

Mentoring Guide

Mentoring Partnerships & Issues

Few of us invest time and energy into anything without at least a small expectation that we will get something from the experience. You want to know what your mentee hopes to gain from your relationship, and it is just as important that you give some thought and be able to tell your mentee what you want from the relationship. That's how a partnership is built: mutual gain; not necessarily equal gain, but a situation where both parties are gaining something.

What's In It for You?

Mentoring is not an exercise in debits and credits. There's no need to make sure that the account balances at the end of the relationship. However, in order for you, as a mentor, to gauge the success of the mentoring relationship, you have to give some thought to what you want from the experience. Take a few minutes and think about what you would like to get from the relationship.

- What type of satisfaction are you looking for?
- What types of recognition are important to you and from whom?
- What types of rewards?
- What other benefits or returns are you anticipating from this relationship?

Setting Expectations

Any type of relationship is doomed if expectations are held but not expressed. We are disappointed most when people don't meet our expectations, but often times we never share our expectations with each other. We may feel that we don't have a right to expect anything from another person, or that our expectations will seem trivial, or too great. To avoid the confusion, disappointment, and disaster that come from having unspoken expectations, it's critical to discuss expectations openly.

There are number of ways to discover your mentee's expectations and your own expectations. Here are a few:

- Both the mentor and mentee write a brief essay describing what they expect from the relationship and then share this with each other.
- Both identify their perception of the roles and responsibilities of each party in the relationship.
- Both list any special needs or features of the relationship that should be considered.
- Both ask each other some critical questions:
 - How much time, effort and enthusiasm can you realistically devote to this relationship?
 - What do you think a mentor/mentee should do?
 - Who's responsible for this relationship? What does that mean?
 - Besides this relationship, what are your priorities?
- Both independently respond to the following statements, and then use them as a conversation starter:
 - What I expect to devote to this relationship is . . .
 - I can give ____ time to this relationship.
 - I anticipate meeting ____ times a month.
 - This is what I expect in terms of confidentiality . . .
 - This is what I expect in terms of punctuality . . .
 - This is what I expect in terms of communication . . .

Developing a Mentoring Agreement

It may be appropriate to have a formal mentoring agreement. In most cases the mentor takes the lead in devising such an agreement. The goal of an agreement is to set objectives for mutual effort. It is a tentative agreement, subject to change as required. Some things to include in an agreement are the expectations listed above, as well as the following:

- Specific actions that a mentee is to take in his or her professional development, for example to complete a training course, read a book, etc.

- Specific actions that a mentor will take to assist the mentee, for example set up introductory meetings for the mentee with one colleague per month.

Special Issues

Mentoring is typically cross-generational--an older professional mentoring a younger professional. However, the idea of mentoring across gender or culture is not as clearly defined by the definition of mentoring. Whether cross-gender or cross-cultural mentoring makes sense depends a great deal on the goals of the mentoring relationship and the skills of both the mentor and mentee.

Cross-Gender and Cross-Cultural Mentoring

Cross-gender mentoring can provide great benefits to those who participate. It can help by providing entry into different circles of an organization, and different perspectives--two outcomes at the core of mentoring relationships. However, several studies have revealed that cross-gender mentoring can result in problems stemming from gossip, envy, suspicions, sexual stereotypes and charges of sexual harassment. It's important that mentor and mentee have a conversation about these potential problems up front and have a plan of communication and protocol should they become an issue.

Like cross-gender mentoring, cross-cultural mentoring can provide tremendous benefits to the mentor and mentee and their organizations. This type of relationship can help bridge gaps and provide greater understanding that benefits both parties. However, more care must be taken in discussing expectations, since individuals from difficult cultures may not share some of the "unspoken" expectations that individuals from the same culture may share. The responsibility on the part of the mentor and mentee to communicate clearly and openly and to be open to questions is multiplied. It may take more work, but the rewards are likely to be far greater for both parties.