



Quick Reference

**FOR EXISTING OR POTENTIAL
MENTORS AT THE UW**

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Identifying a Mentee

It's not unusual for more seasoned professionals to already have unconsciously or informally established mentoring relationships with less-experienced colleagues. Keep in mind that mentors are not necessarily leaders; for instance, with peer-to-peer mentoring, a mentor may be a staff or faculty member who has more experience in a particular area or field or more time in the workforce.

Jot down the names of individuals you believe you may already be mentoring. Ask yourself:

- Does this relationship need to be more formalized?
- Do I believe that _____ sees our relationship as a mentoring relationship?
- If we were to formalize this mentoring relationship, would that enhance it? Make it more productive?

If you answered yes to any or all of these questions you might want to consider having a conversation with the individual(s) you have in mind about mentoring relationships.

Mentoring Supervisees

Mentoring an individual who reports directly to you is generally discouraged. When one is a supervisor a relationship is already established that requires specific tasks and responsibilities; introducing another element to the supervisory relationship could be confusing.

In addition, supervisors are responsible for the performance of the entire group, not just one individual. This requires that the welfare of the group come before the welfare of one person. Mentoring supervisees can create a conflict of interest, as well as give the appearance of favoring one employee over another. Finally, for the mentee's sake, having a mentor away from the day-to-day work environment helps to provide a "safe" sounding board and someone with an objective perspective on events.

Who Picks Who?

Unless there is a formal mentoring program in your organization, typically a mentee seeks out a mentor; however, if you're interested in sharing your experience with someone and being mentor, there are a number of ways you can let your interest be known and identify a suitable mentee.

- Talk with your colleagues to see if they have an employee who could benefit from a mentoring relationship. Your departmental HR administrator might also have some ideas.
- Contact the alumni relations or career services office of the institution from which you graduated or here at the UW. They may have mentoring programs or ideas for connecting with potential mentees.
- Get involved in professional organizations. They may have mentoring programs, or at the least, you may meet less-experienced individuals interested in developing themselves.
- Attend University-wide events, lectures, receptions, etc., that are open to UW employees or the public.

Developing a Partnership

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 you should also be able to tell your mentee what you want from the relationship. That's how a partnership is built—not necessarily equal gain but mutual gain.

What's In It for You?

In order to gauge the success of the mentoring relationship for you as a mentor, consider the following:

- What type of satisfaction are you looking for?
- What types of recognition are important to you and from whom?
- 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. With mentoring relationships, as with other partnerships, it's critical to discuss expectations openly.

Here are some ideas for uncovering and clarifying your and your mentee's expectations:

- Share what you each expect from the relationship.
- Discuss the roles and responsibilities of each party.
- List any special needs or features that should be considered.
- Ask each other some critical questions:
 - How much time, effort, and enthusiasm can you 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?
- Independently respond to the following and use your answers to start a conversation:
 - What I expect to devote to this relationship is...
 - I can give ___ time to this relationship.
 - I anticipate meeting ___ times a month.
 - What I expect in terms of confidentiality / punctuality / communication is...

TIP: ONCE YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR MUTUAL OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTATIONS, YOU MAY DECIDE TO CAPTURE THEM IN A FORMAL MENTORING AGREEMENT.

The Mentor/Mentee Connection

Empowering Others

While you as a mentor will bring quite a bit of knowledge, experience, and insight to the relationship, it's important to note that effective mentoring is built on respect for the mentee. Some mentors want the mentee to do things "their way" and are discouraged when a mentee makes another choice. The cornerstone of mentoring is empowerment: helping another person discover their own strengths and talents, as well as allowing them to make mistakes and then learn from those mistakes.

An effective mentor provides guidance and then lets go. Think about your ability to provide information in a neutral way and allow your mentee to pick and choose what they want to use. How would this feel to you?

