



# Mentee Handbook

Material adapted from

[University of Wisconsin Madison](#)

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# Common Expectations for Mentees



## Checklist of Functional Expectations for Mentees:

1. **Know yourself.** Understand your own personality and temperament and realize that what might make your colleagues happy may not make you happy. Reflect on what drives you, what gets you up in the morning, and then take your cue from that. Spend some time being honest about your strengths and weaknesses, and consider ways to leverage your strengths as you develop new skills. Development plans are a good way to add structure to this thinking process. Be sure to share your thinking and questions around your goals, needs and wants with your mentor/potential mentor.
2. **Come prepared.** When you meet with your mentor, remember that her/his time is limited, as is yours, so make sure that the time together is well spent. Many mentees suggest that developing an agenda for each mentor meeting helps to structure the sessions around your short- and long-term needs.
3. **Ask productive questions.** Prepare questions ahead of time that produce the information and learning you wish to get in a mentoring exchange. Questions that are open ended versus closed (answers by yes/no or a simple one- or two-word response) are most conducive to facilitate higher-level responses and in-depth conversations.
4. **Develop key listening skills.** Listen for the central message and feelings in a response to a question. The following four steps will improve listening:
  - A. Listen for central ideas.
  - B. Determine what is of personal value to you in your mentor's conversation.
  - C. Identify and eliminate as many of your "trigger" words as possible. These are words that affect your mood, distract you from the conversation, and, in general, interfere with hearing the central message.
  - D. Use the advantage of thought speed over speech speed productively. Do not let your mind wander or mentally argue with the speaker. Stay focused.
5. **Be flexible and innovative.** Know that plans change and roadmaps sometimes take a detour. Be adaptable and don't be afraid to change and take new opportunities.
6. **Be open to criticism.** Don't fold in the face of disapproval. Take criticism as a gentle nudge to keep you on the right track. Ask for feedback from your mentor to improve yourself.
7. **Use trust-building behaviors.** Behaviors such as following through on commitments, listening, sharing, and cooperating are trust building, in contrast to behaviors such as putting people down, ignoring, hiding or withholding, and competing.
8. **Follow through on commitments.** Develop your capacity to manage your time

- effectively and follow through on negotiated meeting schedules, deadlines, roles and responsibilities.
9. **Keep confidences.** Keep the content of your discussions within the relationship confidential. All exchanges, both personal and professional, are subject to the expectations of professional confidentiality.
  10. **Overcome the awe factor.** A mentor is a respected and important person. To overcome being intimidated, prepare for the meeting and talk with others who have a relationship with the mentor.
  11. **Take responsibility for your own career.** Your mentor can only point the way. You will need to make the final decisions, and the final actions are your responsibility. Although a mentor can help you to define your goals, ultimately only you can define success for yourself.
  12. **Resolve differences.** Use "soft" responses, such as, "That is a good suggestion, but it doesn't fit me." Use "I" versus "You" messages, such as "I understood that we were meeting today" rather than "You missed our meeting".
  13. **Capture the essence of your mentor's help.** After each meeting, ask yourself, "What did I learn today?" and "How can I apply what I learned?" Summarize for your mentor what you learned, listen carefully to feedback, and ask questions to clarify.
  14. **Internalize your mentor's input.** Sort out the learning and find where patterns appear. Review these in your mind shortly after they occur—substantial loss occurs in a few hours. Record the outcome of each mentoring session to reinforce your learning. Discuss the learning with others.

Adapted and posted with permission from Shea, Gordon. (1999). Making the Most of Being Mentored. Axzo Press. pp. 42-61.

# Mentees: Selection Phase Resources



The selection phase begins by taking the time to gain clarity about your strengths, goals, and areas of development. The more information you can communicate in investigatory meetings with potential mentors the better the ultimate fit will be. Review the material below to set yourself up for a successful match.

## Mentee Responsibilities in the Selection phase:

1. Have a clear understanding of your motivation to be mentored
2. Request a mentor based on pre-established criteria relevant to your career goals

# Mentees: Questions to Help Assess Fit

Choosing a mentor is about finding the right fit for you and for them. Be sure to address multiple aspects of fit, including:

## Career Development

Depending on your career stage, you will need a mentor to help with different areas of professional development.

1. Can this person help you navigate your advancement process in your field?
2. Can this mentor help you identify other potential members of a mentor team and help model effective methods of sharing knowledge and decisions across multidisciplinary teams?
3. Can this mentor help translate institutional/professional cultures and norms in a way that fosters your sense of inclusion and belonging?

