

Ten Tips for Making the Most of Your Mentor

1. Be clear on why you want a mentor and why you are meeting. Define what type of help you are looking for in a mentor. Are you looking for someone with similar skills, or someone with a very different skill set who can coach you?

2. Establish goals for the relationship. What exactly is it that you would like the mentor to assist you with? Discuss and agree upon the goals of the relationship together. Review these goals from time to time to be sure the relationship is working; if not, adjust and refocus.

3. Network, network, and network to find a suitable mentor. Once you decide on the type of mentor you need, participate in functions where you might find this type of person. Good sources are faculty and staff at school, parents and friends, professional organizations and associations, clubs and sports leagues, etc.

4. Don't limit yourself to one mentor. You can establish multiple mentoring relationships with individuals who can address different aspects of your project. Think of it as building your own personal Board of Directors. It is not uncommon to have a mentor as well as someone who can act as an "advisor" who has complimentary skills and experiences.

5. Establish communication methods and frequency of contact. Talk to your mentor and determine the lines of communication that will work for both of you. Will you meet face to face or communicate mainly through e-mail and the telephone? Make sure you meet/talk enough to suit both of you.

6. Manage expectations and build trust. Mentoring takes time and implies sacrifices for both the mentee and the mentor. Be respectful of your mentor's time and the other priorities in his or her life—family, travel, community activities. Avoid any trust-breaking behaviors such as canceling appointments or not following through on tasks, including following up on leads and contacts given to you by your mentor.

7. Acquire mentoring skills and competencies. Acquire great mentoring skills; these include listening, guidance, recommendations, and wisdom. When you receive corrective feedback from your mentor, don't be defensive. Listen, digest, and take immediate steps to apply what you have learned.

8. Be respectful of your mentor's time. Do not overburden your mentor by demanding too much in terms of their time and/or contacts.

9. Vary the activities you do together. There are numerous activities you can do together with your mentor, including talking about your past experiences, goals, plans, and skill development; attending meetings, conferences, and other events; shadowing your mentor at work; role-playing situations you find difficult; or exchanging and discussing written materials (your resume, report or an article one of you has written).

10. Express your gratitude. The mentor may tend to give a lot more than you do in the relationship in terms of time and/or contacts. Be sure to express regularly that you value and appreciate your mentor's guidance.