or think of from time to time. Ending the formal mentoring relationship should be done in a way that is focused on the future and leaves the relationship open to evolve into something different.

Celebrating

Most of us don't take the time to celebrate. However, celebration at the end of the mentoring relationship



is important; it reinforces the learning that has taken place and helps with transitioning to the next phase, much like a graduation ceremony does.

Some suggestions for celebrating may include a face-to-face get-together (if you have been mentoring via a virtual meeting platform). A written note expressing your gratitude to the mentee and vice-versa can be an expression of celebration, providing a permanent reminder of the relationship and its successes.

Looking ahead

Take the time to be honest about whether there will be a future relationship. If you do wish to continue the relationship, agree whether it should be touching base periodically via email or phone or something more formal.

Whatever you agree upon, know that each of you will likely feel a loss. You have confided in each other and learned together. As mentor, you may wonder how the mentee is doing without you. The mentee may miss the support and feedback that you provided. The good news is that, over the coming years, you may receive voicemails, emails or notes informing you of the mentee's latest accomplishment and waiting for your feedback.

Now that you have agreed upon your future relationship with the mentee, it is time for you to do a self-evaluation. Add this experience to the personal journey you did at the start of the relationship. Ask yourself:

- How has this mentoring experience changed you?
- What did you learn from this relationship?
- How can you use what you learned in future mentoring relationships?
- Are you ready to be a mentor again?



Notes



Notes





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