

Starter Guide for Mentors

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. Mentors also draw benefits from the mentoring relationship. As a mentor, you will have the opportunity to share your wisdom and experiences, evolve your own thinking, develop a new relationship, and deepen your skills as a mentor.

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

Adapted from [Mentoring Basics - A Mentor's Guide to Success](#)

How to Be a Successful Mentor

Listen Actively

- Listening actively is the most basic skill you will use throughout your mentorship.
- Active listening not only establishes rapport but creates a positive, accepting environment that permits open communication. By listening actively, you will better understand your mentee's interests and needs.
- Show interest in what they are saying, and reflect back on important aspects of what they have said to show that you've understood.
- Use body language (such as making eye contact) that shows you are paying attention to what they are saying.
- If you are talking to them by phone, reduce background noise and limit interruptions. Your mentee will feel that they have your undivided attention.
- When utilizing e-mail, answer within 24 hours if possible, and be sure your message is responsive to their original message.
- Reserve discussing your own experiences or giving advice until after your mentee has had a chance to thoroughly explain their issue, question, or concern.

Build Trust

- Trust is built over time. You will increase trust by keeping your conversations and other communications with your mentee confidential, honoring your scheduled meetings and calls, consistently showing interest and support, and being honest with your mentee.

Determine Goals and Build Capacity

- As a role model, you should have your own career and personal goals and share these, when appropriate, with your mentee. It is also likely that they will ask you how you set and achieve your own goals.
- Help your mentee identify and achieve their career and personal goals.
- You will develop your mentee's capacity for learning and achieving their goals by doing the following:
 - Assisting them with finding resources such as people, books, articles, tools, and web-based information
 - Imparting knowledge and skills by explaining, giving useful examples, demonstrating processes, and asking thought-provoking questions
 - Helping them gain broader perspectives of their responsibilities and organization/ministry
 - Discussing actions you've taken in your career and explaining your rationale

How to Be a Successful Mentor Cont.

Encourage and Inspire

- Here are some ways to encourage your mentee:
 - Comment favorably on their accomplishments
 - Communicate your belief in their capacity to grow personally and professionally and reach their goals
 - Respond to their frustrations and challenges with words of support, understanding, encouragement, and praise (just knowing that someone else has been there can be tremendously helpful)
- Here are some ways you can inspire your mentee:
 - Share your personal vision or those of other leaders
 - Describe experiences, mistakes, and successes you or others have encountered on the road to achieving your goals
 - Talk with them about people and events that have inspired and motivated you
 - Introduce them to your colleagues who can be additional useful contacts or inspiring models

Stay on Track

- Plan effective meetings.
- Make meeting commitments and stick to them.
- Identify action steps. Mentors and mentees should work together to develop action steps for each mentoring objective. Action steps should demonstrate how you will reach your objectives.

Adapted from [Mentoring Guide: Center for Health Leadership & Practice](#), [Career Connect Mentoring Guide](#)

Mentoring Best Practices

Identify Your Goals: Establishing clear goals will help you determine the design, format, and overall direction of the mentorship.

- **Clarify for Yourself:** What are you comfortable with in your mentoring relationship and how do you see your role as a mentor? Do you prefer a formal relationship that remains 100% 'professional'? Or would you like to get to know your mentee better, including their personal interests?
- **Questions You Might Ask Your Mentee:** What do we want to achieve with this mentorship? What problems are we hoping to address? What's your biggest challenge currently? What has been your biggest victory?
- **Information to Discuss With Your Mentee:** What digital platform you would prefer to use when meeting. Would you prefer the mentee come prepared with questions or would you prefer they come ready to learn based on what they expressed they are desiring to gain from the mentorship or both? Expectations of both mentors and mentees.

Provide Guidelines: We recommend establishing general guidelines. When your mentorship has a structure and a clear set of expectations, all the participants will have a strong foundation to work off of. This also ensures consistency throughout the mentorship.

- **Offer Guidance in Areas Such As:** What time and how often you all will meet. How to track progress. How to navigate potential challenges.
- **Flexibility:** While you want to offer some structure, you also want to build in flexibility. This allows you and your mentee(s) to create a relationship that works for their specific goals and schedules. For example, you can recommend meeting at least once a month – but it's up to the participants whether they want or need to meet more frequently.

Adapted from [8 Mentoring Program Best Practices](#), [Mentoring Best Practices: A Handbook](#)

Guidelines

Avoid Over-Mentoring

- Over-mentoring is an easy trap to fall into for any well-meaning mentor. It is tempting to see your own career or experiences as a template for success for your mentee. You can and should certainly express caution about things that you see as potentially detrimental, but it will be important not to prevent your mentee from taking reasonable risks in developing their career—their creativity and perspective may help them to build new directions that were not available to you and your colleagues. Above all, avoid confrontation with your mentee—try to remain a source of information and encouragement rather than a parental figure of authority.

Learning Facilitator

- Think of yourself as a “learning facilitator” rather than the person with all the answers. Help your mentee find people and other resources that go beyond your experience and wisdom on a topic.

Ask Probing Questions

- Emphasize questions over advice-giving. Use probes that help your mentee think more broadly and deeply. If they talk only about facts, ask about feelings. If they focus on feelings, ask them to review the facts. If they seem stuck in an immediate crisis, help them see the big picture.

