



MENTORING

Mentoring is most often **defined** as a professional relationship in which an experienced person. (the **mentor**) assists another (the mentee) in developing specific skills and knowledge that will enhance the less-experienced person's professional and personal growth.

Today, **mentoring** is a **process** in which an experienced individual helps another person develop his or her goals and skills through a series of time-limited, confidential, one-on-one conversations and other learning activities. **Mentors** also draw benefits from the **mentoring** relationship.

12 Ways to Be an Amazing Mentor

(from my experience and ideas borrowed from Lindsay Kolowich and others)

1. Approach each mentorship differently.

While you can do your best to categorize a mentor/mentee relationship, everyone is unique. When you first begin, it's important to take the time to assess your own style and readiness and think about what kind of commitment you can and want to make.

Ask yourself and reflect on the questions on this list that are relevant to you:

- What kind of style do you naturally have/want?
- What expectations will you set regarding your style and how best to work with you?
- How will you know when your mentee is making progress and your relationship is successful?
- How will you communicate what progress or success looks like to her?
- What do you hope your mentee's development looks like over the course of your mentorship?
- How might you segment her experience into phases to get to a point?
- How will you use one-on-one time?
- How will you explain your expectations for one-on-one meetings so you are both on the same page?

2. Set expectations together in the very beginning.

Once you've reflected on the questions from #1, both you *and* your mentee will find it helpful to sit down and go over expectations -- especially if you're just getting to know each other.

3. Take a genuine interest in your mentee as a person.

A mentor/mentee relationship is a very personal one. You can give mediocre advice without really knowing a person, but to stand out as an amazing mentor, you're really going to have to get to know your mentee on a personal level.

Remember it's about the stuff that makes them ... *them*. Getting to know your mentee on a deeper level will help you build a strong relationship, and it'll also help you understand who they are as a person, their likes and dislikes, how they interact with others, and so on.

If your mentee tells you they had a great weekend, don't just move on with the program. Ask them what they did, whom they did it with, or what their relationship is like with those people.

One great way to get to know someone? Be an active listener. This is easier said than done: It means making a conscious effort to really, truly pay attention to what your mentee is saying, instead of thinking about what you're going to say next. You might worry that you need to come up with something helpful right away, when in fact, the best thing you can do for your mentee is to listen closely to what they're saying, ask open questions to dig deeper, and act as a sounding board.

I and all of my mentees have always had a note pad or composition book in which we kept notes to see if we were on track and to make sure that we both followed up when necessary. We also made certain that we set our next one-on-one meeting during the meeting at hand.

4. Know when to wait before giving advice.

When you're mentoring someone, you might feel pressured to give them advice straight away. But not all feedback is helpful feedback and giving unhelpful -- or unwelcome -- feedback can be detrimental to your relationship. An amazing mentor knows how to determine whether or not a situation lends itself to off-the-cuff feedback or really thoughtful feedback.

You can hit the "pause button."

What might that look like in a real conversation? *"Thanks for sharing this with me. I'm going to take some time and give this some serious thought before we continue. It's important to me that I'm giving you the best possible solution. Why don't we continue talking about it [tomorrow/next week/next time we meet]?"*

5. Improve your emotional intelligence.

Being emotionally intelligent is a big part of being an amazing mentor. Any time you become a mentor for someone, you'll find yourself getting to know their unique personality, their wants and needs, the experiences that have shaped them, and how they deal with different situations. The best mentors know how to unlock this information by asking the right questions, reading their mentee's body language, being open-minded, and even acknowledging and controlling their own emotions. ([Read this blog post for tips on becoming more emotionally intelligent.](#))

6. Don't assume anything about your mentee -- ask.

It's easy to fall into stereotypes or not see a situation from another person's perspective. But great mentors recognize that it's their responsibility to break through common assumptions by asking questions and digging deeper. This is especially true if you're mentoring someone who is as young as our scholarship recipients. If the two of you are just getting to know each other you may not be sure how transparent to be.