## Personality and Fit

It is important to consider how your personality will fit with your mentor's, as well as how her/his mentoring style and priorities will match with your needs. A mismatch of these styles could lead to miscommunications and an unsatisfactory mentoring experience. Here are some questions to consider:

- How knowledgeable are you about your own personality and communication style and the type of leadership and management with which you work best?
- What are previous and current mentees saying about this mentor's work- and mentoring-style?
- Do you feel confident the mentor can "meet you where you are" and reflect on how her/his mentoring styles can best support you?

- Is this mentor's primary focus on fostering your independent career or in you lending expertise to his/her project?
- Does this mentor have the time and motivation to provide you the guidance you need?
- How do you feel before meeting with this person? Excitement? Motivation? Dread? Anxiety?
- Does this person serve as a role model or model behaviors you want to develop in yourself?

### **Availability**

It is important to consider how often you want to meet and communicate with your mentor and whether they will be able to accommodate those needs. Consider these questions:

- Does this person respond to your emails or phone calls in what you consider a timely fashion?
- When you meet, how balanced is the conversation? Who does most of the talking?
- Does this person demonstrate active listening skills? Does the mentor check if her/his perception of what you said matches what you intended to say? How do they demonstrate they have heard and understood you?

## Mentees: Alignment Phase Resources

The Alignment phase is where formal and informal mentoring can part ways, where early conversations about goals, roles and timelines get fleshed out and, in a more formal approach, written down for future assessment and revision. Taking the time early in the mentoring relationship to articulate, align, and document relational expectations is an investment in developing trust, effective communication and shared goals. Discussions with your mentor should include topics such as compatibility of learning and communication styles, expectations around progress, and intentions of oversight or supervision.



The act of articulating and aligning expectations is an important and iterative process. Formal plans should be revisited every 6 months with revisions made to capture current realities and future directions. Templates for prompting and capturing key elements of these discussions are provided in sample [mentoring compacts](#).

### **Mentee Responsibilities in the Alignment phase:**

1. Have a clear understanding of your goals and the role/resources you want your mentor to play/provide
2. Be prepared to clearly communicate your expectations and listen to the expectations of your mentor(s)
3. Be flexible and willing to alter your expectations and change plans
4. Inform your mentor of your preferred learning style

# Mentees: Cultivation Phase Resources

In the cultivation phase, the mentor and mentee follow through on the expectations and timelines outlined in the Alignment Phase, modifying the specifics as the relationship plays out. For you, this phase means cultivating your areas for growth and communicating your needs as they change; it means seizing opportunities as they arise and following through with intentional action.



## Mentee Responsibilities in the Cultivation phase:

1. Actively listen and contribute to conversations
2. Acknowledge your weaknesses and build from your strengths
3. Accept and reflect on constructive criticism
4. Don't shy away from difficult conversations
5. Follow through on tasks and meet deadlines
6. Communicate your changing needs
7. Celebrate successes
8. Periodically evaluate progress and assess the relationship

## Cultivation Resources

- [Maintaining effective communication](#)
- [Mentoring across differences](#)
- [Managing mentoring challenges](#)
- [Assessing the mentoring relationship](#)
- [Resources and suggested readings on Cultivation](#)

# Mentees: Maintaining Effective Communication

Virtually every aspect of successful mentoring boils down to effective communication. Four key skills for effective communication in mentoring relationships are:

## 1. Increase your awareness of yourself and others.

You are the instrument through which mentoring happens, both as mentor and mentee. The more you are clear about your own agenda and able to separate out your own thoughts, feelings, and wants from those of your mentor/mentee, the greater the potential for intentional partnership and mutual benefit. "In each moment you spend in another person's presence, you are communicating that person's importance to you. Are you doing this consciously or unconsciously?"

- Denise Holmes

## 2. Get curious about the other person's story.

Listening in order to learn something new (rather than to confirm what you already know) is essential to good mentoring. When you get curious about the other person's story, you open up the possibility of greater connection and value for both parties. "In order to understand what another person is saying, you must assume



that it is true, and try to imagine what it could be true of." - George Miller

**3. Listen for passion and potential.**

Great mentoring means understanding what makes the other person tick, what has brought them to this moment in their career, and where they would like to go next. [Read more about active listening.](#) "Listening for potential means listening to people as if they have all the tools they need to be successful, and could simply benefit from exploring their thoughts and ideas out loud." - David Rock

**4. Share your own crystallized experience.**

One of the pleasures of mentoring is the chance to share one's own hard-earned experience so that it might be helpful to others coming along a similar path. [Read more about receiving feedback as a mentee.](#)

## Mentees: Mentoring Across Differences

Individuals bring a wide range of different life experiences to their mentoring relationships. Three key principles can help mentors and mentees bridge the potential differences to create satisfying mentoring relationships.

