

HANDBOOK FOR STUDENT MENTEES

PURPOSE

The concept of mentoring has become a “cure-all” for whatever ails professional relationships or careers. Yet, how many people really know how to get the most out of being mentored? Simply being matched with a mentor is not enough. This handbook will guide you through the steps for initiating and maintaining a successful mentoring relationship.

A successful mentoring relationship is non-threatening and non-judgmental to both parties.

DEFINITION

There is a great deal of “magical thinking” about what happens when mentors and mentees come together. Mentoring skills are thought by many to be intrinsic, yet in many cases what passes as mentoring is not mentoring at all.

Broadly defined, a mentor is an advisor, teacher, counselor and role model. Formal mentoring programs, like ours, match a senior or more experienced person - the mentor - to a junior or less experienced person - the mentee or protégé. Mentors can help mentees to achieve, succeed in school, or prepare for the workforce through a one-on-one relationship that is non-threatening and non-judgmental to both parties. Typically, the mentor provides guidance, facilitates the transition from school to work, serves as a role model, counsels on different topics of concern, or offers insights and perspective on the world, relationships or any topic of interest to the mentee.

A mentoring relationship changes over time as the mentor and mentee grow, learn and gain experience in the relationship. A mentor may be a friend and a colleague, but neither is a necessary prerequisite to a successful relationship. Successful mentoring relationships can be formed regardless of the gender, age, ethnicity, race, educational level, field disciplines, marital and parental status of the mentee or mentor.

TYPES OF MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

Mentoring may take place at any age and in different types of settings, including schools and workplaces. Mentors may be older than their mentees, the same age, or even younger. A single mentee can have multiple mentors that mentor them in different ways or on different aspects of their lives. The most frequent types of mentoring relationships include:

- Peer Mentoring occurs when the mentee and mentor are the same age or of equal status within an organization. Common peer mentoring programs include big sister/big brother programs, student to student mentoring, and faculty to faculty mentoring.

- Group Mentoring occurs when a mentor has multiple mentees and meets with all or a group of them concurrently. In group mentoring situations, every mentee contributes to the experience, exposing each mentee to peer mentoring as well.
- Professional/Academic Mentoring is usually a one-on-one relationship between a mentee seeking assistance with career and professional development and a mentor who has experience working in either an industrial or business setting or in an academic setting.

Think about what your objectives are in a mentoring relationship.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives for having a mentor vary. As a student, you should expect mentoring to facilitate your personal and career development through a relationship with a role model in your field. Your specific objectives of being mentored could include gaining:¹

- Exposure to positive role models,
- Guidance that will ease the transition from school to work,
- Access to the professional community,
- Personal and career guidance, and
- An expanded horizon.

Remember that mentoring will not cure problems, magically open doors or get you a job. Try to be realistic about your goals for being in a mentoring relationship.

Remember to show interest in your mentor.

BENEFITS

True mentoring is a two-way relationship. Both you and your mentor will gain something. Some of the benefits you and your mentor may receive from mentoring include:²

Benefits of Having a Mentor	Benefits of Being a Mentor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual recognition, encouragement, and support. • Increased self-esteem and confidence when dealing with professionals. • Confidence to challenge oneself to achieve new goals and explore alternatives. • A realistic perspective of the workplace or academe. • Advice on how to balance work and other responsibilities and set priorities. • Knowledge of workplace “do’s and don’ts.” • Indoctrination to networking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Satisfaction of helping a student reach her academic and professional goals. • Recognition at work for participation. • An expanded network of professional colleagues. • Recognition for service to the community. • Increased self-esteem, self-confidence and affirmation of professional competence.

A mentor can help you meet new people, make career decisions, increase technical knowledge, develop career potential, develop as a person, and learn career-related politics.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF MENTORS AND MENTEES

In addition to clarifying your objectives for mentoring, you and your mentor need to understand your responsibilities in the relationship. Since this is a two-way relationship, each of you should be accountable for your own actions or neither will benefit. Being responsible in any relationship requires adhering to common and professional courtesies such as:

- being considerate
- returning phone calls and emails
- scheduling the next contact each time you meet
- attending scheduled meetings or calling to cancel
- notifying change of address, email, or phone number
- contacting each other on a regular basis
- following through on agreed upon responsibilities
- Ending the relationship if it does not work.

