
Tips for Mentors

Mentoring won't work if the people involved in the relationship don't have complimentary attitudes, approaches and respect for each other. Trust and respect form the foundation of a successful mentoring dyad.

To Succeed as a Mentor

Remember that your personality is your own, and you should not try to change it. In fact, it is one of the reasons that mentors are selected. However, it is useful to think about which aspects of your personality would be useful to replicate in others.

A mentor should act as a role model for the mentee, being a living example of the values, ethics, and professional practices of an organisation. Most mentees, in time, imitate the behaviour and attitude of mentors. Learning by example is a very effective way of developing the talent of the future. Your mentee will learn a lot about you while observing how you handle situations or interact with others.

For this reason, you should be constantly aware of how you appear to your mentee. You must strive for high standards of professionalism, show solid work ethics, and have a positive attitude. You should give your mentee an opportunity to learn the positive qualities of an experienced professional.

Some of these qualities are listed below (but please note that the list is not exhaustive, and not all mentors will display all of the characteristics).

A good mentor:

- Gives honest opinions.
- Challenges assumptions constructively.
- Gives feedback skilfully.
- Has a good range of networks and contacts that can be utilized appropriately.
- Has a wide and detailed knowledge of the organisation.
- Has the ability to establish good professional relationships.
- Creates trust and confidence in a relationship.
- Is culturally self-aware and open to differences.
- Feels comfortable about having their views challenged.
- Finds time to help.
- Is a positive role model in terms of my own achievements.
- Is always well prepared.
- Is accessible and easy to approach.

- Is encouraging.
- Is non-judgmental.
- Listens to the whole before commenting.
- Looks for the reality within which a mentee works.
- Is passionate about using their expertise to develop people.
- Willing to share knowledge.
- Is still willing to learn.
- Is a good negotiator/influencer.
- Understands their own strengths and limitations.
- Is able to analyse situations and cause/effect.
- Believes in mentoring and sees it as integral to their role.
- Has an understanding of development issues / opportunities.

Developing Trust and a Co-operative Relationship

Relationships develop at their own pace, and there is no 'magic formula' to making one work. However, the following tips will help you to build a great and mutually beneficial relationship with your mentee.

a) Be predictable and consistent. A mentor should keep their promises and be reliable. For example, if an appointment is scheduled to meet a mentee at a certain time, it's important to keep it except in exceptional circumstances. The time of both the mentor and the mentee is important, and should be respected. Being consistent with advice and attitude is also helpful. For example, if you encourage caution sometimes and risk-taking others, the mentee is receiving mixed messages and may stop valuing your advice.

b) Establish and respect confidentiality: A mentor should be non-judgemental and let the mentee know that whatever he or she wants to share with them will remain confidential, unless there is a clear reason for involving others. The outcomes of mentoring conversations should never be shared with others without the mentees permission.

c) Develop closeness: Once mutual respect and trust is established, a close and unique relationship should emerge. This doesn't necessarily mean that mentor and mentee spend a lot of time together, or start to neglect other important relationships. Rather it means that there is definite rapport, and both parties feel comfortable initiating contact and raising issues for discussion.

d) Maintain communication: All relationships have their ups and downs. People get different pressures from different sources, and sometimes this affects relationships, including the mentoring one. The mentee may start to feel the need to do things themselves, or ignore the mentors advice. Mentors should be prepared for this, and not

assume that something is wrong with the relationship if this happens. Instead, keep communicating and remain non-judgemental. Eventually, the relationship will re-establish itself.

e) Reassure the mentee: The mentee may be disappointed if they expect too much and feel that the mentor has no magic solutions, and is expected to find his own answers. In the long term, it is better for them and the organisation for them to do this. Be patient, give constructive feedback, and don't rush things.

f) Transfer the tacit knowledge: Tacit knowledge is a very valuable product of an individual's experiences. Tacit knowledge is what would make an individual an expert in his area. A mentoring relationship is the best opportunity to share the tacit knowledge with the mentee.