

Mentorship



MENTORSHIP

A partnership through which a person with more experience, expertise, or wisdom (mentor) consciously helps teach, develop, and help a person with less experience (protégé) learn and achieve his/her personal and/or professional goals.

IMPORTANCE OF MENTORSHIP

Successful mentorship benefits not only the protégé, but also the mentor and the organization.

- The protégé gains professional growth, an expanded professional network, emotional support, and increased job satisfaction.
- The mentor enjoys a different perspective of the organization and the increased effectiveness of the protégé, gains a reputation of successfully developing future leaders, and helps others manage their careers by giving back.
- Mentorship helps the University by managing knowledge within the organization, providing leadership development at all levels, improving retention through continuous development opportunities, creating a culture of giving aligned with the University's motto, and increasing the sense of belonging for employees.

FOCUS AND ROLE OF THE MENTOR

Provide a Safe Place

Protégé means "a person under the patronage, protection, or care of someone interested in his or her career or welfare." When mentors provide a safe haven, protégés are more willing to express their concerns or opinions without fearing judgment. Encourage calculated risks and ensure that the protégé learns from mistakes. Forming a relationship of trust and openness is a necessary first step in mentorship.

Inspire Excellence

To inspire excellence, you must believe in the protégé's abilities, encourage the protégé, and celebrate successes along the way. Be appropriately available and approachable to the protégé since mentorship cannot take place from a distance, and energize the protégé for the work ahead. Most importantly, model the excellence you wish to inspire.

Educate and Challenge

While the focus of mentoring should not be on you, the protégé wants to and will benefit from hearing your experiences and lessons learned along the way. A good mentor uses a holistic approach and focuses not only on current projects, but also on soft skills such as organizational politics and norms and on personal goals that may enhance the protégé's career. Create opportunities for the protégé to be challenged, such as an assignment or project that aligns with his or her goals. Consider bringing the protégé to meetings or social events to expose them to new ideas and to create a supportive network.

QUALITIES TO LOOK FOR IN A PROTÉGÉ

They possess admirable character.

They model integrity, humility, and compassion, and constantly strive to be better. This is the foundation of a truly great leader who will also be a great student.

They are committed to their work and to others' success.

They view their work as more than just a job and have high expectations of themselves. They care deeply for the University and for their colleagues and demonstrate a clear affinity for the mission. The best protégés realize that the world does not revolve around them; they are excited to take what has been given to them in the mentoring relationship and use it to invest in their community.

They are adventurous and proactive.

They are not afraid to try new things and take calculated risks. Personal and professional growth often requires challenging one's self and thinking outside of the box. A mentor's time is limited and while the mentoring relationship is a priority, it is also helpful to know that the protégé is taking appropriate action without constant oversight.

Mentorship in Action



THEMES TO EXPLORE

Setting Professional Goals

It is beneficial to discover the protégé's dreams and desires so that goals may be set to realize them. Ask the protégé specific questions about their professional goals, such as: "What are your goals? What work do you want to do? What do you want to know? Where do your passions lie? What skills do you want to develop? How can I help?"

Encourage the protégé to set effective goals (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, challenging, timely, written).

Deepening Self-Awareness

Identify the protégé's strengths by asking, "What was the best day at work you've had in the past three months?" Find out what the person was doing and why she enjoyed it so much. This question will prompt the protégé to start thinking about her interests and abilities from this perspective. A strength is not merely something the protégé is good at. In fact, it might be something she is not good at yet. It may just be a predilection, something she finds so intrinsically satisfying that she looks forward to doing it again and again and getting better at it over time.

Identify the protégé's weaknesses by asking, "What was the worst day at work you've had in the past three months?" Probe for details about what he was doing and why it grated on him so much. As with a strength, a weakness is not merely something the protégé is bad at; in fact, he may be quite competent at it. It is something that drains his energy, an activity that he never looks forward to doing and that when he is doing it, all he can think about is stopping.

Developing Problem Solving Skills

Asking questions to help the protégé create viable solutions is a key tenant in developing problem solving skills. In some instances, answering the protégé's questions with more questions is a good development tool. For instance, if the protégé asks, "How should I report the changes in our schedule?" you may answer with questions such as, "What are the goals of your communication?" or "How will you get feedback on the changes?" When the protégé makes a mistake, you may ask what she is going to do about it. After asking probing questions, you may decide to share your experience and ideas to help the protégé overcome challenges.

FORMING QUESTIONS

Plan what you intend to say.

Especially at first meetings, consider what points you want to cover and in what order. How do you want the protégé to feel during and after your meeting? What is the purpose of your meeting?

Ask specific questions.

Specific questions elicit specific answers, which helps the protégé develop critical thinking skills and promotes learning. For instance, you may ask, "In what ways did your planning succeed or fail?" or "What were some of your specific contributions to its success or failure?" Ultra-generalized and open-ended questions are mostly unhelpful. "What do you want to talk about?" and "How are things going?" rarely provide useful information and quality dialogue.

Avoid "why" questions.

"Why" questions may put the protégé on the defensive because they imply that you have already made judgments about the protégé's actions. Instead of asking, "Why did you do that?" you may want to ask, "Can you tell me more about the thinking process that led to your decision?" or "Help me understand your decision."

Avoid "yes" and "no" questions.

Such questions end dialogue and do not elicit thoughtful insights from the protégé. Instead of asking, "Do you think the staff respects you?" you may choose to ask, "What are some of the specific qualities for which the staff respects you?"

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