You and your mentor may decide upon specific responsibilities that need to be met during the mentorship. For example, your mentor may suggest that you read and discuss a book or article that will give you some insight on a particular topic. If you agree to this suggestion, and do not follow through, your inaction may seem like disinterest or disregard for your mentor's advice. You must be accountable to follow through on any of the responsibilities that you and your mentor agree upon.

We often hear from mentees and mentors that they have fallen out of touch. Sometimes this happens because a mentee feels as though their mentor is too busy or uninterested in them. If this happens, remember that your mentor volunteered to be a part of this program. Stop by their office or send them an email to help get the relationship back on track.

Being responsible in your mentoring relationship builds respect and trust.

SETTING EXPECTATIONS

Fundamental to successful mentoring is a common understanding of the expectations you and your mentor have for the relationship. Potential conflicts can be prevented if you set the ground rules for the relationship together at the beginning. After determining your own expectations of the mentoring relationship, meet with your mentor to go through a mentoring agreement. Doing this will allow you to make sure that you are both on the same page.

DEFINING YOUR OWN EXPECTATIONS

Before your first meeting with your mentor, reflect on your expectations for the relationship. By doing this in private, you can freely think about your own needs without being influenced by your mentor. You may use the “Expectation Worksheet” to facilitate your reflection. Examples of what mentors and mentees expect include:

Mentors expect mentees to be:	Mentees often expect mentors to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• aware of their own expectations• committed to the relationship• reliable• responsible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• guide and direct• recommend resources• invite mentees to tour their worksite• offer “hands-on” involvement• advise on the workplace climate• be problem-solvers• have real experience in their field.

Your and your mentor’s expectations may be different than those listed above. Do not limit yourself to these examples, but define your expectations based upon your own needs. As your relationship develops and grows, your expectations will change. Try to stay aware of your expectations and be sure to express them to your mentor.

Mentees expect their mentors to be good listeners, give frank feedback and be enthusiastic.

HOW TO INITIATE YOUR RELATIONSHIP

During one of your initial meetings with your mentor, you need to discuss expectations, protocols, and establish a set of objectives to work on in your relationship. A few things to discuss at your initial meeting include:³

- Define your roles in the mentoring relationship.
- Share what you have to offer in the relationship, i.e., knowledge, skills, resources, etc.
- Outline the concrete skills you hope to learn.
- Review the specific information you hope to gain.
- Clarify any limits that you may have for the relationship.
- Discuss how you want to deal with confidentiality issues.
- Determine any time constraints in the length of the mentoring relationship.
- Discuss your preferred ways of interacting: phone calls, email, or face-to-face.
- Decide on the number and length of contacts per quarter, and plan the dates and times in advance.
- Agree on a procedure for notifying each other if you will be late or absent.

- Exchange addresses, email addresses and/or phone numbers.
- Agree on the appropriateness of where and when to call.

Feel free to use this list or the checklist included in this packet when discussing these topics with your mentor. Discussing such topics may seem task oriented and unfriendly, but in fact, sharing your expectations, hopes, and desires up front with your mentor establishes an honest and open communication pattern. Both you and your mentor will begin to feel at ease and comfortable with one another as you discover mutual and shared expectations.

***Why do you want to be in a mentoring relationship?
Discuss this with your mentor.***

MENTORING AGREEMENTS

A formal method for establishing mentoring expectations is to draw up and negotiate an agreement.⁴ The success of the mentoring relationship will be determined to a great extent by the clarity and reasonableness of this agreement. The key components of an agreement include:

- Specific role of the mentor. Establish the role of the mentor first to focus the agreement.
- Objectives of the mentee. Tie expectations and objectives to skills and specific activities.
- Confidentiality parameters. Discuss how sensitive issues will be handled.
- Duration of relationship. Set a realistic and flexible ending date. Note that although some mentees and mentors choose to end their relationship after a year, many others remain matched indefinitely.
- No-fault termination. Discuss a no-fault conclusion wherein either mentor or mentee may end the relation with no questions asked.
- Frequency and type of meetings. Consider the specific activities to be accomplished and ease of contact when establishing meeting times and types.

A sample agreement form is included in this packet. You may use the form or a letter of mutual agreement.

***Drawing up an agreement with your mentor is a great
experience for your first meeting.***

GUIDELINES FOR MENTORING

FIRST CONTACT

Because your first contact with your mentor has been arranged by a formal program, you may feel anxious and hesitate. This is natural – relax before calling or emailing your mentor. She or he wants to talk to you. Remember your mentor has volunteered to help you through this stage of your professional development.

