
momentor

Maximizing Coaching Success

TIPS FOR FACILITATING AN EFFECTIVE MENTOR-MENTEE RELATIONSHIP

Here are 11 key points that mentors should keep in mind for a successful relationship:

- 1. Mentoring and Not Coaching.** If your mentee wants “coaching” they should work with an executive coach. Mentors certainly provide some soft coaching in areas of competency/skill development and knowledge acquisition, but mentoring is more than that. It's about having a personal relationship with a mentee that moves beyond coaching to discussing who the person is and what his or her passion, interests, values, and aspirations are.
- 2. Honor Your Time, Limits, and Boundaries.** Discuss and reach agreement with your mentee about boundaries, such as how often you can meet/communicate, areas of discussion that may be off limits, network contacts you don't want to share. Ask your mentee to do the same so that both of you have a clear and mutual understanding of these boundaries in your mentor-mentee relationship.
- 3. Giving Advice is Easy.** Truly listening to understand is the hard work. As an experienced and successful mentor it's easy to fall into the trap of wanting to tell, share and give advice. Sometimes what you say might actually be useful, valuable and exactly what a mentee needs and wants. More than anything, a mentee wants an experience sage and confidant to really hear and understand their career and organizational experiences. The best mentors seek to truly understand their mentees before being understood.
- 4. Support and Facilitate but Don't Model and Clone.** Keep in mind that you are sharing your mentee's journey—it's not about you. You might use yourself as an example or share “where you have been” but try to understand the uniqueness of your mentee and how this will help or hinder their professional journey within or outside the organization. The goal of the mentoring relationship is not to produce another “you” but to help the mentee find a way to manage his/her strengths, personality and style.
- 5. People Are Snowflakes.** What makes every mentoring relationship different is the uniqueness of each mentee. Truly try to identify his/her signature strengths, passions, interests, values and personality which is likely to be quite different in many ways from your own. Put time and effort into understanding what makes your mentee “tick” and you will find that you can be more beneficial to realize their professional development dreams.

- 6. Consistency Builds Habits.** First impressions are formed in minutes but relationships evolve and develop through ongoing interactions. Maintain an ongoing commitment to meet, speak and chat at least every other week for 1 to 1.5 hour (or reach a mutual agreement on the frequency and length of your meetings and keep it regular).
- 7. Feedforward is better than Feedback.** Genuine and honest feedback is the “currency” of mentoring. Seek to provide constructive tips, suggestions, ideas and recommendations for what your mentee can do in the future to help them truly become more effective. Candor and honesty are difficult to come by particularly as leaders move up in the organization. Remember, you are a “trusted advisor” and can be most helpful to your mentee when you model honesty and provide direct feedback but focus specifically on what the mentee can do more, less or differently in the future to be effective.
- 8. Enable and Not Solve.** Your role is to empower the mentee to think critically about solving their own problems. You have likely faced the same challenge or issue and the temptation is to provide the answer or give advice. The best mentors withhold the solution to problems but help the mentee explore possible courses of action and develop critical problem solving skills that will empower them to act independently in the future.
- 9. You Aren’t Responsible for the Mentoring Results.** It’s natural in a helping role and situation to feel responsible for the mentee’s success and/or possible failures within or outside the organization. You are not their boss, coach, or counselor. As a trusted advisor your role is to provide “an imperfect mirror” to the mentee regarding what you see and truly hear to help them navigate the political and practical side of their professional journey. The mentee has responsibility for their own career and professional success although you can play a critical role in helping them along the way.
- 10. Provide Resources and Homework.** Talent learn best by doing things on the job (in fact a good rule of thumb for talent development is the “70/20/10 rule” where 70 percent of learning is experiential, 20 percent is based on coaching and feedback and 10 percent is associated with reading, attending workshops, etc.). The more you can provide pointed resources, exercise, concrete skills to practice and additional homework assignments to deploy the more you will find that your mentee grows during the course of your mentoring relationship.
- 11. Evaluate Your Effort as a Mentor.** The best way to learn what you have contributed is to ask the mentee what you could do more, less or differently in your mentoring role. Your mentee may have expectations about the relationship that are unrealistic or things they might want you to provide that you are unable or unwilling. Check in with your mentee to define what things you could be doing to support them in your mentor role.