



10 Mentoring Tips for the Corporate Mentoree

By Management Mentors

Being a mentoree is a powerful opportunity to grow. Still, being a mentoree is a "job," just as it is for the mentor. Regardless of what role you play in corporate mentoring, it's important for everyone--mentor, mentoree, program manager--to understand a mentoree's true role in the mentoring relationship.

Here are 10 key points that mentorees should keep in mind:

- 1. It's your job, not theirs.** The focus of mentoring is on you, the mentoree. Therefore, don't expect your mentor to do all the work. His or her role is to facilitate your development, not do it for you. Take the initiative and follow-up on agreed upon goals.
- 2. Think commitment, not lip service.** Regular, ongoing contact is one of the most important building blocks for successful mentoring. Agree with your mentor to meet on a regular and ongoing basis and avoid canceling appointments.
- 3. Show up for the relationship.** Be prepared before your meeting with anything agreed upon and with an issue to discuss that's important to you. There's always something to discuss since events have occurred between the current meeting and the last one. The issue need not be monumental--sometimes simple things can lead to great discussions and insights.
- 4. Give back and get more.** Mentors don't usually ask how the mentoree has benefitted from the relationship. Take the time to share examples and to say "thank you" on occasion, and you'll often find that the mentor will give more without your having to ask. Sharing how a mentor has been helpful in the past gives the mentor guidance on how to be helpful in the future.
- 5. Keep expectations realistic.** Unstated assumptions or expectations can easily derail a relationship. To avoid this, you and your mentor should both discuss your expectations of each other and the relationship. For example, discuss how often you'll meet or what areas you will work on. When there's a change in expectations, discuss this as well. Relationships grow and change and so do expectations, so those agreed upon early on may not be the same later. Have periodic conversations to discuss your mutual expectations.
- 6. It's risky, but it's healthy.** A mentoring relationship is not meant to make you comfortable with where you are. It should challenge you both professionally and personally. This can't happen unless you're willing to take risks. What kind of risks? Whatever makes sense, but things like discussing your lack of confidence, challenging a mentor on an issue, trying something completely outside your comfort zone are all

examples. Taking risks is an integral part of growth and well-being. So by taking risks, you're actually getting healthier!

- 7. Be yourself; we already have everybody else.** You needn't act exactly like your mentor. You are a unique person. Recognize your uniqueness and resist the temptation to clone your mentor. This is especially important when considering diversity initiatives. For example, it's been documented that when white males mentor non-whites, there's sometimes an inadvertent attempt to make the mentoree "more white." Recognizing our differences allows us to remain who we are.
- 8. Don't be afraid of your mentor's silence.** You're in a mentoring session and you seem to run out of things to say, and your mentor isn't helping because all she or he is doing is keeping quiet. This is a good thing! Your mentor's silence is inviting you to probe more deeply into what is on your mind, and it's an opportunity to share more deeply in the relationship. In this situation, pause and look inside yourself to try and get at what is of immediate concern or on your mind and share that with your mentor. The possibilities of what may happen are endless.
- 9. The elephant will crush you.** Don't sit with an issue that you should discuss with your mentor; otherwise, it will severely impact and could derail your relationship. If something is not working in the relationship, chances are your mentor is feeling similarly, but neither one of you is taking the responsibility to deal with it. Here's an example: the relationship is not going well and you or your partner frequently cancels appointments. Instead of discussing the issue, you both avoid it. Your relationship is doomed and probably will be a waste of time. Talking about the elephant in the room will remove the elephant and give you the opportunity to reframe your relationship in a positive way.
- 10. Pass it along.** Since you're enjoying the mentoring experience, give back by becoming a mentor to someone else. Whether it's a peer, a subordinate, a family member, share with others so that what your mentor has shared with you gets passed along through you.

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