



# BEING A SUCCESSFUL MENTEE: A Guide for Career Services and URR Professionals

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## ON BEING A MENTEE: The Role of a Mentee

In his insightful article, “Mentoring Guide for Career Services Professionals,” Gary Alan Miller (2016) begins with a discussion about mentoring and describes the role of a mentor. The role of the mentor is defined as a guide, a model, a helper. Miller explains that the “mentor exists in the relationship to serve the growth of the mentee” (p. 1). Others define the role of the mentor similarly. Revelle (2013) explains the mentor’s role as someone who will “counsel, coach, and advise the mentee” to help the mentee understand the “standard processes and culture of an organization or industry” (p. 50). Zachary (2009) reports that mentoring “results in significant personal growth and career development” and has the “potential to change people’s perspectives and the quality of their lives” (p. 76). These definitions explain the role of the mentor and relate the benefits to the mentee.

But what of the role of mentee? The role of the mentee is more often than not defined in terms of the benefits received from a mentor. There is no doubt that the mentee benefits greatly from this relationship. However, to get the most out of the mentoring relationship, the mentee must not be a passive participant. The mentee has an essential and active role to facilitate the professional relationship (Hudson, 2013). The quality of the mentoring relationship is driven by the mentee.

NACE’s Mentor Guide reports that the mentee is “responsible for arranging meetings, preparing the agendas, and any other pre-meeting work” (NACE Mentor Guide, n.d.) to ensure that the topics and themes to be discussed are of key concerns to the mentees.

Starcevich and Friend (1999) reported mentees are not a “passive vessel(s)” and should be “very proactive, taking responsibility for their own development and growth” (p. 3). The researchers surveyed mentees and found that a good mentee must:

- ▶ Listen
- ▶ Act on advice
- ▶ Show a willingness, desire, and commitment to learn and grow
- ▶ Check his or her ego at the door—ask for and be open to feedback and criticism
- ▶ Be open-minded and willing to change

Furthermore, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) offers a document titled *Role of Mentee* (n.d.) on its website. ASHA describes a mentee as a:

**RELATIONSHIP DRIVER** Identifying goals to achieve and topics to discuss

**DEVELOPMENT PLANNER** Maintaining schedules and time frames for the mentoring plan

**RESOURCE PARTNER** Working with a mentor to uncover new resources and people to aid learning

**TEACHER** Sharing information that might be valuable to the mentor

**CONTINUOUS LEARNER** Taking full advantage of this learning opportunity

While these sources describe the characteristics of the mentee and the need for action on the part of the mentee, they provide little in terms of specific guidance. Considering that mentees are frequently new professionals, they may not know where to begin. This guide provides direction for career services and university relations and recruiting (URR) professionals considering working with a mentor. It begins with a brief introduction to different types of mentoring. The guide then offers step-by-step direction about how to prepare for a mentoring relationship, how to choose a mentor, and how to work with a mentor to get the most out of this learning experience.

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## TYPES OF MENTORING

Mentoring can occur in various ways (one-on-one, group, team, virtually, in-person), and programs can be both formal and informal.

**FORMAL** According to the United States Office of Personnel Management (2008), formal mentoring programs are “structured, have oversight, and have clear and specific organizational goals.” In NACE’s formal program—the NACE Mentor Program—self-matched mentors and mentees commit to a one-year relationship, and NACE’s program offers suggestions for how often and how long to meet. The NACE Mentor Program (n.d.) allows “experienced members to build and strengthen the community by sharing their expertise, and for those new to the field or new to a specific role to gain insight and knowledge to succeed in their careers.”

**INFORMAL** Informal mentoring has less or no structure, oversight, or goals, but can still enhance personal and career development. Relationships often happen spontaneously in the workplace when an individual asks for or offers suggestions or guidance. There are few expectations (for example, regarding goals or time frames) in this relationship.

The advice in this guide can offer direction for any type of mentoring program in which you may engage, but serves best for those in a more formal, one-on-one mentoring program.

