

# Starter Guide for Mentees

Helpful Tips for the Mentorship Journey



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# Intro to Mentoring

## ***What is Mentoring?***

- Mentoring is a process in which an experienced individual helps another person develop their goals and skills through a series of time-limited, confidential, one-on-one, or group conversations and other learning activities.

## ***What Does a Mentor Do?***

- ***Acquire Resources***: brings critical readings, opportunities, or experiences to the mentee's attention
- ***Act as a Role Model***: offers insight on how they "made it" in the organization/ministry setting
- ***Advise***: shares professional wisdom, critiques performance, and makes suggestions
- ***Coach***: helps the mentee learn new skills and practice new behaviors
- ***Protect***: helps the mentee find new and challenging opportunities while protecting them from adverse forces and/or "dead-ends"
- ***Support***: listens with a sympathetic ear, explains unwritten rules, and acknowledges disappointments and triumphs

# Mentoring Best Practices

***Identify Your Goals***: Establishing clear goals will help you determine the overall direction of the mentorship.

- ***Clarify for Yourself***: What are you comfortable with in your mentoring relationship? Do you prefer a formal relationship that remains 100% 'professional'? Or would you like to get to know your mentor better, including their personal interests?
- ***Questions to Think About***: What do I want to achieve with this mentorship? What problems am I hoping to address? What's my biggest challenge currently? What has been my biggest victory? What time and how often would I prefer to meet?

# Your First Meeting

## ***Setting Goals and Objectives:***

As a mentee, consider coming to your first meeting prepared with answers to the following questions. This will help you both plan on how to progress, and what steps to take moving forward. This will be an ongoing process, as your goals and objectives are likely to evolve over a few conversations.

- What would you ideally like from this mentoring relationship?
- In six months' time, what would you like to have achieved?
- What specific help from your mentor would be most useful?
- How much time am I prepared and able to give to this?

## ***Practicalities and Who Will Take Primary Responsibility:***

- Deciding how often to meet, where and for how long
- Setting the agenda of each meeting
- Defining the goals of your mentoring relationship
- Reviewing progress throughout the mentorship
- Ground rules for the mentorship

## ***Confidentiality Limits and Other Important Topics:***

- What sort of confidentiality limits do you want to or need to work with?
- Will any written records be kept of your meetings and if so by whom?
- Inform your manager you are in a mentoring relationship (alert them to the time commitment involved).
- Get a better understanding of each other's background, experience, and current situation.
- Discuss any previous mentoring that either of you has been involved with. Use this learning to work out what worked well and what didn't.

# Group Mentoring

## ***What Exactly is Group Mentoring?***

- Group mentoring is more similar to traditional mentoring in that the mentee is still driving the relationship. Each mentee has their own learning and developmental goals, which may or may not be similar to the other mentees in the group. To help mentees achieve these learning goals, mentors will ask questions, share relevant stories, and complete learning activities. Group mentoring is a confidential, safe space for mentees to share their struggles.

## ***Benefits of Group Mentorships***

- A major benefit to mentees is that they can feel much more comfortable in a group setting rather than one-on-one, taking out some of the intimidation that can come with one-on-one mentoring.
- Mentees get multiple perspectives at the same time, as there are different people available in the room. This experience can provide mentees with a richer, more complex understanding of various issues.
- Group mentoring can accelerate network building for mentees. Not only are mentees able to build a relationship with their mentor but mentees are also able to build relationships with their peers in the group mentorship setting.
- Group mentoring helps mentors increase their influence.
- Mentors and mentees can further develop their communication skills.

# One-on-One Mentoring

## ***What Exactly is One-on-One Mentoring?***

- One-to-one mentoring is the traditional model of mentoring in which a more senior individual is paired with a more junior individual in order to provide guidance, support, and encouragement. One-on-one mentoring is a confidential, safe space.

## ***Benefits of One-on-One Mentoring:***

- Increased self-confidence
- Increased self-awareness
- Leadership skill development
- Strong communication skills
- Art of delivering feedback
- Art of asking questions
- Becoming a good listener
- Exposure to new and different perspectives
- Growing a personal network
- Increased job satisfaction
- Supporting another person
- Learning from someone else

# Navigating Potential Challenges

Mentoring relationships don't always magically 'gel'. It takes intentional effort on both sides to ensure an effective mentoring relationship over time.