Through a phone call or an email, you will want to establish when and where to meet and what you will do. Remember it is wise to discuss expectations and goals during your first meeting. The first meeting should be informal and one that provides time for you to get to know each other. Break the ice by sharing some of your background, experiences and goals. It is also a good idea to schedule a second meeting right away or at least talk about when you will be back in contact.

Effective mentoring starts with your mentor getting to know you.

DEVELOPING A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

At the beginning of your relationship, you will probably feel excitement and energy. As time progresses, the relationship may fizzle due to lack of interest, procrastination, or busy schedules. You and your mentor should diligently schedule your next contact each time you meet. **If time lapses, you should not feel guilty, just give your mentor a call or send them an email!** It is okay to be busy and to have to postpone a meeting; however, it is not okay to allow the relationship to dissolve because of a lack of contact. If the reason you haven't contacted your mentor is that you can't think of anything to talk to them about, use this handbook, other parts of the mentoring packet, or the semi-monthly emails we send to think of conversation topics. If you are too busy to continue in the mentoring relationship, contact your mentor and end the relationship responsibly. If your relationship ends, please contact the mentoring program coordinator.

As your mentoring relationship develops, review your expectations, goals and objectives. Make it a habit to check-in with one another regularly.

CONVERSATION TOPICS

Your mentor will be interested in learning about you so that she or he can mentor in the best way possible. It may seem uncomfortable to talk about yourself at first, but remember that mentoring is all about helping you develop career potential.

Learning About You. Discussion topics that will help your mentor learn about you include:

- Academic. Which classes have you liked best or least and for what reasons? What progress have you made toward your degree? What sort of research are you involved with?
- Activities. What activities are you involved in, including recreation, community service, clubs, societies, and jobs?
- Background. What does your homelife look like? Do you have children? How has your family life affected your graduate school career?
- Career ambitions. Have you thought about life after graduate school? Do you want to work for a big company, a small company, a consulting firm, a research lab, government, or academia?

Learning About Your Mentor. Because your mentor has many life and career experiences to share, the list of possible discussion topics are lengthy. A table of questions is included in this packet. You might ask your mentor about:

- What she/he does at work,
- What her/his workplace and work climate is like,
- What she/he perceives as her/his future,
- Her/his perspective on job entry and preparation, and
- Her/his feelings about her/his career.

Climate Topics. In addition to discussions about your future career and your mentor's job, you may want to discuss workplace climate issues. Some suggestions for this topic include:⁵

- What positive and negative experiences have you faced in the work or academic environment?
- If you faced discrimination, how did you overcome it?
- Do you have any insights into the basic "political" realities and interpersonal conflicts which are common in the professional or academic setting?
- Did you ever feel like quitting school and what changed your mind?
- How have you balanced personal relationships, family and a career/education?

Semi-Monthly Emails. As a part of our program, twice a month, you will receive topical emails concerning issues about the personal and professional development of graduate students. One of the reasons that we send these emails is to give you ideas about conversation topics you can have with your mentee. If you're struggling to think about something to talk about, go back to these emails for ideas.

MENTORING ACTIVITIES

The exchange of ideas, information, and advice can take place in a variety of settings. Some of these are more relaxed and less formal than others. Depending upon the amount of time you and your mentor are able to contribute to your relationship, you may wish to participate in various activities that give you opportunities to share experiences and talk.

The types of activities you and your mentor engage in may depend on the nature of your relationship, as well as your mutual goals, objectives, and boundaries. Typical mentoring activities include:

- Phone calls
- E-mail
- Workplace or lab tours
- Breakfast, lunch, dinner, or coffee
- Campus events
- Professional society meetings
- Practice interviews
- Seminars
- Museums
- Sports
- Walks

DIVERSE MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

Many mentoring relationships are pairs of people with similar characteristics, such as gender, race, sexual orientation, nationality, socioeconomic group and age. When mentors and mentees have several dissimilar characteristics, they may face unique challenges. Conscious and unconscious biases may effect how individuals in these mentoring relationships interact. Mentors and mentees may find that they differ on other characteristics as well including family background, work experience, religion, and disability, among others.

Over the course of your academic and professional career, you will most likely have mentors of both sexes, just as you have friendships with both men and women.