Share What You Know

- When requested, share your own experiences, lessons learned, and advice. Emphasize how your experiences could be different from their experiences and are merely examples. Limit your urge to solve the problem for them.
- Resist the temptation to control the relationship and steer its outcomes; your mentee is responsible for their own growth.
- Help your mentee see alternative interpretations and approaches.
- Build your mentee’s confidence through supportive feedback.

Encourage & Inspire

- Encourage, inspire, and challenge your mentee to achieve their goals.
- Help your mentee reflect on successful strategies they have used in the past that could apply to new challenges.
- Be spontaneous now and then. Beyond your planned conversations, call or e-mail “out of the blue” just to leave an encouraging word or piece of new information.

Your First Meeting

Setting Goals and Objectives:

As a mentor, you may wish to ask the following questions of your mentee during the first meeting so that you can plan how to progress, how you will track your success, and what steps you both need to take. 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?
- How will you know if you've made progress?
- What specific help from me would be most useful?

Things to Consider & Discuss - For the Mentor & Mentee:

- What I am hoping to get out of this mentoring relationship
- How much time I am prepared, and able, to give to this
- What ground rules do we need to discuss

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?
- Should you be in touch in between meetings or not?
- Will any written records be kept of your meetings and if so by whom?
- How will you review the mentorship and deal with any problems?
- Inform your manager you are in a mentoring relationship (not to seek permission, but alerting them to the time commitment involved).
- Although things will change over time, at the first meeting set up some initial ways of working to begin the process.
- 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.

Adapted from [Guidelines for Mentors and Mentees](#)

Example: First Meeting Agenda (One-on-One & Group Mentorships)

Introduction/Prayer

- Mentor outlines what they have planned for the session
- Mentor asks mentee(s) what they have planned
- Agree on the meeting agenda and clarify how long the meeting will last

Get to Know Mentee(s)

- What the mentee currently does in relation to work activities
- Explore education and career history and career aspirations
- Discuss motivation
- What do they want to get out of the mentorship?
- Optional icebreaker

Let Mentee(s) Know About You

- Your current job and your career history
- What has motivated you?
- Have you always been clear about your chosen career path?
- Why you want to be a mentor and what you want to get out of the experience
- Your preferred working style – how they can get the best from you

Come to a Mentorship Agreement

- Discuss the objectives of the mentoring relationship
- Frequency/Time of day/Length of meeting time
- Meeting norms
- Expectations

Next Steps

- Decide what will be covered in the next session
- Set a date and time for the next meeting
- Agree to any pre-meeting work either of you needs to do
- Confidentiality – explain what it involves and make an agreement
- Allow time to get feedback
- Put the one-on-one or group norms agreed upon in writing and send it to mentee(s) or have it available at the next meeting

Adapted from [Guidelines for Mentors and Mentees](#), [Group Mentoring Manual for Mentors](#)

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 many feel 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.

Adapted from [What is Group Mentoring?](#)

One-on-One Mentoring

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 chance of promotion
- Increased job satisfaction
- Supporting another person
- Paying it forward
- Learning from someone else

Downsides of One-on-One Mentoring:

- One-on-one mentoring relationships often run into some mentoring challenges. First, a mentoring relationship often depends on the rapport or “chemistry” between the mentor and the mentee. If the relationship is awkward or uncomfortable, the mentee isn’t likely to share much or be vulnerable with the mentor, and the success of the relationship will be limited.
- Everyone isn’t always comfortable with one-on-one mentoring.
- There may not be enough people with adequate mentoring skills available to those who need mentoring. As a result, some potential mentees miss out on important development opportunities.

Adapted from [What is Group Mentoring?](#)

Mentorship Benefits

Benefits for Mentees

- Improving self-confidence and self-esteem
- Broadening horizons and accessing new experience
- Recognizing achievements and raising aspirations
- Motivation
- Improved performance
- Job satisfaction
- Networking opportunities
- Self-directed learning
- Career opportunities and career mobility
- Opportunities to give and receive feedback
- Opportunities to demonstrate strengths and explore potential
- Develop visibility within or outside an organization
- Being challenged to use talents and share expertise

Benefits for Mentors

- Enhanced coaching and listening skills
- Opportunities to develop and practice your personal style of leadership
- Learn new perspectives and approaches
- Opportunities to put something back into the industry
- Gain additional recognition and respect
- Personal satisfaction
- Opportunity to exercise your creativity
- Extended professional/community networks
- Experience in dealing with challenging situations
- Demonstrate expertise and share knowledge and skills
- Be aware of new opportunities

Adapted from [Guidelines for Mentors and Mentees](#)

Mentorship Activities

Suggestions for Activities

- Introduce your mentee to colleagues and “useful” people in and outside of the ministry/organization, so they can benefit from a range and variety of insight.
- Share resources as well as explain any ministry-based best practices.
- Help your mentee locate basic written information on teaching and research activities related to their goals, career, and development.
- Attend webinars or virtual conferences together and then discuss what you learned afterward.
- Provide books and devotional materials that you are familiar with that have aided you in the past or present.
- Include times of prayer together, invite the Lord into your meetings.

Adapted from [Mentoring Best Practices: A Handbook](#)

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.