

Mentor's Guide

The First Step: Getting to Know Your Mentor/Mentee

As you begin your mentoring relationship, we would like you to spend some time getting to know your partner. Take about fifteen minutes to talk about where your mentor/mentee is from, where they work, what their typical day looks like, and whatever would help you to get to know your partner. Write down your partner's name, county, address and best way to contact him or her.

Name: _____

County: _____

Address: _____

Email/Phone number: _____

Other: _____

The mentor relationship can take on various forms including: professional support, encouragement, technical assistance, networking and other forms. It is important to remember that both you and your mentee have certain needs and expectations of how the relationship will develop and grow. Take a few minutes to talk about what type of relationship and support you envision.

Attributes of a Mentor

In a mentoring relationship, it is important that:

1. Open and honest communications between mentor and mentee exist with the mentor giving honest praise and criticism. Confidentiality, integrity, and trust are important aspects of the relationship.
2. A mentor provides opportunities for growth and development of the mentee outside of the existing skill areas as well as introduces the mentee to the right people.
3. A mentor is accessible and the responsibilities of the mentor and mentee are clearly defined.
4. A mentor provides encouragement and feedback regarding the mentee's strengths and weaknesses.
5. The mentor makes the mentee aware of the formal and informal political structure of the courts.

The important characteristics of mentor and mentee are as follows:

MENTOR

Enthusiastic
Good listener
Maintains confidentiality
Open-minded
Flexible
Sensitive
Resourceful
Share authority and prestige
Clarify essential issues
Accessible
Observant
Know when to let go
Delegate work
Give encouragement
Give emotional support
Give recognition where due
Insightful
Share knowledge of political structure
Ethical

MENTEE

Enthusiastic
Good listener
Maintains confidentiality
Open-minded
Flexible
Sensitive
Resourceful
Independent and productive
Don't infringe on mentor with trivia
Accept responsibility
Ethical

The importance of mentoring in training effective staff cannot be underestimated. Mentoring provides continuity, a process linking one professional generation to the next. Through mentoring, men and women can work as partners, since an old-boy or an old-girl network is not as effective as whole team network.

Maintaining Your Mentoring Relationship

The key to a successful mentoring relationship is communication. Whether your role is as coach, listener, teacher, clarifier, etc. having positive communication interactions with your mentee is the basis for maintaining a positive, on-going relationship.

You will most likely engage in two types of communication when interacting with your mentees:

- **Providing performance feedback** – clarifying issues, suggesting strategies for achieving work objectives, questioning, listening, problem-solving;
- **Providing personal feedback** – encouraging, boosting confidence, showing concern, questioning, listening.

Providing feedback is a two-way communication interaction. Your goal is to provide feedback in such a manner that it generates a dialogue between you and your mentee so that they can further pursue and accomplish their goals.

Providing Feedback Constructively

- Describe the behavior or issue that you will be providing feedback on carefully and accurately.
- Try to preface any statement that may be negatively perceived with more positive statement. (Note: Be sure the positive statements are significant; “empty” comments just to be “nice” are not necessary).
- Be as specific as possible with the information you give.
- Direct feedback at behavior or issues that the mentee can do something about (i.e., make sure feedback is concrete).

In the course of your mentoring relationship there may be times when feedback from you does not generate dialogue, but instead seems to generate defensiveness. This is not uncommon. As mentees work on their goals they will feel ownership toward their endeavors. This can lead them to sometimes feel threatened or become defensive when given certain feedback.

As you coach and counsel your mentees on their goals, there are two common defensive barriers that you may encounter (Morrison, 1998):

- **The quick agreement barrier**—This can block the exchange of potentially valuable information. By agreeing too quickly, the person may limit themselves from further learning and understanding.
- **The “yes, but...” barrier**—This is an information-blocking defense which shuts down the flow of feedback.

Overcoming defensive barriers

- Be aware that you may encounter these responses; increase your perceptiveness toward these responses so that you can recognize when they occur.
- Use questions and clarifying statement to elicit dialogue from the other person so that they do not have the opportunity to disengage from the interaction.

As your mentoring relationship progresses, continue to be open and honest in your communication. In this way, the relationship will become increasingly rewarding for both of you.

What to Do When Things Aren't Going Well in the Mentoring Relationship

1. The first step is to talk about it. Try approaching the subject by asking the other person how they feel the relationship is working. Then offer your observations and share your concerns. Be sure to provide specific examples. (Remember to cite the behavior not your interpretation of the motivation). Then once the concern is in the open, encourage the other person to share their views, if they have not already done so.
2. You have had the initial conversation and discussed both of your expectations, but you are still having difficulties. Talk about it with each other and explore options. It may be that you don't have the same understanding of the expectation or of the mentee's goals. Cover these slowly to ensure understanding and use concrete examples. Be sure to flag areas of concern or disagreement. Talk about your different points of view. What can you adjust that will still deliver the goals within the mentoring relationship? Ask each other what you can do differently that will help. Listen carefully to ensure you understand the request and consider whether it is something you can change.
3. You have had several conversations at this point that explored your expectations of the relationship and of each other. You have discussed and clarified the mentee's development goals to ensure you are both on track. You are still having difficulties moving the relationship and the goals ahead. This would be an appropriate time to bring in third party assistance. Talk with another mentor for recommendations. This is not a sign of failure, you have both been proactive and both people are interested in making it work, but feel they may be stuck on something or overlooking some aspect that will enable them to move forward.
4. You have tried everything! Your communication or interpersonal styles may just be too different to work together effectively in this relationship. Or, an existing managerial relationship or work priorities place too much strain on the mentor-mentee relationship. Despite best efforts, it is not workable. You may need to end the mentoring relationship while there is still good will between the two of you.