

Mentoring for academic career progression

Mentoring can support academic colleagues to progress their careers, by asking a more senior colleague to provide advice and act as a sounding board and role model. The relationship requires trust, confidentiality and mutual respect. This guide provides some tips for mentees and mentors to get the most out of this relationship.

Aims for the mentoring might be to:

- assist in developing the mentee's understanding of what is expected of academics in their area
- provide a listening ear and informal guidance, so that the mentee can work out how to address any work challenges
- help their mentee consider how they can get the experience they need for the next role and/or present the experience they have for an academic promotion application

Advantages of Mentoring

For Mentees:

- Gain a valuable source of ideas, perspective and experience – someone who knows what might work in your situation
- Have a 'critical friend' who can offer feedback on your ideas
- Identify ways to develop your knowledge, skills and experience
- Build your network of existing contacts and resources
- Advance your career – and pass this on to another 'generation' of mentees

For Mentors:

- Improve your communication skills through active listening and constructive questioning
- Build leadership skills through motivating and developing others
- Learn new perspectives from colleagues with different backgrounds and experiences
- Review your own career development to date, and better understand where you might go next
- Support your own career progression; mentoring can be used as an example of citizenship and leadership in the Academic Promotion framework

Tips for mentees

How can mentees find mentors?

You might already have a 'role model' figure in mind to approach. If not, a good place to start is by looking at your current network of contacts (and their networks) for people whose careers are in a position that you would like to reach yourself. You might also want to ask around to find out if anyone is looking for a mentee.

Your first meeting with a mentor is to establish chemistry. A mentoring relationship can be long-term, and you'll need someone you can get along with and trust. You might choose to leave out altogether that you're approaching them as a potential mentor, and instead ask to discuss their career development to date.

If, by the end of the meeting, you think that they're going to be a good mentor for you? Then you can start to talk about 'formalising' that relationship.

How to get the most out of mentoring

- Be as clear as possible about your goals: writing them down and sharing them before the meeting helps. Review this regularly; they are unlikely to stay the same.
- Really listen to what is being said. Some suggestions may not be directly expressed, e.g. 'you might consider trying...'. You don't have to take all advice, but it's worth considering it.
- Ask questions. Asking 'why' a lot can sometimes sound challenging, so you could ask: "Help me understand why X is the right thing to do", or simply "Can you say a bit more about...?"
- Be open and curious. Sometimes in trying to impress you want to give the 'right' answer. Instead, take your time and reflect. Be honest if you're not sure about something.
- Be respectful. It's OK not to agree, but remember your mentor is trying to help. Also be respectful of their time by picking the most relevant questions and subjects for them.
- Plan before sessions, as this can also help you track your progress:
 - What have I accomplished since our last session? What didn't get done?
 - What problems, challenges and opportunities do I face?
 - What topics or issues do I want to discuss at the next session?
 - What have I promised to do before the next session?
 - How do I want my mentor to support me?
- Stay in touch. Check in regularly to inform your mentor of your progress, activities and accomplishments. Remember to thank them for their contribution!

Appendix – Further Reading

- [Guidance on academic promotions](#)
- [CIPD Coaching & Mentoring Factsheet](#)
- [Active listening](#)

Tips for mentors

Coaching vs. Mentoring

Mentors are different from coaches. A coach facilitates progression by helping their coachee to explore their options and how to take action. They are unlikely to have relevant professional experience, and will not offer specific advice. However, mentors are likely to have coaching conversations with their mentees, where they offer themselves as a 'sounding board' for ideas.

How can mentors find mentees?

Generally, it's better that mentees identify mentors – as a potential mentor, it's hard for you to know who might consider you a role model. The best thing for you is to make sure that people know you're looking for a mentee, and that you're prepared to make the commitments required of the mentoring relationship.

Guidance

As you prepare to start mentoring, it's a good idea to start exploring the skills you'll need as a mentor. These include active listening, open questioning, and conversation models such as GROW or the '5Cs of Mentoring'. There are more detailed guides in the appendix.

Contracting

Once a mentor and mentee have decided on a mentoring relationship, at the first meeting they create a contract together, defining elements like:

- The mentee's overall objectives
- How often you're going to meet, where, and for how long
- How you can contact each other between meetings
- How you're going to record progress
- How, and how often, you're going to review the mentoring relationship to make sure it's still serving its original purpose

Further Support

This is a very brief introduction! It's important that you do further reading into the subject (see below for some ideas). The Organisational & Professional Development team also runs an annual accredited course in Coaching & Mentoring; find out when this is available via their [newsletter](#).

Appendix – Further Reading

- [Guidance on academic promotions](#)
- [Linkedin learning course “Being a good mentor access”](#).
- [CIPD Coaching & Mentoring Factsheet](#)
- [Active listening](#)