Mentoring

Mentoring is a personal and professional relationship. A mentor takes a special interest in helping another person to succeed professionally. Some supervisors may not act as mentors and some may be very experienced in mentoring.

A mentor could be a colleague, wise friend, or another faculty member. Good mentors share wisdom and technical expertise. An effective relationship between mentor and mentee is based on trust, understanding and empathy.

Students should recognize that mentors are typically very busy people and they should respect that mentors also have other obligations. If you can, try to fill your life with more than one mentor.

Tips: Characteristics of a good mentor

1. **Good listener.**
   A good mentor has good listening skills and will use this skill to help you with your goals.

2. **Available.**
   A good mentor is someone that has time and makes time to be a mentor to you. It is your job to keep in touch, not theirs.

3. **Knowledge.**
   Has knowledge to share and willingness to pass it along to you, and is willing to develop a professional relationship over time and to help you achieve your goals. Your mentor should engage students in ongoing conversations.

4. **Networking.**
   A good mentor will refer you or introduce you to other people that will help you with specific problems or goals. They will help to expand your professional network and resources. Everyone benefits from multiple mentors of diverse abilities.

5. **High ethical standards.**
   Mentor should exhibit professional standards that can serve as a role model for you. Also, your mentor should be someone with who you can discuss ethical issues.

6. **Authority.**
   Does not abuse authority over you. Another reason to have more than one mentor. It is important to have mentors that do not have direct authority over you. These mentors can be helpful when formal advising relationships become difficult or when you have different interests from your formal mentor.

7. **Gives constructive feedback.**
   You want a mentor that will give you constructive criticism in order for you to improve over time. Also want someone who is keeping your career goals, personality and limitations in mind.
8. **Direct in discussions.**
   A mentor that is direct and honest with you will lead to effective meetings where you can gain valuable information from them. You want the “real story”.

9. **Honesty.**
   Someone that is able to communicate truths.

10. **Good role model.**
    If someone is struggling with their own career this may not be the best time for them to be your mentor. Find people who emulate the person you wish to be or career you are pursuing to have.

11. **Well Rounded.**
    Helps you develop various aspects of your professional program in addition to your research program. It is important to diversify your skill set while in graduate school and also afterwards. Look for someone who is involved in a number of organizations or activities.

12. **Personal touch.**
    Open minded and approachable. Mentors should not assume that all students experience the challenges of graduate school in the same way. Mentors should help students find creative solutions to their problems and issues.

13. **Empathy.**
    Insight into what a trainee expects and needs to succeed.

14. **Respect.**
    A mentor should respect each student’s individual style and goals.

15. **Patience.**
    Everyone makes mistakes and mentors should have patience to deal with students that will make mistakes.

16. **Looks out for students’ interests.**
    Convey that they want you to succeed.

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**Tips: Getting the mentoring you need**

- Keep in contact with your old mentors. This may be a professor from your undergraduate studies or employer at an internship. You may never know when you will need a reference or guidance. Sending an email with a current update of your work, such as published paper or successful award application, will help them continue to support your career goals.

- Establish a relationship with your supervisor and your supervisory committee. They can be considered your formal mentors, and their contacts and advice can be beneficial in your career development.

- Find people who would be good informal mentors. They will be able to give you a broader perspectives or insights.

- Keep meetings professional. Information about emotional and personal issues should be disclosed only when they have relevance to your discussions.

- Respect your mentors’ time constraints. Don’t overstay your welcome.
• Be specific about what you ask for and what you want to learn from your mentor.

• Think about your goals and what you need to achieve your goals.

• Be polite. Thank your mentor.

• Accept critical feedback. It can be very difficult to accept criticisms but it is one of the best ways to improve.

Other Resources

• Advisor, Teacher, Role Model, Friend. Online book on mentoring: www.nap.edu/readingroom/books/mentor/1.html

• Making the Right Moves: A Practical Guide to Scientific Management. Chapter 5, Mentoring and Being Mentored.

• University of Nebraska-Lincoln Graduate Student Mentoring Guidebook: http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/dev/mentoring/

• How to Mentor Graduate Students: http://www.rackham.umich.edu/downloads/publications/Fmentoring.pdf