

Quick Guide: How to be a Mentee

Mentoring can be a fulfilling experience or a waste of time. Like baking a cake, the outcome will depend on using the right ingredients and following the recipe.

When done well, mentoring offers you the opportunity to accelerate your success in accomplishing goals, and, in the process, grow and develop your human potential. It is that powerful.

Essential Ingredients:

- A goal
- Someone committed to contributing to your success in accomplishing that goal
- Determination and perseverance
- Willingness and commitment to learn from others
- Ability to prioritize the commitment
- Trust and confidentiality

Recipe:

1. Start with a Goal

Mentoring is all about accelerating the success of goals: yours and your Mentor's. Without a goal, you just have a new acquaintance without a compelling reason to meet on a regular basis. As a Mentee, you need to understand where you want to go and what you want to accomplish in order for your Mentor to contribute to that goal and help accelerate your success.

2. Establish a Structure

A structure identifies the logistics of this relationship. How often, how long, and who is responsible for what aspects of the relationship. An intentional structure will help prevent the most common pitfalls (see #9 below) and ensure your experience is meaningful and your relationship is effective.

3. Build Trust

Every effective mentoring relationship is grounded on trust. If you want your Mentor to share their experiences and insights with you, they need to trust you. And if you are going to be willing to share your aspirations and fears with your Mentor, you need to trust them.

While trust grows organically over time, you need to accelerate the trust you have with your Mentor in order to quickly move your conversations and your relationship from an acquaintance to a confidante. The best way to accelerate trust is to look for commonalities and be interested in the differences. We bond over commonalities, and we are drawn to people who are interested in us (not just interesting to us). When trust is important, drive it with your curiosity in and fascination with your Mentor.

4. Incorporate Mentoring Activities

With planned activities, you will learn through experiences and in the conversations that you create afterwards with your Mentor. Some examples of mentoring activities include: shadowing, observing, role playing before and debriefing after situations, practicing of skills, reading books and articles, working on projects, preparing for presentations, attending workshops and programs, career planning (ex: Individual Development Plan), and using a 360 or a self-assessment. Ask your Mentor to suggest some activities, and then schedule time to debrief each activity with your Mentor to glean their perspective and insights.

5. Engage in Confidential Mentoring Conversations

Confidentiality is a foundational premise of mentoring. You and your Mentor expect confidentiality, and only with it can you each engage in authentic and vulnerable mentoring conversations.

To create true mentoring conversations, you each need to ask questions. Questions are the gateway for you to access your Mentor's wisdom, and for your Mentor to understand your aspirations and challenges.

To best direct your Mentor in providing you with their advice, perspectives, and ideas, ask these 5 questions:

1. Why did you decide to _____?
2. Why did you decide not to _____?
3. What would you have done differently?
4. Based on my goals, what could I be doing differently?
5. Who else should I know, what else should I read or do?

To best offer you advice, perspectives, and ideas, your Mentor will likely ask you these 5 questions, so be prepared to answer them:

1. What do you want to be, do, or accomplish (in this conversation, relationship, career, etc.)
2. What's working?
3. What's not working?
4. What are you already doing? / What have you already tried?
5. Where do you need the most help? / How can I help?

By asking questions, you set the stage for you to receive and for your Mentor to offer appropriate, relevant, and desired advice.

6. Seek Advice, Perspectives, and Ideas

At its core, mentoring is about advice. Mentoring happens when your Mentor: offers you advice based on his/her own experiences in similar situations provides you his/her perspective on a situation or their viewpoint or experience of you shares with you their ideas, connections, and resources to help you accelerate the success of your goals

7. Commit to Vulnerability, Integrity, and Authenticity

One of the best things you can do in the relationship is to leverage the safe space your Mentor is creating for you. This allows you to discuss your aspirations and goals, process your concerns or upsets, work through any issues or fears, and explore various solutions. And to maintain that safe space, you must exhibit vulnerability, integrity and authenticity.

8. Give and Get Feedback

The brilliance of mentoring is that your Mentor is not responsible for your paycheck or your performance review. Your Mentor's feedback comes without agenda. As such you can receive your Mentor's feedback as a genuine contribution to your goals, rather than a personal attack or criticism.

Feedback is essential in the mentoring process, not just at the end, but throughout the relationship. With feedback your Mentor can help you identify actions and behaviors that are contributing to your goals and those that may be contaminating your success. If you are not receiving such feedback, you need to ask your Mentor to provide it. Sometimes you just need to give your Mentor permission to contribute to you in this invaluable way.

9. Prepare for the Pitfalls

There are 6 challenges that could sabotage your relationship: Time, Distance, Support, Direction, Chemistry, and Courage. Each of these can be managed with structure, priority, and intentionality. Instead of waiting for these pitfalls to occur, plan for them in advance with your Mentor.

10. End the Commitment, Redefine the Relationship

When the goal has been accomplished or the time commitment of the program has ended, you need to acknowledge that, while your relationship is not ending, the commitment to work together in this capacity is. Express appreciation for how your Mentor has made a difference for you, acknowledge the progress and growth you each experienced, and determine how you and your Mentor plan to stay connected going forward.

Summary

Being a Mentee is an opportunity, a privilege, and a pleasure. With intentionality it can be a meaningful and effective experience for you and your Mentor.