

What is a mentor?

In short, a mentor is a personal or professional advisor, usually a more experienced person, who provides guidance and support based on a mentee's needs and goals. Mentors especially play critical roles in the workplace.

What does it mean to be a mentor?

Making sincere efforts to ensure mentees succeed is what being a mentor is all about. It is as much their success as yours. Mentors always have their mentees' best interests at heart and will support them with their time and resources.

Let's explore the idea of a mentor and what it means to different people.

For Estelle Barthés, marketing manager at Napta.io, it's about leading by example and trusting your mentee.

"For me, being a mentor is advising and boosting through exemplarity. Also, trusting your mentee is the best gift you can give them. Feeling like someone trusts you is the best motivation you can have in your job. Today, these are the things I try to act on with my own team."

She adds that her mentor gave her all the resources she needed to become an asset to the company, including invitations to every meeting and no holds barred knowledge-sharing.

For Aderinsola Amobi-Daniel, special projects and events lead at Leading Ladies Africa, having a mentor provided guidance, career sponsorship, and advancement.

"Mentors often end up becoming sponsors for their mentees as they have, over time, built a trusting relationship that lets the mentor understand the skill capacity of the mentee and the potential career path," she stated further.

Mentors usually offer these services at no cost. Yet, the mentee benefits immensely from the opportunity.

"For me, a mentor is someone who has valuable experience and knowledge in my industry and can provide guidance and support as I navigate my professional journey. My mentor has helped me identify my strengths and weaknesses, provided valuable feedback, and encouraged me to take on new challenges. Additionally, my mentor has introduced me to new networking opportunities and has helped me develop a strong sense of direction for my career."

That's from Sharon Heather, business development director at easy Merchant.co. She also highlights that "[my mentor's] presence in my life has made a significant impact on my professional growth and has helped me reach new levels of success."

At this point, you're probably thinking, "What's in it for the mentor?"

Dr Kyle Elliott, founder & career coach at CaffeinatedKyle.com, said, "I serve as both a mentor and a mentee. There is great value in both receiving and providing mentorship. I hope to be motivated and inspired by not only my mentors but also by my mentees."

As you can see, the benefits go both ways in a mentor-mentee relationship. As a mentor, you can also learn from some of the [famous mentoring relationships](#) that have inspired many to become mentors themselves.

What kind of mentor is best?

Each mentorship is unique. The experience for participants varies depending on the personality of their mentor or mentee. Each mentor has something great to offer. They don't all have to be the same for a mentee to benefit from the experience. Here are the [eight different types of mentors](#):

Advisor - this type of mentor offers suggestions on what the mentee should do based on their personal experience or expertise. Their strength is their ability to act as a sounding board.

Protector - some mentors take on the role of protector over their mentee. Their goal is to ensure the mentee does not make a mistake that could be detrimental to their career. The strength of a protector mentor is that they offer a safety net for the mentee.

Developer - mentors that listen well and are eager to point out red flags for mentees are called "developers." This type of mentor empowers a mentee to develop the capability to solve their problems independently.

Broker - this style of mentoring is done by those with a strong network. The mentor will connect the mentee with learning opportunities by connecting them to experts in different areas.

Challenger - mentors who opt for the challenger style will play the devil's advocate with their mentee. This encourages mentees to come up with solutions rather than complain about their issues.

Clarifier - for mentees who are more independent, a clarifier mentor would be a great fit. These mentors act as guides and can provide valuable organizational information for their mentees.

Sponsor - mentors who aim to open doors for their mentees are considered sponsors. These mentors will put a mentee's name forward for a promotion or new opportunity.

Affirmer - these types of mentors are great listeners and provide a safe space for a mentee to discuss challenges. Affirmers are empathetic and understanding, which can boost the self-esteem of their mentees.

While mentors can have different temperaments, there are some similar qualities that they should share:

- Good listening skills
- Flexibility
- Respect for diverse perspectives
- Experienced
- Knowledgeable
- Honest
- Have a strong network
- Provides constructive feedback
- Committed to mentoring
- Life long learner
- Enthusiasm
- Positive attitude

- Emotionally intelligent

What steps should first-time mentors follow?

Being a mentor for the first time can be exciting but also a little scary. You want to help your mentee succeed, but you are not always sure how to go about it.

Making the first meeting exceptional can be challenging for both the mentor and mentee. Follow these 15 essential rules as a guide for first-time mentors.

1. Help your mentee understand and define their goals

The most important job all mentors have is to help their mentees understand and define their goals. This is your first task as a mentor. Many mentees have difficulty mapping out their needs or arranging them according to priority. With the mentor's help, mentees can clarify their goals, ensuring a fruitful mentor-mentee relationship.

2. Set expectations at the beginning of the engagement

It's important to lay down some ground rules and expectations at the beginning of the mentorship. At the first meeting, define how often you'll meet, where you'll meet, and who will lead the discussion. Having these expectations in place will pave the way for a smooth mentoring experience.