Self-Image and Confidence

We've already identified that a mentoring relationship is established largely to help the mentee achieve goals and move forward in their professional growth and development. Given that premise, it's crucial that a mentor be sensitive to and willing to assist with the mentee's self-image and confidence level. It's been reported that two-thirds of the population suffer from low self-esteem; therefore, there is little need in a mentoring relationship to focus on the mentee's weaknesses. Instead focus on your mentee's strengths, discover opportunities to build on those strengths, and create space for new strengths to emerge.

As a mentor it's critical that you:

- Listen without judgment.
- Provide ideas and suggestions without demanding.
- Offer help once the mentee has determined the direction they'd like to take.

Mentoring Skills

In addition to the insight, experience, and willingness to help that each mentor brings to the relationship, there are other specific skills found in effective mentors.

Asking Questions

In a mentoring relationship, it is key that the focus stay on the mentee. The best way to focus on another person is to ask questions, so mentors must be skilled at asking effective questions. There are three types of high-gain or open-ended questions that encourage a dialogue, require that the mentee think through the issues instead of having a pat answer, and disclose your mentee's thoughts on issues.

Investigative Questions

Just like the term sounds, investigative questions seek information and objective facts. These questions are the familiar who, what, when, where, why, and how questions. While these questions are important, they should be limited and serve only to provide enough background to move the conversation forward. For example:

- Who else is involved?
- What have you accomplished so far?
- When is this due?
- Where do you think you lost focus?
- How long have you been working on this?

Discovery Questions

Discovery questions are used to encourage the mentee to tap into their own knowledge, experience, and insight. These questions lead mentees into drawing their own conclusions and learning from their experiences. These types of questions are not as familiar as investigative questions, but they are far more fruitful in the mentoring relationship. For example:

- What have you learned from this experience?
- What does it tell you about your approach?
- What's the best thing that could happen? What's the worst thing that could happen?
- What could you have done differently?
- How do you fit into this problem?

Empowering Questions

Empowering questions get us to explore what happens next. They call upon the mentee to take ownership and plan how to proceed. Empowering questions push for action and ask for commitment. For example:

- What is your next step?
- What do you have to do to make it happen?
- What resources do you have; what do you need?
- What's your goal?

Listening to the Answers

Be on guard; because you have experience, it may be tempting to correct your mentee and give them the “right” answer. It’s tempting, but doing so takes ownership, power, and learning away from your mentee. Instead of correcting your mentee, lead them to their own right answers by asking additional questions.

When your mentee is speaking, watch their body language: are they nervous, upset, or frustrated? What are the bodily signs of various emotions? Listen to their tone of voice and pace; are they talking loudly and quickly? Ask follow-up questions not only about the content of your mentee's responses, but how they feel about what they're telling you.

Providing Feedback

A large part of your job as a mentor is giving feedback based on your observations of your mentee. Mentees are depending on your reactions and, because mentors are often not in a supervisory position to their mentees, the feedback can be shared and received in a safe environment.

Providing honest, genuine feedback is a challenge; sometimes it is even uncomfortable. Many of us are hesitant to give feedback because we have a little voice in our head telling us not to be judgmental. But isn't that what feedback is about—judging another person? The answer is yes and no.

There are times when feedback is about judging another person, about sizing up their behavior, attitudes, and performance against what you expected, asked for, or wanted. It's okay to provide this type of feedback when the situation warrants it, but it's important that mentors consider other ways of providing feedback.

Feedback as a Dialogue

Instead of providing feedback directly, enter into a dialogue with your mentee: Ask them discovery questions about their performance, behavior, or attitude, establish yourself as a listener, and then react to your mentee's self-assessment. This approach allows you and your mentee to be partners in the process. It also allows you to agree or disagree with your mentee, which usually results in less defensiveness for both parties.

It's important that you not shy away from providing honest feedback, however. Playing it safe and denying your mentee honest feedback will never contribute to their growth.

Offering Perspective and Exploring Options

Often we feel stuck because we are unable to see our situation from any other perspective. Mentors, because of their experience and distance from the mentee's situation, can often see things from a different angle. Mentors help turn situations around by asking questions and listening carefully. Mentors offer mentees the opportunity and the invitation to see things from a different perspective.

