

Tips for Cultivating Effective Mentoring Relationships

Moving beyond the “mentor myth” means cultivating mentoring networks that support diverse functions and needs. These developmental networks are a group of people who take interest in and action to support and/or advance an individual’s career, personal and/or professional development. In building an effective mentoring relationship, your principal objectives as a mentor should be to:

- **Establish a positive and productive relationship with your mentee(s).**
 - Make a proactive effort to define a specific roles act as a guide, a coach, an ally or a sponsor. Remember that you can’t successful provide all roles in a single relationship.
 - Trust and respect must be established and cultivated – both require time and contact.
 - Regular interaction and consistent support are important in building effective mentoring.
 - Focus on a specific activity, project or plan to get things started within the first 30 days.
- **Offer your mentee(s) advice, support and coaching to develop professional and life skills.**
 - Work to accomplish specific goals (e.g., acting on advice based on performance feedback; advising about maintaining work/non-work balance; effective networking).
 - When and where appropriate, emphasize life-management skills, such as decision-making, goal setting, time management, dealing with conflict, values clarification, coping with stress.
 - Assist your mentee(s) in learning how to access and use critical professional resources — don’t assume that just because they know what’s available within the profession/region.
 - Help your mentee understand the importance of networking and attending special forums, guest speakers, networking with other professionals (in fact, attend some events together!).
- **Enhance your mentee’s ability to interact comfortably and productively with people/groups from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds.**
 - Your own willingness to interact with individuals and groups different from yourself will make a powerful statement about the value placed on diversity. Model the attitudes and behaviors that you emphasize.
 - Contrary to popular belief, we are *not* “all the same.” It is important to acknowledge and understand, not ignore our differences. We need to learn how to use our differences as resources for growth and building effective managerial competence.
 - Respecting our differences is necessary but not sufficient; we need to know how to negotiate our differences in ways that produce new understandings and insights especially those that cross different national cultures.
- **Several things that you should always keep in mind being an effective mentor.**
 - Effective relationships require cultivation – cultivation takes time.
 - The best predictor of effective mentoring relationship is willingness of the both partners.
 - Effective mentoring requires critical skills and competencies that are also important for leadership effectiveness.
 - Don’t expect to solve all problems as a mentor - Ask for help and support from other mentors and key resources available within your organization.
 - Remember that effective relationships are mutually beneficial, never exploitative.

For more readings:

Murrell, A.J., Forte-Trummer, S. and Bing, D. (2008). *Intelligent Mentoring: How IBM Creates Value through People, Knowledge and Relationships*, Boston MA: Pearson Publishing.