

MENTEE HANDBOOK



Mentoring is a fundamental human relationship in which one person invests time, energy and expertise to nurture the growth of another person. Mentors are the special people in our lives who help us reach our potential. Mentors may range widely in style—from that of a persistent encourager who boosts our self-confidence to that of a stern taskmaster who teaches us to appreciate excellence in performance—but mentors all share the same sincere care for their mentees.

Mentoring is often spoken about in corporate circles, but mentoring can have an impact much deeper than improved work performance. When a mentee accepts and applies the mentor’s wisdom in diverse ways, it can lead to all-encompassing personal growth. During the process, the two work together to discover and develop the mentee’s latent abilities and encourage acquisition of knowledge and skills as opportunities arise. The mentor serves as a tutor, counselor, and friend, enabling us to sharpen skills and increase knowledge.

An important note: To gain from mentoring, you must learn from the mentor’s offered wisdom. You can only experience the benefits of mentoring by assuming ownership of what the mentor has offered and using it appropriately.

The following guidelines will help you get the most out of your mentoring relationship.

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GETTING ACQUAINTED

“Fit and chemistry must be considered when pairing the mentor and the protégé. If the two don’t get along, it matters little what each can offer the other in terms of knowledge and skills.”

— Michael Zey, *Building a Successful Formal Mentor Program*

An important part of getting acquainted is determining compatibility. Schedule a few sessions to get to know each other before setting goals and alert your administrator if you do not feel comfortable interacting with your mentor informally and having intimate discussions on sensitive topics. It is better to discover an imperfect match early than to waste time in an unproductive relationship.

To begin getting to know each other, online messaging is an unthreatening, flexible approach. Many people find it easier to open up to someone new in writing. To break the ice, ask your mentor questions and share a little about yourself, such as:

- Provide your CV and familiarize yourself with your mentor’s career path and field of expertise
- Jobs, hobbies, and extracurricular activities
- Classes you have taken, projects you have worked on, or career-related interests
- Your favorite class in college, favorite book, favorite movie, etc.

As you progress to more serious topics, you are also encouraged to voice professional concerns and challenges. If you find it difficult to discuss certain topics in technical terms, try to paraphrase your questions the best you can. You may find these discussions easier face-to-face or on the phone, but online communication can work if you are deliberate and thoughtful. Although it might take several online discussions to clarify a point, your mentor is likely to appreciate your interest and your passion to learn.

MEANS TO COMMUNICATE

Communication is a two-way process that includes just about any type of interaction with another person. Effective and regular communication is imperative in the mentoring process. The better people can express themselves, the more the relationship will deepen. There are various ways in which you can communicate with your mentee. These include:

- Online Communication:
 - Email and text messaging
 - Audio or video conversations using Zoom or other conference call systems
- Meeting in-person

Effective Online Communication

In person or on the phone, you can use voice modulation, facial expressions, and hand gestures to convey meaning. Because those cues are absent in writing, written communication is a skill and an art. The following tips will help prevent miscommunication:

- **Use a meaningful subject line**—This ensures that the recipient recognizes the importance of your message and doesn't delete it accidentally. The subject line should also serve as a summary, providing a clear idea of the topic you want to discuss.
- **Take time to write clear and concise messages**—If you receive messages that are unclear or not fully understood, be sure to ask for clarification. Provide an opportunity to restate, elaborate or reconsider the intended message.
- **Investigate assumptions**—To uncover assumptions and prevent misinterpretations, state your understanding of your mentor's message or ask for clarification.
- **Communicate about communication**—It is very important to inform your mentor of your schedule well in advance in order to prevent the unnecessary frustration of a communication breakdown.

Suggested In-Person Activities

- Meet for lunch and get to know each other over goal-oriented topics such as favorite classes, career path, and hobbies.
- Meet your Mentor's colleagues and expand your network of contacts.

SETTING SHORT- AND LONG-TERM GOALS

To have a successful mentoring relationship you must:

- Understand your needs and what you are looking to accomplish from the mentoring experience. Think about your goals for this mentoring relationship (e.g., competency development, career advancement, leadership skills development, gain knowledge in a particular topic area, etc.)
- Set your goals
- Discuss how you can accomplish your goals
- Consider how you will know if you reached your desired goals (e.g., improved performance, promoted, attained a new credential, etc.)
- Convey your needs and goals to your mentor
- After completing a discussion session, write a summary to form new action items
- Think about the challenges you anticipate (e.g., availability of advancement opportunities, need to further your formal education, length of time needed to develop a new skill or competency).

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DON'T LOSE SIGHT OF YOUR GOALS

There might be times in your mentoring relationship when progress might stagnate, and you need to re-energize. At such times, try the following:

- Revisit the goals that you have set for your mentoring partnership and for yourself. Look back at the mentoring process and evaluate if you are on course:
 - methods that were effective
 - goals that have been reached
 - areas where improvements need to be made
- Take responsibility for driving success
- Self-actualization and enthusiasm can help you move forward
- Consider extending the mentoring period. Evaluate how long you will need to achieve your goals. Set a specific date—time-bounded goals are more likely to be realized.
- Learning never stops. Regularly reaffirming goals and commitment leads to a more successful partnership.

The point is to continually reaffirm goals and commitment. Your mentor will follow your lead.

NETWORKING TIPS

Networking is a learned skill that takes time and practice to improve. Your mentor has likely leveraged a network of contacts at various times in life. Learn how your mentor built their network. Appreciate the effort that goes into maintaining these quality relationships. If your mentor is willing, ask for an introduction to contacts who may be able to help you reach your goals.

When you approach your mentor or any of his or her contacts, be sure to follow this networking etiquette:

- Ask politely—When asking for a favor, ask politely. Examples of ways to ask are:
 - “Perhaps you can point me in the right direction,”
 - “Maybe you could help me...”
- Follow up—Use the 48-hour rule. Respond to phone messages and emails within 48 hours and send thank-you or nice-to-meet-you notes or emails after a meeting within 48 hours.
- Mention your referrer—When calling a person to whom someone referred you, mention your contact’s name. For example, “John suggested I contact you about...”

TIPS FOR A GOOD CLOSURE-A TRANSITION PERIOD

As you near the completion of your mentoring partnership, you may wonder whether your takeaways from the mentoring relationship will smooth your transition into future endeavors. You may have some loose ends to tie or some fears about moving on. We encourage you and your mentor to discuss your transition to life post-partnership. Your mentor may be in a position to help you better prepare for what lies ahead and reduce any anxieties you have about the changes that await. When mentoring partnerships end, some do with goals accomplished. Some do not, for several reasons. However, even unproductive mentoring relationships can benefit from good closure.

A successful exit strategy includes five steps:

1. **Processing conclusions**—Process the learning that took place while working towards goals.
2. **Integrating what was learned**—Discuss how to apply and take learning to the next level.
3. **Celebrating success**—Plan a mutually satisfying way to celebrate achievement and new beginnings.
4. **Redefining the relationship**—Talk with your mentor about whether the relationship is to continue, and what it will look like. You could potentially become a colleague, a friend, or something else.
5. **Moving on**—Both partners let go and identify ways of keeping in touch, if appropriate and mutually desired.

PROVIDE REGULAR FEEDBACK

In order to continuously improve the mentoring process, it is important to provide regular feedback on your mentoring experience and your mentoring relationship to the program administrators. Please complete any surveys you receive and address any questions or concerns as soon as they arise by emailing to mentoring@uscap.org. In addition, provide your mentor with constructive feedback as you go, to improve the quality of the relationship and to support your mentor's future mentoring endeavors.