3. Take a genuine interest in the person

Although mentorship is a professional relationship, taking a genuine interest in your mentee will enhance the experience. Getting to know each other will help you work better together. A key part of working together is helping your mentee define and reach their goals — whether short-term, long-term, or both.

4. Put the responsibility of growth in the mentee's hands

A mentor's role is to encourage, support, and advise. Your mentee will need to do the hard work of taking action. Have them break down their goals into smaller steps they can accomplish at a time so as not to feel overwhelmed.

5. Hold them accountable

You can help your mentee develop characteristics that will lead to their success by holding them accountable. They should be working towards their goals, and your job is to check in with them to see that they are doing what needs to be done. With your guidance, they can achieve most or some of their goals before the end of the relationship.

6. Understand how to give feedback to the mentee (discern when to be upfront or more constructive)

Knowing how to provide feedback to your mentee constructively depends largely on understanding them. Some mentees can handle a direct approach, while others will need you to soften the blow before they can hear what you have to say. Also, know when to advise them and when to keep your opinions to yourself. After all, being a great communicator is one of the [12 pivotal qualities of a great mentor](#).

7. Focus on the needs of the mentee rather than telling them what you think they need

Based on the goals of the mentee and their strengths and weaknesses, you should be able to discern what they need to succeed. But as you do this, be sure you're not just focusing on what you think they need. Rather, sincerely consider what will help them reach their goals and attain growth.

8. Point out their blindspots if you spot them

Helping your mentee recognize their challenges - including their blind spots, is essential to a successful mentoring experience. If you can see something in your mentee that they need to overcome, help them recognize it.

9. Read between the lines to pull out insight from the mentee

Mentorships will allow you to practice emotional intelligence. You'll need to listen to what your mentee tells you but also read between the lines to gain a better understanding of your mentee and their situation.

10. Share stories, not instructions

Most growth and development come from gaining understanding and wisdom. Simply telling your mentee what they should do won't help them grow. And it will create a mentorship that is more like a manager-employee relationship. Share relatable stories from when you were in a similar position.

11. Guide your mentee to answer rather than telling them

One of your goals as a mentor is to help your mentee develop some independent thinking. Consider yourself more of a teacher than a drill sergeant. When they are trying to solve a problem, guide them to the right answer rather than tell them how to go about solving the issue. Always give them the opportunity to figure things out and develop problem-solving skills.

12. Instill confidence

Empower your mentee by instilling confidence in them. When mentees can grow and learn to solve their issues independently, they'll gain more confidence in themselves. From a mentee standpoint, this is vital to a successful mentoring experience.

13. Leverage your network to help your mentee and sponsor them if appropriate

Draw upon your connections to help your mentee grow. If they need some development in an area that you may not have much expertise in, put them in touch with someone from your network who can help. In the same way, if you hear of a new opportunity that your mentee would be right for, put their name forward and advocate for them.

14. Recognize growth and celebrate successes

As the mentorship evolves and your mentee reaches their goals, celebrate them. This can be as simple as sending them a message or card to acknowledge what they've accomplished and to show how proud you are of their success.

15. Be real with your mentee

Honesty is a key ingredient for a great mentoring experience. It helps build trust in a mentoring relationship. Share your failures and successes with your mentee so they can know it is not always rosy. They would also benefit from the lessons and know what pitfalls to avoid in their own journey.

Preparing for your first mentor-mentee meeting

Your first meeting is very important, as it can influence the atmosphere and outcome of subsequent meetings.

It is important that you prepare and set a [mentoring meeting agenda](#) to keep things focused. The meeting agenda for your first time as a mentor and mentee should include the following:

Build rapport

Establish common ground by discussing personal and professional histories. There are other mentoring activities and icebreakers you should try out too. Mentor-mentee relationships thrive when both parties are honest and open-minded. This is a sure way to build trust. Dedicate your first meeting to getting to know each other, even if you feel like you want to move quickly to career or work-related issues. It pays off in the long run, as people tend to trust people they like and have met at least once.

Choose mentoring topics

Due to time constraints, you might not be able to discuss specific mentoring topics in your first meeting, but at least prepare a general topic you can discuss. The choice of topics could be based on your career goals. For instance, if you want to gain particular skills, that could be the focus of your conversation. Mentors can have topic ideas they wish to discuss too, but the mentee should always come prepared. For more ideas, you should look through these 5 mentoring session templates.

Set initial expectations

The mentee should make it their responsibility to have a structured accountability process. This can be a simple single-paged mentoring agreement that sets meeting length, regularity and duration. You can have this set up officially after your initial meeting, but discuss the terms during your first meeting.

Bottom line

Mentoring is a powerful employee development and growth tool that over 70 percent of Fortune 500 companies have already implemented. It is important that every employee is given the opportunity to participate and reap the benefits of mentorship.