



10 Mentoring Tips for the Corporate Mentor

By Management Mentors

Are you currently mentoring someone in your organization, or are you thinking of becoming a mentor? Do you have a mentor yourself? Or are you the manager of corporate mentoring program? Regardless, it's important for everyone--mentor, mentee, program manager--to understand a mentor's true role in the mentoring relationship.

Here are 10 key points that mentors should keep in mind:

- 1. Facilitate not clone.** Remember that you are sharing your mentee's journey, not yours. If you act more as a facilitator for knowledge, experience, and personal development, you'll avoid the temptation to create another "you" and you'll allow the person to develop into the "who" they want to be.
- 2. Uniqueness is important.** What makes every mentoring relationship different is the uniqueness of each individual. This is especially true when it comes to diversity. "It doesn't matter to me that you're a woman or African American, etc.", though intended to remove a barrier, actually reinforces the barrier. It should matter to you, because it matters to me.
- 3. Consistency is critical.** Relationships develop through ongoing contact. Keep your commitments to engage on a regular basis. The golden standard is every other week for 1 to 1.5 hours; however, agree on what will work and do it regularly. This gives the mentee the assurance that you are genuinely interested and that he or she can count on you.
- 4. Faking it is not making it.** Genuine and honest feedback is the only credibility that will work in mentoring. If you don't know something or feel uncomfortable about a discussion, share that with your partner rather than trying to project that you've always got it together. Perfection is hard to emulate, and your mentee will respect you more when he or she gets to know you as someone who's had disappointments and setbacks.
- 5. Empower rather than solve.** Because mentors are often in a managerial or leadership role, they are problem solvers. The tendency is to take this skill directly into the mentoring relationship and provide solutions. The problem is the solution is the one that worked for you and may not work for your mentee. In addition, a mentor should be empowering the mentee to arrive at their own solutions. As the old adage says: "You can provide a fish and feed someone for the day or teach them how to fish and feed them forever".

6. **You are not responsible--you have shared responsibility.** Mentors feel responsible for their mentee. This is fine if you understand that to mean that you should act responsibly, but this should not go so far as to believe that you are primarily responsible for your mentee's success. It is a shared responsibility. However, the mentee bears the larger portion since it's up to him or her to act on what is discussed during the mentoring relationship.
7. **Appreciate what you're giving.** In an effort to be helpful, mentors often feel they never give enough. This can lead to your missing out on a real benefit for you in mentoring: seeing how helpful you have been. The best way to learn what you have contributed is to ask the person most directly affected--your mentee. Asking will do two things. First, it will provide you with valuable information about what you've given. Second, it will allow the mentee to be aware of this and to be appreciative.
8. **It's not coaching; it's mentoring.** Mentors certainly coach in areas of skill development and knowledge acquisition, but mentoring is more than that. It's about having a personal relationship with a mentee that moves beyond coaching to discussing who the person is and what his or her dreams and aspirations are. Share the dreams. Share the journey. Don't mistake the advice for the journey.
9. **Honor your limits and boundaries.** It is never healthy for any of us to give without limits. This only depletes us and makes us less available for others. You have a right to your own boundaries, such as how frequently you can meet/communicate, areas of discussion that may be off limits, contacts you don't want to share. State those clearly to your mentee so that he or she will respect them. Ask your mentee to do the same so that both of you gain a mutual understanding of the boundaries in your relationship.
10. **Listening is hard, but advice is easy.** We could all use more listeners in the world. We are all more prone to commenting or giving advice without first truly listening to the issue being presented. That's why some solutions don't work--someone wasn't listening. How do you listen? By asking good, open-ended questions and letting the other person speak: "What makes that hard for you?" or "What could you have done differently?" The other advantage to asking good questions and listening is that it gets you out of the "I'll solve this problem" to "I'm facilitating this conversation to arrive at a solution that the mentee thinks is best."