

Top Tips for Being Mentored

Being mentored can help you develop your career, skills and expertise. It is very different from being managed or coached; mentors help their mentees to identify new ways to improve and develop, often drawing upon their own experiences in the process. Following these top tips will help you to ensure that your approach to being mentored is successful.



Meet your mentor

Matching mentors and mentees is a key aspect of any organisational mentoring programme. Regardless of the matching process your organisation uses, you should always aim to have an **informal meeting** with your potential mentor before officially beginning the mentoring relationship. It is good practice to **prepare some questions** for this meeting to help you determine whether you and the mentor are right for one another. Depending on your needs and objectives, these questions might relate to the mentor's skills, background or experience. After this meeting, you should provide some **feedback** to the individual(s) responsible for the mentoring programme, and advise whether you feel you and the mentor are a good match.

Make time for mentoring

Once you have engaged in a mentoring relationship, you should give your mentoring sessions **high priority**. When a mentoring session has been booked, you should avoid changing or re-scheduling the appointment unless you absolutely have to. Equally, when you are in a mentoring session, you should give the mentor your full attention; colleagues and team members should be asked not to disturb you. You may even wish to hold your mentoring session out of the office. Making sure you are not distracted will help you get maximum benefit from your conversations with your mentor, and will demonstrate your commitment to the mentoring relationship.

Set the agenda

You should arrive at your first mentoring meeting with a clear understanding of **what you want to achieve** from the mentoring relationship, and how you would like your mentor to help you. Perhaps there is a particular skill you would like them to help you develop (e.g. leading change or implementing strategy), or maybe you would like them to help you tap into their network. While this is something you may have established in your initial meeting with your mentor, it is good practice to reiterate this at the start of the first formal mentoring session. Once the relationship is under way, it is important to take some time before each mentoring session to consider what you would like to discuss, and what you want to achieve from your conversation with your mentor.

Be open and honest

Mentoring conversations can only be truly effective when the mentee is prepared to **share information** willingly and openly with their mentor. It is important that you are **as honest as possible** when responding to your mentor's questions, comments and insights. Don't worry about how long it takes you to formulate and articulate your thoughts; your mentor will want you to take the time you need to genuinely reflect on what they have said and to respond honestly.

Adapt, don't adopt!

While your mentor is likely to share some of their past experiences with you, it is important to use this as a **guide**, rather than a template, for how you should act. What worked particularly well for your mentor in a certain situation may not work as well for you. Equally, you shouldn't reject ideas just because they didn't work for your mentor. A good mentor should be able to help you develop your own solutions by listening carefully, asking relevant questions and providing constructive feedback.

Ask your mentor questions

During your conversations, you may wish to ask your mentor questions about their experiences. This might be to understand why they took a certain action, or to learn the outcome of a decision they made. If these questions are relevant to your conversation, it is perfectly acceptable for you to ask them, as long as you do so in a polite and respectful manner. Your mentor may find these questions thought-provoking or even challenging, but should be able to provide you with an honest answer after engaging in some self-reflection.

Identify and action next steps

At the end of each mentoring session, you and your mentor may agree some next steps for you to action (e.g. practising a new skill or technique at work). It is important that both you and your mentor agree that these next steps are **appropriate, realistic and achievable**. If your mentor makes a suggestion you don't feel is feasible or relevant, you should be honest about this and explore some more appropriate alternatives. You should always aim to complete your next actions within the agreed timeframe (e.g. before your next session, or in one month's time), and to advise your mentor of the outcomes you achieved and lessons you learned as a result.

Review progress

As the mentoring relationship moves forward it is important to review your progress against the objectives you first set. Your mentor may provide you with some tools or individual exercises to help you do this. Alternatively, you may find it helpful to spend some time before your mentoring session reviewing your own progress and making a note of the areas you still feel need work. Feeding this back to your mentor at the start of your next session will help you both keep the relationship on track and ensure that your objectives are being met.

Provide feedback

When the mentoring programme comes to an end and your relationship with your mentor is formally closed down, the team or committee behind the programme is likely to ask you for some feedback as part of their evaluation process. To help you provide honest, detailed and relevant feedback, it is a good idea to record the outcomes you and your mentor agree, and how you feel the relationship is progressing, at the end of each mentoring meeting. This will also help you to provide your mentor with informal feedback during a session, if you are asked to do so.

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