

Managing a Successful Relationship

Requirements

There are certain behaviors that could be considered requirements on the part of the mentee and the mentor in a mentoring relationship. These include:

- Taking initiative and risks.
- Accepting each other.
- Agreeing upon and working toward specific goals.
- Dealing effectively with unmet expectations or objectives.

Key Factors in Building an Effective Relationship

Research has shown that effective relationships have similar factors upon which they are built. These include:

- Mutual respect.
- Acceptance and flexibility.
- Honesty and direct communication.
- Preparation.
- Commitment.
- Some shared values.
- Trust.
- Willingness to work through obstacles.

Getting Off to a Good Start

The better your mentoring relationship starts, the better and faster you will start experiencing results. There are some ways you can ensure that you start out on the right foot.

1. Prepare for your first meeting with your mentee. Think about:
 - Your background (how have you gotten where you are now?).
 - What you hope to make of the relationship.
 - What you have to offer.
 - Questions for your mentee
 - What are their goals?
 - What is their background?
 - What can you provide for them?
2. Relax and enjoy the relationship. If they don't have any pressing needs at the time, talk to your mentee about the lessons you have learned throughout your career.

Setting Norms

Whether you are in a formal, informal, or situational mentoring relationship, it's important to establish norms, or guidelines, for how the relationship will work (doing this up front can help avoid needing to resolve differences later on). Both you and your mentee should give some thought to the norms you'd like to establish, have an open discussion about them, and come to an agreement. Some questions that can lead to norms might include:

- How often will you meet, and for how long each time?
- How you will communicate between meetings?
- Where will you meet?
- What will you do if a meeting has to be canceled or rescheduled?
- How will sensitive information be dealt with?

Aligning Your Abilities with Your Mentee's Needs

One of the most important tasks to perform in building and maintaining a productive relationship with a mentee is to be very clear with him or her about what you expect and what you can provide. Any relationship can flounder if there are unstated needs and expectations that are not being met. No mentor can meet all of the needs of a mentee, so it is crucial to give mentees a clear understanding of this, and talk about how you might help them in finding other mentors that might be helpful in areas that you cannot.

As a mentor, it's up to you to explicitly articulate your expectations to your mentee and engage in a conversation about whether those expectations are agreed upon. It is also important that you ask your mentee to articulate their needs and expectations of you, and to figure out whether those needs are realistic and appropriate.

Take some time now to jot down your expectations of your mentee, and their expectations of you. Some examples of expectations and assumptions might be:

- My mentee will follow through with agreed upon activities.
- My mentee will follow up with people that introduce them to.
My mentee will act professionally in settings that I invite them to.
- My mentee will be honest about their needs and ask for help early.
- My mentor will help me get into graduate school, find a job, etc.
- My mentor will give me clear advice about what I should do in a situation.
- My mentor will teach me ____ skills.
- My mentor will introduce me to (list names of people).

Have you shared your expectations with your mentee? What was the result?

Reciprocating the Relationship -- What Do You Have to Offer?

Be honest about what you are looking for in this relationship. As a mentor, you are a volunteer and would not expect to get paid. You should, however, want to receive some satisfaction from the relationship. In a recent survey, mentors listed what they hoped to receive from a mentoring relationship. One response stood out above all others. Mentors hoped to make "an important, long-lasting, positive change in another person's life, something that would help their mentees move forward into their future."

The only way that you can know how you are doing is if mentees tell you. Let your mentees know that you want to hear about their progress and that your payment is their success. Let them know that you do not need compensation, but that you do need them to pay forward the time and energy that you put into them, and that they should be a mentor to folks as they grow into their careers.

It's as important to talk about what you want from the relationship, as otherwise your mentee might feel as though they are a burden or that they cannot ask for help.