

## Mentor Match - What makes a good Mentor

### Communicate and listen

Your Mentee should ultimately oversee their own career path. You help them achieve whatever it is they want to achieve. Don't inject too much of your own desires or opinions into their plan. Ask them about their aspirations as well as their expectations of you. For example, are they looking for support, guidance or insight?

Make sure to target your approach. For instance, maybe you want to help someone who's experiencing a similar situation as you did, or perhaps you want to give someone opportunities they don't have access to.

If you and the Mentee share your hopes and desires for the relationship, you'll be able to establish a mutually valuable dynamic. Mentoring is not a one-sided conversation; it is an open discussion that encourages thoughts, questions and concerns.

This must also happen without judgment. If your Mentee feels too insecure to ask a question, you need to find a way to earn their trust and build their confidence. Communication is 99% of a quality Mentor-Mentee relationship. If the two of you can't clearly share ideas, thoughts, opinions and feedback, then it defeats the purpose of the relationship. A Mentee needs to be able to confide in the Mentor. Without this trust, the relationship will not succeed.

### Offer constructive criticism

While you don't want to judge or offend your Mentee, you shouldn't filter your feedback to avoid hurting them, either. There is a way to deliver criticism without breaking their confidence. Sharing your experience is a great way to send a message without criticizing them directly. For example, tell them about a mistake you made and how you learned from it. If the Mentee is savvy, they will see the comparison and the subtle message: "Don't do what I did, and here's why." The point is to educate, not tear down the person.

Mentees are unlikely to get everything right on the first attempt, so you need to be able to provide feedback constructively but effectively to ensure that they improve and progress. Instead of noting only the Mentee's mistakes or shortcomings, point out something positive, and then offer guidance to improve their work.

If a Mentee becomes sensitive or defensive, be as supportive as possible. Again, draw from your own experiences to explain a time you had a slip-up,

or simply redirect their attention to the progress and achievements they've made thus far. Self-deprecating humour is powerful in disarming a defensive Mentee and getting them to listen again.

## **Practise empathy**

It's important to relate to your Mentees and understand their perspective and feelings. If they're having a bad day, you should pick up on their energy and work to help them through it.

Empathy is a vital character trait of a good Mentor. You should be able to understand how your Mentee is feeling and how to best approach guiding them.

You might think empathy cannot be taught but, with practice, you can achieve higher levels of empathy. This requires effort: listening more, being curious about others, appreciating those who are different from you, illuminating any innate judgments, and educating yourself to break false stigmas and ignorant notions.

For instance, you can't expect everyone to progress at the same rate you did. You have different strengths, interests, backgrounds and experiences; be careful not to project immediate expectations onto your Mentee. A common mistake Mentors in very technical fields make is assuming a rising-star Mentee in the same field will perform, think and act the same way as the Mentor did. What might have been the challenge to pass for your generation may not be necessary or applicable now. Don't judge a Mentee because they didn't go through the same meat grinder you did to get a promotion.

Times change, and so do firms. If you can put aside your own feelings about how things were hard for you, you can speak far more clearly to someone who was able to avoid that challenge and still rise to the same role and expectations.

Patience is also an essential virtue of an effective Mentor – not everyone is going to grasp everything as quickly as you did, and not everyone is going to find your working method to be the most effective route for them.

If your process isn't helping, change it. Adapt as you go and include your Mentee in decisions.

## **Let your mentee make decisions**

Because you "know better," it might be tempting to take the wheel while your Mentee rides shotgun. This is not how your relationship should

operate. Your job as the Mentor is to help a Mentee learn their role, not to do it for them.

One of the most important skills the Mentee needs to develop, with your guidance, is the ability to think on the spot with competing demands and high pressure. Some call it creativity; others call it common sense. Whatever you call it, your Mentee has to be able to solve problems on the fly. Your role as a Mentor is to help them develop those skills.

Think of yourself as a driving instructor: You're sitting in the passenger's side, allowing your Mentee full control of the journey. However, you're still there to offer advice and directions or to pull the emergency brake if needed.

Add an element of autonomy to your structure once you have established a good relationship and trust level with the person you are mentoring. Give them some responsibility and allow them to make their own decisions in certain aspects of the job. This will encourage them to think for themselves and improve their confidence, showing you have faith in them.

If you believe in your Mentees, and you make that clear to them by allowing them control, they will have much more faith in both you and themselves.

## **Work on becoming a positive role model**

Your Mentee can learn a lot simply by observing and learning from your words and actions. They can pick up on how you behave and interact with others or a certain task at hand. If you're stuck on a project, your Mentee can watch to see how you react to any obstacles that may come your way. If you're negatively influenced by this task and it shows in your behavior, you may end up pushing the Mentee away or allowing them to see a side they start to believe is acceptable.

To set your Mentee on the right path, show them multiple ways of handling difficult situations and talk them through your process. Let them know that they have a choice to how they react to bad news or a failed project. This can be talking to their supervisor when they made a mistake or learning how to regroup when they've failed a task. With your experience, they can recognize the reactions that will hinder them or help them throughout any difficult time.

Being a positive role model is equally true when you're dealing with a good situation, or one that favours you. It's important to demonstrate the positive situation with wisdom and forward thinking, showing how you'd like to receive more of these experiences and what actions you can take to make that a reality.

You can also show humility in positive situations, meaning that you don't let success make you forget about the overall picture. This can be the downfall of many Mentors, where they push for success over learning experiences. A Mentee can see this happening and allow themselves to go down a path filled with half-earned successes. If you too have been down this path, explain to your Mentee how you learned from it and what you would do differently. Sharing your learning experience is the sign of both a good Mentor and a positive role model.

Allow your Mentee to make their own mistakes, however, they can learn valuable lessons from observing and learning from your own experiences.