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## SELF-REFLECTION

A mentee must engage in self-reflection before selecting and meeting with a mentor. The self-reflection is needed to understand what the mentee hopes to accomplish to get the most out of the mentoring opportunity. Because mentees take the initiative in a mentoring relationship, they must be prepared to reflect on and speak about goals. Contemplate the following when considering becoming a mentee:

- ▶ **REVIEW STRENGTHS** Where would you like to grow?
- ▶ **UNDERSTAND WEAKNESSES** What would you like to learn?
- ▶ **EVALUATE EDUCATIONAL GOALS** Do you need guidance in this area?
- ▶ **ASSESS PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS AND OBJECTIVES** What are the goals for yourself, for your career center or URR office, or for your students?
- ▶ **CONSIDER LEARNING** What is your learning style?
- ▶ **CONSIDER NEEDS** How can your mentor help you most?

Finally, ask yourself if you are ready for mentoring (Zachary, 2011). Are you ready and able to commit the time, effort, and energy? Are you ready and willing to learn? If you answered yes to these questions, it’s time to find the right person to serve as your mentor.

Zachary (2009) suggests that “*critical reflection and self-directed learning*” are needed to drive the mentoring relationship (p. 76).

## CHOOSING A MENTOR

Once you understand the attributes needed and decide you are ready to step into the role of a mentee, you must choose a mentor. This step is critical to maximize the benefits of a mentoring opportunity. Determine whether:

- ▶ You prefer to work with a certain personality (e.g., organized, creative/out-of-box thinker)?
- ▶ You prefer to work with someone with a similar background (e.g., second-career professionals, similar undergraduate/graduate experiences)?
- ▶ You prefer to work with someone in a college/university or organization that is similar to yours (e.g., large vs. small; urban vs. rural setting)?

Just as you would before you embark on any relationship, research your potential partner. Use LinkedIn to research possible mentors. Learn their education, explore their past and current experiences, and examine the groups they follow. Dive deeper by searching for your mentor in NACE blogs, local career or recruiting organizations, and online sites for articles or activities. Ask yourself if this is the type of person with whom you feel you could grow. Determine the key criteria for choosing your mentor. Don't rely on personal chemistry alone.

Here is an acronym that will help you determine what characteristics to look for in a mentor. The role of the mentor is to *share* knowledge with the mentee. Consider these *S.H.A.R.E.* characteristics when you consider a mentor:

**SUPPORT** Will your mentor support you, especially when you decide to take risks and make changes?

**HONESTY** Do you feel your mentor is truly your confidante who will be honest and open?

**APPROACHABILITY** Is your mentor willing to listen to your perspective?

**RESPECT** Will your mentor respect your time and feelings, and remain professional at all times? Will your mentor follow through on promises made?

**ENCOURAGEMENT** Does your mentor offer you sufficient encouragement?

*“Identify what you want to achieve, how you learn best, and what kind of mentoring relationship might work well for you” (Zachary, 2009, p. 76).*

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## SETTING GOALS

During a mentoring relationship, the mentor and the mentee engage in active learning (Fischler & Zachary, 2009). Both the mentor and the mentee are actively involved in the learning process by jointly developing goals. Ultimately though, the mentee is responsible for driving development of these goals under the guidance of the mentor. To maximize the likely success of the mentoring experience, Zachary & Fischler (2013) recommend setting SMART goals—these are “Specific, Measurable, Action-oriented, Realistic, and Timely learning goals” (p. 76). Well-defined goals will help the mentoring relationship proceed in an efficient path to achieve those goals.

Check your goals regularly to ensure they are still relevant and that your mentoring relationship is designed to achieve them.

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## MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

Early in the relationship, discuss expectations. Mentoring relations can be “powerful and life-changing events in people’s lives” (Hansman, 2003, p. 16), but that does not ensure success. While mentees can benefit greatly from mentors’ experience, support, and advice, there are limits. Mentors cannot directly solve personal, work, or career problems. But the mentor can be expected to provide valuable support and advice, even for complicated and aggravating issues.

As a mentee, ask your mentor what he or she expects from you. Tell your mentor what you expect or need from him or her. Clarify at the outset that both mentor and mentee are willing and able to live up to the other’s expectations. It might also be helpful to discuss how to handle disagreements or conflicts.

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## TIME MANAGEMENT

Discuss with your mentor how frequently to meet, how long each meeting will last, and where the meetings will take place. NACE's Mentor Guide recommends that mentors and mentees meet monthly for a minimum of one hour. Discuss with your mentor if this works for both of you and then determine the specifics:

- ▶ Do you want to set up a specific date (e.g., first Thursday of the month) and time to add to your calendar?
- ▶ Would you prefer to schedule the next meeting at the conclusion of each monthly meeting?
- ▶ How long will the meeting run (e.g., 40 minutes, one hour)?
- ▶ Will your mentoring relationship last six months, a year, beyond?
- ▶ How will you meet (e.g., in person, over the phone, via Skype, a combination)?

