

Things to Do Together

Mentor-Mentee Meetings

NIH-HHS Mentoring Program

While the Mentor is available to counsel and impart lessons learned, it is the mentee who should take the lead in the mentoring sessions. The mentee can propose agendas, facilitate the meeting, summarize agreements, and so on. Amid a busy week, sometimes you may be at a loss for ideas on what to do during the meetings and how to deepen your communication. Below please find some quick conversation starters and activities to boost your sessions:

- ✓ Spend time learning more about each other in building a personal relationship before formally tackling mentoring program objectives.
- ✓ Negotiate your ground rules for working together, when and how you will meet; confidentiality, etc. (see Mentor-mentee agreement). Schedule official times on your calendars. Sometimes an informal location, such as a coffee shop, may be preferable.
- ✓ Conduct some short telephone communications as well, with some structure added in: propose agendas and follow-up actions pertaining to the call.
- ✓ Share career stories. Career start, changes made along the way, high and low points. What experiences were helpful?
- ✓ Discuss mentee's personal vision: What would he/she like to be remembered for over the next few years?
- ✓ Talk about topics not pertaining to work: news and events, family history, hobbies, movie.
- ✓ Discuss mentee's strengths and how to enhance their growth. (Get mentee should find information from their own observations, comments in performance reviews, informal feedback from supervisors or coworkers (by e-mail, for example), educational grades). What do people say you do best? Mentor can add his/her observations.
- ✓ Discuss mentee's growth areas and tentative plans for working on them. Discuss how feedback will be given and received, and what, if anything, either would like to avoid doing.
- ✓ Mentee assignment: Write down the picture of a perfect week. What are you doing, where are you living, how do people talk about you? Discuss these discoveries with your mentor and what you can learn/apply from them.
- ✓ Identify/refine 1-3 objectives to work on together -- preferably skills pertaining to growth areas and leveraging strengths.
- ✓ Mentee can regularly brief Mentor on a book addressing career development/another skill set that mentee is reading independently. Mentor and mentee can also read the same book together throughout the year. Communication, personality style, conflict, creativity, organization -- the subject matter can be determined by the mentee's particular goals for growth during the relationship.
- ✓ Discuss any generational differences that may come into play in the workplace. Watch the DDM Series videocast, "What a Difference a Generation Makes," and discuss afterwards.
- ✓ Conduct informal networking by introducing mentee to at least two people who could prove helpful to their careers. Before, provide tips on issues to address or avoid, and review afterwards.
- ✓ Invite mentee to one of Mentor's key meetings. Debrief with mentee afterward.

- ✓ Exchange and discuss potentially useful articles.
- ✓ Review and discuss mentee's resume with a critical eye, offering suggestions.
- ✓ Review and discuss a letter, proposal or other document written by mentee.
- ✓ Discuss external non-job practice round in which mentee is developing skill set (Toastmasters, leading a community project, etc.)
- ✓ Discuss a quote that has certain meaning or inspiration for each.
- ✓ Discuss any cultural values that each of you hold onto. Has culture come into play at all in adjusting to the work setting?
- ✓ Mentee can invite a Mentor to a presentation s/he is delivering or a meeting s/he is facilitating (with permission from mentee's supervisor). Debrief afterwards, or in the next session.
- ✓ Discuss some of the "unwritten rules" each of you had observed or learned about success in your organization. How has this differed from other organizations? What other lessons have been learned?
- ✓ Communicate about what you have appreciated about your mentoring relationship with one another and thus far. This type of "check-in" can only be done in a note or e-mail.
- ✓ Mentee can research, write up or present on various career path they would consider taking within the organization. Mentor can provide feedback; provide a sounding board, discussion.
- ✓ Share/lend books, tapes, CDs.
- ✓ Discuss: How do you each best like to learn.
- ✓ Discuss: how would your competitors or critics describe you?
- ✓ Discuss a role model that has been influential in each of your lives. How has s/he impacted your decisions or beliefs?
- ✓ Discuss: What keeps you up at night?
- ✓ Meet up with other mentoring pairs for lunch, coffee or participation in an NIH community activity.
- ✓ Mentee and shadow mentor or observed him/her while he/she works. Debrief afterwards. Determine ahead of time what mentee particularly interested in learning about or observing first.
- ✓ Exchange jokes, funny stories to touch base with this side of yourselves. Bring in a favorite cartoon with respect to the workplace.
- ✓ If mentee agrees and there is no conflict, have lunch with mentor, mentee and his/her supervisor.
- ✓ Mentee can research learning opportunities (training courses, books, on-the-job activities) and vet them with mentor.
- ✓ Mentee can identify risks, difficulties or stress s/he is facing in the next few months (deadline, conflicts was premises, fears, etc.), and plan with mentor way to minimize them.
- ✓ Discuss a situation of interpersonal conflict that the mentee has experienced or successfully avoided.
- ✓ Discuss a situation of miscommunication that the mentee has experienced or successfully avoided.
- ✓ If possible, serve on a committee together on or off the job.
- ✓ Prepare for the end of your formal mentoring relationship: take stock of lessons learned, directions taken, and what is still needed to be accomplished.