As a mentor, you may find yourself in a position of encouraging your mentee to "think outside of the box," to perhaps consider a different career path or other options for themselves. This is often one of the outcomes of a mentoring relationship. Your role in this situation is never to recommend a change, but to provide an opportunity and maybe even resources for your mentee to explore options and make their own decisions.

Consider the following:

- Think back to an important decision you had to make in your own life where you were torn between alternatives. What things did you need from those close to you?
- Think back in your life to a point where you made, or were about to make, a serious mistake or error in judgment. What did someone do, or what could someone have done, to keep that situation from turning out badly?
- In these situations, what difference could a mentor have made?

TIP: RECOGNIZE THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN NEUTRAL (FACTUAL OR OBJECTIVE) INFORMATION AND OPINION. BE CLEAR WITH YOUR MENTEE WHETHER YOU ARE PROVIDING NEUTRAL INFORMATION OR AN OPINION.

Counterproductive Behaviors

There are behaviors that some mentors may believe are helpful but are actually counterproductive and may harm a good mentoring relationship.

Criticizing

A mentor may have a big impact on the self-confidence and self-image of their mentee. Because of this impact, criticizing your mentee must be avoided. This is not to say that you, as a mentor, cannot provide difficult feedback to your mentee; quite the contrary. The difference is that criticism is at its core evaluative and judgmental: typically the outcome of criticism is not to encourage positive change, but rather to create fear and hesitation in the recipient of the criticism.

To avoid criticizing, take the time to think through how you will provide a mentee with feedback. Use a dialogue approach (asking discovery questions) to allow your mentee an opportunity to identify how they might do better.

Giving Advice

While the breadth of your experience may make you a valuable or knowledgeable mentor, a mentor relationship is not an opportunity for you to prove to your mentee how much you have learned through your experiences. Instead, it is an opportunity for you to provide a safe place for your mentee to learn from their experiences. Giving advice takes away this opportunity. It produces little or no growth or learning in your mentee. You might have an opinion or information which may be appropriate to share, but beware when you begin a statement with “What I think you should do ...” or “If I were you, ...” By giving advice, you’re cheating your mentee out of the essential experiences of a mentoring relationship and out of professional growth.

Rescuing Your Mentee

There may be times when it would just be easier to tell your mentee what to do. After all, the appropriate action may be obvious. It may also seem easier sometimes to just do it for them. When this urge strikes you, remember the old proverb that if you give a person a fish, they’ll eat for a day, but if you teach them to fish, they’ll eat for life.

Resist the urge to rescue. While it may make you feel great, it doesn’t teach your mentee anything, except that they may always be dependent on someone else in difficult times.

Cross-Gender and Cross-Cultural Mentoring

Mentoring is typically cross generational; an older professional mentors 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 mentoring can provide great benefits to those who participate. It can help by providing entry into different circles of an organization, and different perspectives. These two outcomes are 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 different cultures may not share some of the assumptions 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.

Resources for Mentors

POD Offerings

- [How to Give and Receive Feedback](#)
- [SLP Level 2](#) (The Learning Lab offers numerous videos, book summaries, and learning assets related to coaching and mentoring)
- [Training, Coaching, and Mentoring for Success](#)

Websites

- [Duke Graduate School mentoring resources](#)
- [Free Management Library site on mentoring](#)

Books

- “Coaching and Mentoring: How to Develop Top Talent and Achieve Stronger Performance,” Harvard Business Essentials (Harvard Business School Press 2004).
- “The Mentor’s Guide: Facilitating Effective Learning Relationships, 2nd Edition” by Lois Zachary (Jossey-Bass 2011).
- “FYI: For Your Improvement — For Learners, Managers, Mentors, and Feedback Givers, 5th Edition” by Michael Lombardo and Robert Eichinger (Lominger International 2009).