Becoming An Effective Mentee

Those who seek mentoring will rule the great expanse under heaven.

Chu Ching, Chinese Book of History
Circa sixth Century B.C.

The power of mentoring has been recognized throughout the ages. Your company believes in you and in the power of mentoring and has chosen to sponsor you in this unique, rewarding experience. The opportunity to develop a relationship with a highly successful senior executive is a privilege open to only a few. Those who take maximum advantage of this opportunity will indeed "rule the great expanse under heaven."

Through our experience with hundreds of mentors and mentees, we have observed the behaviors that lead to the most effective and productive partnerships. Mentor feedback and our experience confirm that the best partnerships occur when mentees:

- Respect the commitment being made by their partner.
  This respect manifests itself by being prepared and on time for meetings, following through on action items, and acknowledging the mentor's dedication and support.

- Participate fully in the program.
  Commitment to the program and your peers is essential if you are to reap the benefits of your mentoring experience. For example, attending monthly developmental forums and building networking and support relationships with your peers show your commitment.

- Assume responsibility for the partnership.
  The responsibility for managing the mentoring partnership clearly belongs to the mentee. The best mentoring experiences occur when mentees take ownership for their growth, invest in the partnership, and create a vision for their journey of discovery. Where mentees lead, mentors will follow; mentees should select the destination and make the journey memorable.
- Are open to new ideas.
The purpose of the mentoring experience is to open mentees to new possibilities and perspectives. The best mentees are willing to consider new ideas and recognize that growth can sometimes be uncomfortable; they come to the program wanting to learn and not expecting to be taught.

- Make honest communication a priority.
Communication is key to the success of the partnership. Mentees have responsibility for accepting and encouraging honest feedback from their mentors and for providing the same kind of feedback to their partners. Mentors, like mentees, want to learn and not expecting to be taught.

Taking Charge
What does it mean to manage the relationship? It means that you are setting the course and direction of your experience. To take charge of your experience, you must:

- Establish goals and maintain your focus.
Your mentoring experience begins with pre-planning and goal setting which occurs prior to your first meeting. Develop specific and measurable goals and share these goals with your mentor. Your goals give meetings focus and direction. Without goals, a mentoring experience can become a series of crisis management meetings.

- Plan ahead.
The mentee assumes primary responsibility for initiating and scheduling meetings. However, there are other issues that you should discuss with your mentor. If you set up ground rules, your partnership will get off to a smoother, stronger start. Anticipate issues that could diminish your mentoring experience and identify possible solutions.

- Be persistent.
Occasionally, it may be difficult to get in touch with your mentor. Mentees sometimes think they are a burden to the mentor if they make repeated phone calls, but be careful not to get locked into self-defeating assumptions. Mentors are in the program because they want to be.
Communicate effectively.
You can make communication with your mentor a great deal easier by using e-mail or voice mail effectively. Leave a clear, concise message that tells your mentor exactly what you need.

"...I would like to meet with you for about one hour to discuss the sales presentation I am preparing. I'm available the afternoon of the 14th or the morning of the 15th. Call and let me know what time and date would work for you. If these dates do not work, please suggest alternatives."

Approach your mentoring relationship just like you would any special project. The effort you put into planning and execution will pay off.
Maximizing the Mentee Experience

Responsibility is the price of greatness.
Winston Churchill

Mentees frequently ask, "What makes a mentoring experience exceptional?" Our response is simple—the attitude and hard work of the mentee. All of our mentors are successful, committed, and motivated; it is the mentee who determines the final outcome and success of the partnership.

Use the assessment below as a review and a reminder of mentee behaviors that lead to a successful partnership.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I assume responsibility for managing the mentoring partnership.</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I set immediate goals related to my current position.</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I set long-term, visionary goals that transcend my current position.</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I share both immediate and long term goals with my mentor.</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I evaluate my progress periodically and modify my goals, if necessary.</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I set an agenda for our meetings to update my mentor on my progress.</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I call between meetings to update my mentor on my progress.</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I respect my mentor's time by keeping our appointments and arriving on time.</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I complete action items that my mentor and I have agreed to.</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not expect my mentor to make decisions for me.</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I encourage my mentor to provide honest feedback, both positive and negative.</td>
<td>☐</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
I give my mentor honest feedback, both positive and negative.

I keep the confidences my mentor entrusts to me.

I am realistic about what my mentor can do for me.

I attend the monthly program meetings.

I speak positively of my mentor and the program.

I provide the program staff with feedback regarding my concerns and experiences.
Managing the Initial Meeting

We know what we are, but we know not what we may be.

William Shakespeare

Mentoring is a unique relationship and an active experience. You need to be thoroughly prepared to get the most out of it. You must know before you start what kinds of problems you may face, what special efforts you will have to make, and what goals you want to reach.

Your first meeting is critical. It will set the tone for your partnership and get you off to a smooth start. Being well-organized, prepared, and enthusiastic is the first step. You might also want to make the following activities a part of your first meeting’s agenda.

- **Get acquainted**
  Mentoring begins with a personal connection. Get your partnership started by exchanging information about yourselves. Before you begin talking about work, it is important to connect on a personal level.

- **Review your goals**
  A discussion of mentoring goals is critical. Mentees should plan to elaborate further on their goals, explaining why they are important. Mentors will already have received a copy of their mentee’s goals, but they should be prepared to ask questions about them. An understanding of mentoring goals is essential because these goals will guide subsequent meetings.

- **Discuss the mentor’s reasons for participating**
  Mentoring is a reciprocal relationship that benefits both mentors and mentees. Understanding the mentor’s reasons for participating will help to guarantee that both benefit and will further reinforce a personal connection.
Valuing Your Differences

We find comfort among those who agree with us – growth among those who don’t.

Frank A. Clark

Our life’s experiences lead us all to different places. We are a product of both our heredity and our environment. Our race, gender, family background, religion, disability, and sexual orientation define us as people. Our educational and work experiences further define our uniqueness.

The challenge of matching two diverse people with different views and life experiences can be daunting. For this reason, mentees and mentors undergo an intensive interview process that is designed to ensure a successful match. But, however, perfect the match, you and your partner may have different perspectives on many issues. Your life and work experience, and even your working styles, may be very different. The way you handle these differences and move beyond them directly impacts the success of your partnership.

Managing Through Differences

The mark of a leader is the ability to value and learn from different perspectives. Learning to put aside differences and see through the eyes of another could well be the most powerful achievement of your partnership. A frank and open discussion of differences, while uncomfortable at first, can very quickly move you beyond your differences. In fact, our research has shown that matches between people of different styles and experiences are often the most successful and lead to the greatest growth.

Consider the following guidelines when establishing a relationship with your partner.

- Find a common denominator to put each other at ease.
- Examine your internal beliefs.
- Don’t stereotype or generalize.
• Don’t assume that your partner won’t understand your perspective.

• Be open about your work and family.

• Articulate your concerns about working with a person who has a different perspective.

The challenge is to respect, explore, and learn from our differences. The benefits can be astounding. Each person brings a new and unique perspective -- a new way of thinking that increases your chance for true innovation.