

## Mentees: A Guide to Getting the Most out of the Experience

Having a mentor can help you to learn how to function more effectively in the world of work. Your mentor can connect you with people and perspective that you need in order to advance your career or be better at your job. He or she may provide advice on how to handle situations and people. Your mentor may be able to draw from his/her own body of experience to share insight, wisdom, and knowledge. He or she may be in a position to support positive change in your life and may challenge your thinking, thereby expanding the possibilities for you.

However, you will not automatically receive these benefits of the mentoring relationship. Experienced mentees know that, to have the relationship they want, much depends on them. As a mentee, the success of the mentoring relationship depends on you.

### **You are the driver of your own development.**

If you are serious about learning from your mentor, your frame of mind will be: "I am here to learn, and I am open to new ideas. I am responsible for my own life and for making my own development and career path happen."

Below, you will find tips on how to get the most from your mentoring conversations.

### Tips for Mentees

- 1. Be prepared for your mentoring sessions.** Model professionalism in your mentor meetings by being prompt, prepared, and maintaining a professional attitude. Preparation means coming to the conversation with a good idea of what you would like to focus on during the time together. Be punctual, well organized, and ready to give a brief update on recent progress and developments and to propose an agenda for the conversation. You might consider emailing the topics to the mentor ahead of time, if you think the mentor would appreciate it.
- 2. Establish a mutually agreeable plan for mentoring sessions, including how much time each of you need if a session has to be postponed.** Schedule the sessions on your calendar immediately and build in enough time around the sessions to prepare. Your mentor is a volunteer whose extra time is scarce and valuable. By establishing a time commitment and ensuring that conversations start and end on time, you will demonstrate respect and responsibility to your mentor.
- 3. Let your mentor know who you are.** Share your hopes, fears, ideas and goals openly, even if your mentor has a different background or style. It's helpful to share your life situation as well as your professional goals. Your mentor will then be able to put your situation in perspective.
- 4. Focus on the relationship, rather than outcomes.** Your mentor's role is not to get another job for you. Be realistic in your expectations and focus on building a relationship, not obtaining a particular kind of help from the mentor.
- 5. Ask direct questions about what you most want to know.** Since the mentee is the one who establishes the agenda for the conversation, you are in a position to set up the conversation in a way that provides the most relevance and value for you. Let your mentor know what is pressing on your mind and what would be most helpful to you to talk about. If the conversation strays, you can gently prompt the mentor to return to the original topic, and they may also do so. You are responsible for ensuring that the conversation meets your needs, yet ends on time.

6. **Practice learning from anyone.** In the past, people believed that a strong personal connection was essential to a mentoring relationship. However, mentoring serves many purposes and most don't require a deep personal connection. Mentoring may be short-term, specific to a situation, focused on a particular area of development, or mentoring may turn out to be a life-long conversation. By recognizing that you can benefit from a variety of perspectives and styles – even those quite different from your own – you will open yourself up to new ideas, valuable information, and a wide range of perspectives. You and your mentor need not have everything in common to have a productive exchange.
7. **Listen with an open mind.** Often, we turn off our listening when we believe that the perspective being offered isn't pertinent or that the person speaking is "different" from us. However, your mentor's experience – however distant in time or industry-specific it may be – will carry a nugget of learning for you. Challenge yourself to find the connection, rather than rule out the advice or perspective that you are hearing. Be ready to learn something new as a result of the conversation.
8. **Ask curious questions.** The most enjoyable mentoring sessions flow with a natural back-and-forth dialogue. Relax and enjoy getting to know another person. Don't be shy about asking curious questions, such as, "What was that like for you?" or "How did you feel at the time?" Ask a question or two at the start of each session to get to know your mentor's experiences, such as, "I'd love to learn about your career path..." or "What do you know in hindsight that you could share with me about how you achieved professional success?"
9. **Take notes.** It's difficult to remember key points and commitments after the meeting. Keep a notebook and jot down ideas and insights during the session, and in between sessions. Do capture the action items or commitments that you and your mentor make so that you are able to follow up appropriately.
10. **Provide context and brief updates to help your mentor to understand you.** While the mentor doesn't need to know every single detail about you, it's helpful to both of you if you use the first session to get to know each other. At the beginning of each session, provide a brief update on progress since the last conversation.
11. **Respect your mentor's boundaries.** The mentor's role is to support your development through regular conversation. Outside of the session, most mentors have very limited time to engage with mentees. Communicate respectfully with the mentor. Be careful not to inundate the mentor with emails or phone calls outside of the session. Do not text your mentor unless they let you know that's an acceptable form of communication. If you'd like to connect on social networks, make that request, but don't expect it. Respect the time boundaries of the session and do all you can to end at the agreed upon time.
12. **Follow up on agreements.** If you've committed to take a particular step or set of actions as a result of the mentoring session, make sure you do so, and follow-up with your mentor. It is discouraging for the mentor if you have made commitments that you don't act upon. You can also help the mentor to keep their commitments by sending a brief thank you note after a session that also lists any agreed-upon actions from either/both of you.
13. **Say "thank you!"** Remember to say thank you after each session and give appreciation for specific insights or examples that helped you. This information will let your mentor know more about what you value and how he is making a difference for you

*Source: The Institute of Food Technologists. (Date Unknown) How to be a Good Mentee. IFT. Retrieved from <http://www.ift.org/careercenter/ementoring/how-to-be-a-good-mentee.aspx>*