As a mentee, put the scheduled meetings on your and your mentor's calendar (suggestion: add to an online calendar and use calendar reminders).

Be respectful of your mentor's time. If your meeting is set to run for 1 hour, keep to the time limit. Also, during the scheduled time, give your mentor your full attention, whether meeting in person, over the phone, or online. You should not be distracted by others or by electronics (e-mails, phone calls, and texts). Bedsole and Pierce (2014) warn that a "mentee should never forget that the time and energy spent mentoring are real costs mentors pay when supporting mentees."

Finally, maintain professionalism in your communications with your mentor. Respond in a timely manner to e-mails and phone calls.

## CRAFTING AN AGENDA

For each meeting, draft an agenda to share before or at the start of each meeting. Preparing an agenda forces the mentee to carefully consider the importance of various topics. As a mentee, you are responsible for determining the topics to be discussed. The agenda will help your mentor keep discussions on track. Send the agenda in advance to allow a mentor to plan ahead for the discussion.

Agendas need not be complicated or too detailed. Think about agendas as a discussion of the past, present, and future:

- ▶ **BEGIN WITH THE PAST TO REVIEW/UPDATE YOUR MENTOR ABOUT A PREVIOUS DISCUSSION** Provide feedback to your mentor about the usefulness of his or her advice.
- ▶ **MOVE TO THE PRESENT** Introduce the meeting topic. One topic is sufficient as long as you prepare in advance (e.g., research, draft questions).
- ▶ **FINALLY, DISCUSS THE FUTURE** At the end of a meeting, confirm the date and time for the next get-together and note any topics you'd like to defer or continue to discuss at the next meeting.

AGENDA TEMPLATE	
Mentoring Meeting	
Names of Participants	
Date - Time	
I.	Update: Report on last week's issue
II.	Today's topic to be discussed
III.	Next meeting (determine next date)

Remember, the goal is not to get your mentor to solve your problems or provide answers. Use the mentor meetings as an opportunity to seek advice and guidance. Keep this in mind as you craft your agendas for each mentor meeting.

Bedsole and Pierce (2014) say that *“mentees steer the relationship, assume a leadership role and help set the course and destination.”*



## DISCUSSION TOPICS

Your time with your mentor is your opportunity to learn and grow. Reflect on the initial goals established for the mentoring relationship. Consider your mentor's experience, skills, and strengths, and why you chose this person as your mentor. Finally, review the goals you set with your mentor. Below is a chart of discussion topics to spark ideas for your mentor meetings:

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION	
TOPIC	QUESTIONS
<b>Get to Know Each Other</b>	What was your major? How did you choose this area of study? What was your first job in this industry? How did you get started? What key experiences shaped your career path?
<b>Counseling Issues</b>	Which assessments do you use most often? Why do you prefer one over another? Can you tell me how you deal with tough counseling cases?
<b>Work/Life Balance</b>	How do you manage your time? How do you balance personal and work obligations?
<b>Managing Conflict</b>	How do you deal with office politics? Do you have suggestions for diffusing conflicts in your office?
<b>Career Growth</b>	Where do you see yourself in 5 or 10 years? What are the key skills needed for success in this industry? What experiences do you recommend? How do you make a bigger impact on students, in an office, or in our industry?
<b>Presentations</b>	Tell me about presentations/talks you have led? Are these topics important to you? What led to your interest in this area?
<b>Philosophy</b>	What are your personal goals? Who had the greatest influence on you? What drives you?
<b>Insights</b>	What do you wish you knew when you started? What do you wish you could change? What else would you be doing if you were not in your current position? What has been the most challenging experience in your career?
<b>Leadership Development</b>	How have you successfully influenced others? What are the key leadership skills to develop?
<b>Networking</b>	How do you network effectively? Can you share any networking success stories? Which other informal mentoring relationships should be developed? Is there anyone with whom you suggest I speak?
<b>Resources</b>	Which resources do you recommend for keeping up to date in this industry? Which groups (Facebook, LinkedIn) do you follow? To which professional organizations do you belong?