## ***Potential Challenges and How to Overcome Them***

- ***Too Much Respect for Time:*** A primary reason that mentorships do not 'take' from the very start is an overly pronounced concern for the mentor's time: Mentees may be hesitant to "bother" their mentors with "silly questions". Conversely, mentors who are not regularly asked for help often do not wish to seem "pushy" and thus do not contact their mentees without an express invitation. While well-intentioned, such concern for the mentoring partner's freedom, time, and independence often has a negative impact on the usefulness of the mentorship and on the mentoring partners' attitudes toward mentoring in general. A large part of the success of a mentorship lies in the trust that builds up over time when mentors and mentees get to know one another. This trust builds through informal and regular contact and is what will allow the mentee to share any difficulties, ask important questions about being effective, and get honest answers. It is important for both the mentor and the mentee to be proactive in the relationship so that the mentee gets the support they need for success. Mentors cannot begin to help if they have not spoken often enough with their mentees and do not know what their primary questions and concerns are.
- ***Unrealistic Expectations:*** Some mentees may have unrealistic expectations for their mentors. One mentor cannot be the only resource on every topic. However, out of respect for the experience of their mentor, they can overestimate the information and guidance a single person can provide. They may also not be aware that they should always be looking for additional sources of information to help them get their questions answered. Being seen as the only source of relevant information may feel somewhat unfair to you as the mentor and result in you sometimes feeling overwhelmed by the relationship. Mentors should be able to discuss with their mentees the value of gathering multiple perspectives and building multiple mentoring relationships that can act as additional resources. Mentors should also admit when they do not have expertise in a particular area and look for other people who might be appropriate resources on that topic and help the mentee build a solid support network.
- ***Relationships That Don't "Gel":*** Research shows that assigned mentors are as effective as mentors chosen by the mentee. However, it is important to remember that, through no fault of the mentee or the mentor, some relationships may never gel. This possibility is much less likely if you begin your mentorship with a frank and honest discussion about what you want and need and how you see the role of mentor and mentee. As a part of its foundation, any mentorship should have a no-fault termination possibility so that mismatched mentoring partners are not trapped in a negative relationship.

## Navigating Potential Challenges Cont.

- ***The "Seasons" of a Mentorship:*** All mentorships undergo changes as the needs of the mentee are gradually met. A successful mentee often becomes increasingly independent of the mentor, which can lead to disappointment on the mentor's part as contact with the mentee declines or changes. Mentors and mentees need to take into account the natural "seasons" of a normal mentoring relationship and accept that contact may vary over time.
  - ***Building the Base:*** During the first three to six months, the mentor and mentee are getting to know each other, building trust, and developing expectations of each other. The interaction which occurs at this stage lays the foundation for a strong and beneficial relationship.
  - ***The Middle Period:*** The middle phase of a mentoring relationship is typically the most rewarding time for both mentor and mentee. The mutual trust which has developed between them can give the mentee the confidence to ask questions, share concerns and disappointments, and even challenge the ideas of the mentor. Likewise, the mentee's ideas can be challenged by the mentor, who can help the mentee think more strategically.
  - ***Loosening of the Relationship:*** Often, the relationship begins to draw apart after a year or two. It is important, at this stage, that the mentor discusses with the mentee how they wish to continue their relationship.
  - ***Questions to Check the Process of the Relationship:***
    - What's going well?
    - What needs to be changed?
    - How do we feel about the structure, format, activities?
    - What other topics/activities would be helpful that we haven't tried?
    - In what other areas does the mentee still need guidance?
- ***Redefining the Relationship:*** Here, the mentoring relationship enters a new phase, where the mentor and mentee begin to regard one another more as equals. At this point, the relationship may continue as a productive, collegial one that might even beget new collaborations or begin to cool as the mentee gains independence and distance from the mentor. This cooling of the relationship can sometimes be hurtful to mentors, considering the time and effort they have put into helping their mentees. However, it is important not to take a cooling relationship personally. It is a normal phase in some kinds of mentorships and simply shows that the mentee has developed their own directions and confidence.