MENTORING ACROSS IDENTITY GROUPS

Interactions between individuals whose backgrounds differ, be it by gender, sexual orientation, race or any other category, constitute cross-cultural communication⁶. Studies have revealed many differences in how individuals communicate based on their identity. These differences are often linked to nonverbal cues. Some nonverbal cues to be aware of include:

- If you are silent, you may be perceived as having nothing to say, even though you may just be pausing to review your thoughts. When you hesitate in responding to a question, do not remain silent. Communicate with a comment such as, "I need a moment to think about that."
- Perhaps you monitor your participation in conversations so you do not appear hoggish, selfish, or egotistical. If this causes you to limit your responses, indicate your feeling of dominating the conversation. Request to hear what others have to say, then respond to their comments. Try to remain participatory in discussions.
- If you and your mentor are in an environment which constrains you from talking freely, indicate this to your mentor. Mostly likely, you will be able to move to a location that makes both of you more comfortable, or he will be able to assist you in learning to adapt to such situations more easily.
- Pay attention to your body language. If you feel yourself leaning forward, trying to participate in the conversation, but are holding back, address your hesitancy with your mentor. He can make an effort to prompt you when he notices your non-verbal cues.

Interactions with people who have different backgrounds, cultures, and life experiences can be exhilarating and exciting. Both mentors and mentees in these sorts of mentoring relationships need to be aware of the similarities as well as the differences in their partners' backgrounds. Some issues both you and your mentor need to consider about your relationship include:

- What stereotyping could you be doing in the relationship?
- What is the difference in your education and access to professional experience?
- What constitutes an ideal role model?
- What are your mentor's cultural, religious, and family traditions?

- What are the similarities in your backgrounds?

Mentors are sometimes overly sensitive to differences and consequently reluctant to give negative feedback. It is important to indicate to your mentor that you appreciate and look forward to feedback.

POTENTIAL PITFALLS AND HELPFUL HINTS

Some of the most common problems in a mentoring relationship include:⁷

- Excessive time and energy commitments. You or your mentor may find you have situations arise that infringe on the time you planned to spend together. The proper way of handling this is to be honest about the situation. It is unprofessional to miss scheduled appointments with your mentor and it is important to the relationship to be able to find time to meet or talk with her/him.
- Inappropriate choice of mentor or mentee. You or your mentor may realize that you are not compatible. There are numerous possible reasons, including: you do not share the same technical area of interest; you or your mentor do not have some of the desired qualities; you or your mentor may sense that the other person is uninterested or not committed to the mentoring relationship. These differences do not necessarily warrant ending the relationship; you and your mentor should talk about ways that both of your needs can be met even if the match is not perfect. Be aware that these sorts of differences can be okay and can enrich your mentoring experience.
- Unrealistic expectations for mentors or mentees. Both of you will feel frustrated if one or the other's expectations for the mentoring relationship are not met. Clearly discussing the expectations and goals of the relationship, the amount of time, and activities will alleviate these problems.
- Expectations of mentee failure. If you feel that your mentor does not have faith in your abilities, you should ask your mentor to reassess her or his perception of you. Is the concern valid or are negative assumptions or stereotypes being made? If the mentor cannot change her or his feelings, both of you should promptly end the mentoring relationship.
- Mentee's feelings of inferiority. You may feel intimidated by your mentor. It can be detrimental to the relationship if you are not confident enough to utilize your mentor or to even contact your mentor. Remember that your mentor wants to be part of this relationship with you and wants to help you map out a successful career path.

It is unlikely that one mentor will have all the traits, skills, and characteristics you are seeking. Cultivate more than one mentoring relationship.

Occasionally some people encounter problems with their mentor that are more difficult to resolve. It is best to practice preventative behaviors that will avoid these types of conflicts. A few of the extreme problems that could arise are:⁸

- Unfair manipulation of one or the other. Mentors and mentees have the potential to manipulate each other in the relationship because they each want to be respected and want to make the relationship work

- Excessive jealousy of each other. Mentees and mentors can find that they are jealous of one another and their successes.
- Excessive jealousy from others. Other people may become jealous of your relationship with your mentor.
- Unwanted romance and sexual involvement. It is best not to become romantically involved with your mentor.
- Over dependence on each other. Mentees and mentors can find that they depend upon one another for too much.
- Harassment. Verbal or physical harassment, particularly in the form of sexual harassment, can occur between mentees or mentors. This is not acceptable.

