

WOMEN'S WEEKLY

Mentor Guidelines

Mentors are good listeners, people who care and people who want to help others develop the strengths that are already there. A mentor is not a therapist, parole officer or cool peer.

Take the initiative in the relationship. Invite your mentee to talk, suggest topics to discuss, and ask if you can offer advice. Ask about and encourage accomplishments and ask if you can make suggestions or offer constructive criticism. Your perspective on all aspects of a professional career is valuable.

Be Prepared. Lay-out a guideline and suggest goals, expectations and guidelines. Recommend how long you expect the active mentoring relationship to continue so it can be productive to both. You may exchange materials, articles and attend events or receptions together introducing the mentee to other professional women.

Have an agenda. Frequency of contact is important in the relationship to keep the learning process moving forward. The mentor should be involved in the big picture, not just the details. Focus on current issues or challenges, as well as short and long-term goals. Although face-to-face meetings are recommended, emails and telephone conversations may supplement and enhance the process.

Respect the time you spend with your mentee. Be explicit about your own limits, specifying times that are particularly good for communication. It might be helpful to discuss setting aside a particular time every few weeks to meet. If you feel that more time is needed, feel free to suggest it. Consider discussing how you have been able to balance work with personal life demands. Younger professional women often appreciate hearing your thoughts and experiences as career demands overlap into personal responsibilities. There may have been times when you struggled in making decisions that may help your mentee in similar situations.

When feedback is offered, it should be followed by constructive advice for improvement. If possible, specific examples should be offered. Try to avoid offering advice in a way that would intimidate your mentee from best availing herself of your expertise. It may be helpful to allow her to think about your comments for a period of time and then come back together to discuss.

Be candid. If, after a period of time, you don't believe that either you or your mentee is able to participate in an effective mentoring relationship, then don't be averse to discussing this with her. If the relationship ends, end it on professional terms. It is no reflection on either of you if a particular pair isn't suitable.

Treat conversations with confidentiality. Make only positive or neutral comments about your mentee to others. She must trust that anything said to you will be held in the strictest of confidence unless instructed otherwise.

Based on these guidelines your mentee should reasonably expect that you be in regular contact, provide career planning advice, keep confidences between the two of you and be caring while giving honest feedback.

Tips on Interaction When setting a date for the first meeting or contact, both women should arrange to exchange copies of their curriculum vita (CV) beforehand. The mentee's CV is helpful so the mentor can review the mentee's career at that point and possibly suggest some goals for the immediate future. The mentor's CV provides a base with which she can point out key steps that were particularly valuable along her career path. Second, the mentor should ask the mentee to share her main issues of career growth that may include both challenges and opportunities. Goals for the upcoming year, as well as more long-term goals should be included as another point for discussion. The exact nature of subsequent meetings, including their topic and duration, will vary from pair to pair. Discuss days and times that are most convenient. In addition to sharing a breakfast or lunch together; consider activities of common interest such as walking, meeting in a bookstore, or for a coffee over the weekend. Enjoy and please make the most out of this valuable, and possibly, life-changing, experience.