

How To Be An Outstanding Mentee

For a mentee, mentoring provides an excellent chance to learn from someone with more experience, insight and connections. Here is our guide to exceptional menteeship.

1. Be clear about what you're trying to achieve



It's a common issue that mentees think they ought to have a mentor, without having a specific end goal or purpose in mind. **Clarity** in your thinking and communication about **why** you need a mentor and **what** exactly you want from them will determine how effective your mentoring relationship can be.

Questions are a fast route to learning. Open questions will help you dig deeper into areas of interest, to understand the reasoning behind your mentor's advice, or to get direct guidance that moves you closer to your goals. For example, "I've got these three options. Can you help me work through the choices?" [1] Try to avoid questions that ask for general opinions, for instance "What would you do if you were me?" You might find that your mentor simply suggests something they've done already themselves, or recommend what they wish they could do.

2. Own the experience

"Plan on being an energy donor, not an energy recipient, in your mentoring relationship." [2]

To get the most from the opportunity and relationship, it's the mentee, not the mentor, who needs to put in the bulk of the work. **Take the initiative:** schedule the meetings, set the agenda and always do what you say you'll do.

Enthusiasm and positivity are traits that your mentor will both appreciate and respond

to in kind. Moaning or gossiping aren't productive; however, there's always a place for opening up and being honest about how you are feeling. If, for instance, your self-confidence is holding you back, this is something that your mentor might be able to help you with.

Also, don't be afraid to start a conversation with your mentor about anything that isn't working for you - explain what the issue is and suggest a solution if it's appropriate.

3. Foster the relationship



Your mentor will have their own priorities, expectations and boundaries. Ask about what those are, along with the time they have available, and how they'd like to work with you. With a keen appreciation of your mentor's workload and preferences, you can set up your meetings accordingly.

Although your meetings will have a focus on you and your goals, it's worth taking some time to get to know your mentor better. Family, occupation, recreation and motivation (FORM) are areas that most people connect over. Finding common and diverse ground is part of building rapport, and asking if you can help them will promote a stronger mutual relationship and respect. [3] Mentoring relationships can be invaluable and, if nurtured, can last a lifetime. Saying thank you is a given.

4. Go beyond your comfort zone

Mentoring expert David Clutterbuck cites "willingness to challenge and be challenged" as an essential trait of a mentee who is after success. [4]

You don't have to accept everything your mentor says - deeper inquiry and debate is encouraged! Use well-framed questions to probe your mentor's reasoning or sources, or to seek clarification. Furthermore, having an **open mind** will allow you to receive, consider, discuss and act on knowledge or guidance that you might not have had before.

Your mentor's role is not to do the hard work for you. To help you progress and achieve your goals, your mentor may ask you difficult questions, or suggest actions that take effort or are challenging. Developing resilience and, what psychologist Carol Dweck terms a “**growth mindset**” [5] (a belief that you can develop, with dedicated work), will help you to stay motivated and focused in the face of obstacles.

5. Reflect and learn



Progress towards your goal(s) will inevitably involve learning. Neuroscientists have shown that engaging in a reflective process helps to embed our learning, and make new behaviours permanent. Reflecting throughout your mentoring journey will propel you towards your goal.

Here are a couple of ways to reflect:

- Reflective models, such as that by Boud, Keogh and Walker,* can help you structure and stretch your thinking and behaviours. Many of the models focus on thinking about your new **experience/learning/action**, reflecting on it (what was useful, how did you feel, what went well etc.) and then planning to **take steps** to improve what you did next time. You could apply one of these models to review and learn from your mentoring experiences, sessions and/or conversations.
- Alternatively, you could keep a reflective journal as you go. By writing a log of your experiences, thoughts and feelings, you'll generate new ideas and make connections that you wouldn't necessarily make otherwise. You can ask yourself questions to keep yourself writing - for example, what happened, how did you feel, how did others react, what did you learn etc. You don't need to share your journal with anyone, so it's a space to clear your brain, revisit experiences and firm up what you took from it

Conclusion

Being an outstanding mentee is as much about action as it is about considered thought. If you've got a goal, are clear about your need for a mentor and are happy to put in the effort to set things up, then this will set you on the right path. Mentees who are energetic, positive and keen to build a lasting relationship are appreciated and respected more by their mentors. Success in achieving goals comes down to the mentee, their attitude and ability to learn, to go beyond their 'norm' and to reflect deeply for lasting change.

*There is more information on this model in the article 'Boud, Keogh and Walker: Reflection and Learning'. Just type 'Boud' into the search bar at the top of the page.

[1] B. Casnocha, *Six Habits of Highly Effective Mentees* (2008). Available at: <http://casnocha.com/2008/04/six-habits-of-h.html> (accessed 19 January 2018).

[2] V. Chopra, M. Woods and S. Saint, *The Four Golden Rules of Effective Menteeship* (2016). Available at: <https://www.bmj.com/content/354/bmj.i4147> (accessed 07 March 2019).

[3] B. Gervais, '10 killer questions to make the most of your mentor meeting', *Forbes* (2014). Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/theyec/2014/02/28/10-killer-questions-to-make-the-most-of-your-mentor-meeting/#6251ea6e1481> (accessed 19 January 2018).

[4] D. Clutterbuck, *Everyone Needs a Mentor* (CIPD, 20014) p59.

[5] C. Dweck, What is Mindset? Available at <https://mindsetonline.com/whatisit/about/index.html> (accessed 22/01/2018).