If you feel that you are experiencing any of these behaviors from your mentor, please contact the Mentoring Program Coordinator and terminate the mentoring relationship. Even if the relationship seems valuable in other respects, the harassment will do you harm. If at all possible, seek advice from a trusted friend, colleague, or institution representative.

It is not necessary to form a deep friendship to mentor. In many cases, your relationship will be strictly professional.

RESOURCES: WHERE AND WHEN TO GO FOR HELP

There are many resources available at the University of Washington that can supplement the support that you receive from your mentoring relationship. Please see the list of resources included in your packet for more information. Among the resources listed are offices like the Graduate School, the Center for Career Services, and GO-MAP. Being familiar with these offices means that you know where to turn when you need help. You might also want to look at the Graduate School's Mentoring Guide available online at: <http://www.grad.washington.edu/mentoring/> .

The Mentoring Program Coordinator is another resource that you can make use of. Among the things that this person can assist you with:

- Getting in touch with your mentor
- Finding resources on campus
- Strategizing about how to work with your mentor; and
- Ending the mentoring relationship.

If you feel uncomfortable about something that is happening between you and your mentor, chances are something is going wrong. You need the opportunity to at least talk it out with someone else. A confidential discussion with a friend for their feedback may be all that is needed. In other cases, the nature of your discomfort may require more attention. Use your resources or contact the Mentoring Program Coordinator. These people are there to help you.

PERIODIC ASSESSMENT BY MENTORS AND MENTEES

Your mentor may question whether he or she is making a difference in your life. It may be many years before you will realize the positive effects of your mentoring relationship. As a result, your mentor may feel he or she is not having an impact on your career. To alleviate this situation, the two of you should periodically assess your relationship.

Re-examine your objectives together periodically to determine if both of you are getting something out of the relationship and meeting the expectations set during your first contact. You both may find that new expectations and goals need to be set for continuing your relationship. Over time you may find yourself:⁹

- Increasingly interested in meeting with your mentor
- Opening up to your mentor
- Paying more attention and asking more questions
- Happier at school
- Improving your academic performance
- More enthusiastic
- Feeling more like your mentor's colleague
- Improving your eye contact and smiling more

Your mentor will appreciate knowing that his or her effort makes a difference. Relay your positive experiences to your mentor whenever possible to show how he or she is affecting your life.

A formal assessment happens at the end of the end of the year: we distribute our end of the year evaluation. In this evaluation, we ask you to reflect on your match as well as the program. We will also ask whether you would like to remain matched with your current mentor for the following school year. You may want to talk to your mentor to assess your relationship before filling this out.

As mentoring relationships mature, they enter new phases. Be flexible and open to change.

SUMMARY

This handbook was designed to give you the fundamentals of effective mentoring. The topics covered have included the objectives of mentoring; your and your mentor's responsibilities; how to set expectations; guidelines for establishing and maintaining an effective mentoring relationship; diverse mentoring relationships; and a review of potential pitfalls in the relationship and how to handle them.

Mentoring relationships fill many different needs for different people; some last for a short period and others last a lifetime. Do not judge the quality of your relationship on the time it lasts, but on the level of growth you experience from interacting with one another.

¹ Brainard, S. and Ailes-Sengers, L. (1994). Mentoring female engineering students: A model program at the University of Washington. *Journal of Women and Minorities in Science and Engineering* 1, 2, 123-35.

² *ibid.*

³ Washington State Department of Personnel, *A guide to planning and conducting an agency's mentoring program*. Olympia, WA: 14.

⁴ Murray, M. with Owen, M. A. (1991). *Beyond the myths and magic of mentoring*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass Publishers.

⁵ Maestas-Flores, M. and Chavez, M. (1987). *PUENTE project: The mentor's guide*. San Jose, CA: Evergreen Valley College.

⁶ Simons, G. (1993). The ultimate cultural difference and how to bridge it. *Careers and the Engineer*, 32-33.

⁷ Phillips-Jones, L. (1982). *Mentors and proteges: How to establish, strengthen and get the most from a mentor/protége relationship*. New York: Arbor House.

⁸ Bozarjian, B. and others. (1993). *Workplace education mentoring pilot project. Final report*. Boston, MA: Massachusetts State Dept. of Education.

⁹ Weinberger, S. Ed. (1992). *The mentor handbook: A guide for adult volunteers, sponsoring companies or organizations and schools involved in a one-to-one mentor/student support program*. Norfolk, CT: Educational Resources Network, Inc.