**1. Be aware of your own assumptions.**

In the same way that others may have different points of view because of differences in their life experiences, you likely have been shaped by your gender, race, social class, education, generation, geography, and a multitude of other cultural influences. Increasing your awareness of the ways you are a product of your past can help you avoid assuming that others see the world in the same way.

**2. Get curious about the experience of colleagues who have different life experiences.**

Putting yourself in other people's shoes and seeking to understand how they may have come to their different points of view is a critical step in building a mentoring relationship.

**3. Address differences openly.**

Relationships in which it becomes comfortable to talk about and acknowledge differences have much greater potential value for both mentor and mentee. While it may initially feel uncomfortable to talk about topics such as race, gender, and/or socioeconomic background, the potential for increased understanding and connection makes it worth the risk.

## Mentees: Assessing the Relationship

Formally evaluating the mentoring relationship and providing feedback to mentors is an important next step. If an explicit plan and expectations have been laid out at the beginning of the relationship, assessing progress and checking in on the health of the relationship is not only possible but necessary if maximal benefit is to be gained.

As you negotiate your expectations at the beginning of the relationship, be sure to lay the ground work for ongoing assessment:

1. What do you want to measure?
2. What are your criteria for success?
3. How will you go about measuring success?

Be sure to include measures for each domain of the mentoring relationship:

- Meetings and Communication
- Expectations and Feedback
- Career Development
- Psychosocial Support

As always, the instruments you use need to be tailored to your individual relationship; effective assessment relies upon both parties feeling free to be honest and forthright. Leverage these [existing evaluation templates](#) as you negotiate how you will evaluate your relationship success with your mentor.

## Mentees: Closure Phase Resources

At all phases of the mentoring relationship, both you and your mentor should feel motivated and confident that each is contributing toward shared goals. Once the mentoring relationship has served its purpose and the long-term goals are achieved, or it becomes clear that those goals are not going to be met, it is helpful to have a framework or set of conditions in place for when the association should change or end.



### Mentee Responsibilities in the Closure Phase:

1. Be sensitive to when the relationship has run its course
2. Provide your mentor with updates after the formal relationship has ended
3. Provide a summative evaluation of the experience
4. Say thank you and give credit where credit is due
5. Give back to the profession and mentor others

### Closure Resources:

- [Preparing for Closure](#)
- [Relevant Readings on Closure](#)

## Mentees: Preparing for Closure

If closure is to be a mutually satisfying and meaningful learning experience, mentoring partners must prepare and plan for it beginning in the Alignment phase. The first step toward closure is a review of the mentoring plan. What was accomplished? What is yet to be done? What really worked? What was not successful? By meaningfully engaging in the questions, good closure should catapult you forward into a new stage.

### Typical reasons for closure/redefinition:

1. Accomplished intended achievement
2. Lack of adequate progress toward goals
3. You or your mentor leaves the institution

### To ensure meaningful closure, consider the following:

- **Be proactive.**  
Don't wait until the end to begin! Agree on how you will come to closure when you first negotiate your mentoring partnership. Make one of the ground rules an agreement to end on good terms. Many mentoring partners adopt the no-fault rule, meaning that there is no blaming if the partnership is not working or one person is uncomfortable.
- **Look for signals.**  
Check out your perceptions and assumptions when the first indicators appear.

- **Respect your partner.**  
If he or she wants to end the relationship and you don't, you must honor their wishes.
- **Evaluate the relationship.**  
Periodically, check out the health of the relationship. Make sure your needs and those of your partner are both being met. Make ongoing evaluation a commitment.
- **Review your goals.**  
Regularly review your goals and objectives with your mentoring partner. Gauge where you and your partner are in the accomplishment of goals and objectives.
- **Integrate.**  
When it is time to come to closure, ask how you can use what you've learned. Without closure, you lose the value-added dimension of integration. Good closure involves taking what you've learned from the mentoring relationship and applying it. Focus on both the process and the content of the learning in your discussion.
- **Celebrate.**  
Find meaningful ways to celebrate your accomplishments and be vocal in your appreciation of each other.
- **Move on.**  
Once you have redefined your relationship, "let go" of the relationship as it was and embrace it as it will be going forward.

From Zachary L. and Fischler L., (2009). *The Mentee's Guide: Making Mentoring Work for You*. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons. pp. 99-103.