Your mentee may have "issues" with one or both parents or a sibling or a family pet or deciding upon a major in college, etc. Ask your mentee detailed questions about their relationship(s). Don't assume you understand anything about what is going on.

Only once you've gotten an honest background on a problem can you share helpful, relevant feedback -- without making decisions for your mentee. That's up to them but if they request help with a decision you can say something like, "well, if I were faced with this decision, this is what 'I' would do..." "...what are your thoughts about that?"

7. Be forthcoming about mistakes you've made.

Being open to sharing your own mistakes and failures is one of the best gifts a mentor can give. Not only is it helpful information for problem-solving purposes, but it also helps build trust, gives them permission to share their own mistakes, and strengthens the relationship overall.

"If you cop to your failures and struggles, you make it okay for them to chime in and help them share with you." You can reflect on the problems you faced and what tripped you up at the same point in your history at the point that your mentee is at now. Hearing how someone else approached a challenge is always helpful for someone going through it for the first time. Even if you don't solve problems the same way as your mentee, it's always useful to hear multiple perspectives. Ask your mentee how she would handle the situation before you tell her how you handled it.

8. Celebrate their achievements.

Because people often look for or call upon a mentor to help them with tough situations, many mentorship conversations revolve around the negative stuff. When you take the time to highlight and even celebrate your mentee's successes and achievements, you're not just balancing out the mood of those conversations -- you're also building your mentee's confidence, reinforcing good behavior, and keeping them focused and motivated. Depending on the relationship, mentees might also be seeking approval from their mentors -- and acknowledging their success is a way to satisfy that psychological need for recognition.

How you go about celebrating their achievements is entirely up to you. In one case, I bought a "cross" necklace for my mentee because she was Christian and her parents were atheistic and she "wished" she had a necklace like mine. I did that to celebrate all the accomplishments we made while reading an assigned book: ***"Attitude is Everything" by Keith Harrell (there is now a "workbook" to go with the book).***

9. Give more than you ask for.

I believe in the principle of "what goes around, comes around" and to "pay it forward." The best mentors that I've had selflessly offered their time and wisdom to me -- and I'm sure the best mentors *you've* had have done the same. Most mentees, inherently, have less to offer simply because they are younger and less experienced.

In one case, my mentee bought me a book for my birthday because she wanted to "give back." The book, ***"Choose Joy Because Happiness Isn't Enough," by Kay Warren*** was a great book that we read together and reviewed. We also developed things together from the book...none of us is too old to learn.

10. Seek out classes or projects related to skills your mentee wants to develop.

Great mentors look for situations -- and some even create situations -- where their mentees can get involved to learn some of the skills they've been hoping to learn.

You could send them a website link or to a conference or class they might want to sign up for. Take note of the areas in which your mentee wants to grow, and always be looking for opportunities to point them in the right direction.

Introduce projects to them to build a strong foundation, during the summer. This could be something that requires research and is genuinely valuable.

11. Solve for the long-term.

Work with your mentee as if you'll be their mentor forever. That mindset will make it easier for you to give them long-term guidance, which will help them make decisions that outlive their time with you, especially since they will be heading off for college and all mentees handle that experience differently. Some are excited, and some are anxious and worried.

12. Lead by example.

Last, but *certainly* not least, be a positive role model. Your mentee can learn a whole lot from you by simply observing how you behave. They'll pick up information about your "ethics, values, and standards; style, beliefs, and attitudes; methods and procedures," writes E. Wayne Hart for Forbes magazine. "They are likely to follow your lead, adapt your approach to their own style, and build confidence through their affiliation with you. As a mentor, you need to be keenly aware of your own behavior."

At the end of the day, being a great mentor takes practice and patience. The more you work with a given mentee, the more you'll learn about them: their communication style, how they process feedback, how they go about pursuing their goals. At the same time, you'll learn a lot about yourself like how effectively you can explain ideas in a way that others can understand, how well you're able to control your emotions, whether you're able to provide a vision that motivates others, and so on. In the end, being a mentor will likely be as rewarding an experience for you as it will be for your mentees. ...and remember to have fun.