## CLOSING THOUGHTS: Getting the Most Out of the Mentoring Relationship

As a mentee, the mentoring relationship is what you put into it. See 10 ideas below for getting the most out of a mentoring relationship:

- 1. JOURNAL** Keep a notebook or journal of your meetings. In the journal, include copies of your agendas and highlight key learnings to review and revisit later. Reflect on your learning by reviewing the information provided or re-reading your notes.
- 2. QUESTION** Use a journal to jot down questions or issues that can be used as topics for upcoming meetings. Do not ask questions that can easily be found by simple research. A mentor is there to guide, advise, and teach. Don't waste your mentor's time by making him or her look for information that you can find on your own.
- 3. THANK** Show appreciation to your mentor often. After each meeting, send a message (e-mail, text, or note) to thank your mentor for the meeting and reflect back some insight gained or learned.
- 4. KEEP IN TOUCH** Check in with your mentor between meetings. For example, you may follow-up on advice that you took. You also can simply wish your mentor happy holidays or a nice vacation. Confirm the next meeting to make sure the date and time still work.
- 5. REASSESS** To determine that things still work on both ends, reassess with your mentor. Midway through your planned time together (e.g., at the six-month mark if you plan to work with your mentor for the full year), add a check-in session to determine that all is satisfactory.
- 6. RESPECT** A mentor is there for advice and guidance, not to solve personal problems or find a job. Also, your mentor meeting should not be a time to grouse. Do not complain about your job, your supervisor, or your co-workers. This is your time to develop professionally and to learn more about the industry. Respect the mentoring relationship and do not put your mentor on the spot in any way.
- 7. BE ENTHUSIASTIC** Be eager and excited when you engage with your mentor. Show passion about the industry. It also helps to be friendly and warm with your mentor to show how the experience is enjoyable and how you appreciate his or her time!
- 8. END** Know when to end the mentoring relationship. At some point, it is time to move on. Summarize the mentoring experience in a thank you note. Use your journal to recall all you gained and learned.
- 9. SHARE** Consider sharing the experience with others. Discuss what you learned at a team meeting in your office, include any nuggets of wisdom in your center or office newsletter, or consider writing for the NACE Blog about what you learned. Also share with your mentor by offering your own fresh perspectives and new ideas (Lee et al., 2003).
- 10. DETERMINE NEXT STEPS** Where are you in your career? Determine if there might be a benefit from working with another mentor. Finally, consider becoming a mentor yourself.

*“Successful mentoring requires a clear understanding of mentoring and the central role of the mentee in driving the relationship” (Fischler & Zachary, 2009, p. 9).*

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## APPENDIX: CHECKLIST FOR MENTEES

### PREPARING FOR A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

- ▣ **Self-Reflect** Review strengths and weaknesses, evaluate educational and professional interests and objectives, consider learning styles and needs, and determine readiness to commit to a mentoring relationship at this time.
- ▣ **Choose a Mentor** Determine the key criteria for choosing a mentor.

### WORKING WITH A MENTOR

- ▣ **Set Goals** Work with a mentor to set SMART (Specific, Measurable, Action-oriented, Realistic, and Timely), well-defined goals (Zachary & Fischler, 2013).
- ▣ **Manage Expectations** Mentors and mentees must discuss expectations. Clarify at the outset that both are willing and able to live up to the other's expectations. Confer how to handle disagreements or conflict.
- ▣ **Manage Time** Discuss how frequently to meet, how long each meeting will last, and where the meetings will take place.
- ▣ **Craft an Agenda** Determine topics to be discussed and draft an agenda to share in advance of the consultation to keep the meeting on track.

### GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

Follow these suggestions to get the most out of a mentoring relationship:

- ▣ **Journal**—Highlight key learnings to review and revisit later.
- ▣ **Question**—Jot down questions or issues as topics for upcoming meetings.
- ▣ **Thank**—Show appreciation to a mentor often.
- ▣ **Keep in touch**—Check-in with a mentor between meetings.
- ▣ **Reassess**—Midway through planned time together, check in to determine that all is satisfactory.
- ▣ **Respect**—Respect the mentoring relationship and do not put a mentor on the spot in any way.
- ▣ **Be enthusiastic**—Be eager, excited, friendly, and warm when engaging with a mentor.
- ▣ **End**—Know when to end the mentoring relationship and when it's time to move on.
- ▣ **Share**—Consider sharing the experience with others.
- ▣ **Determine next steps**—Consider working with another mentor or becoming a mentor yourself.