

# Nurturing the Next Generation: The Art of Mentoring

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# Agenda

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- Mentoring 101
- Basic Principles
- How to...
- The Mentors Among Us
- Tips for Assorted Situations

# Mentoring 101

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*“It takes a whole village to raise a child.”*

- Ashanti proverb

# What is mentoring?

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- A professional and / or social relationship in which one person shares knowledge, experience, and perspective with another in order to facilitate success.
  - The mentor is many things – coach, advisor, counselor, teacher, cheerleader, role model, big sibling, etc.
  - Mentors are often people who have achieved the goals that the mentee is seeking (but not always)
  - Basic goal: “Showing the ropes”

# Types of Mentoring

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- Work mentoring
  - Usually done through work-related programs
  - Either done with direct supervisor, or with other more experienced coworkers
  - Learn workplace culture, career planning strategies, how to deal with office personalities, and which dishes to avoid in the employee cafeteria
  - May be part of a formal career development program or an informal “adoption” by more experienced employees

# Types of Mentoring

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- Academic mentoring
  - Younger students are paired with faculty or older students
  - Learn study strategies, which classes to take, idiosyncrasies of professors, how to utilize university resources
  - Provide a “friendly face” to new students in an otherwise large and impersonal university setting
  - Extra motivation for mentee to succeed – someone out there is actually paying attention to how he or she is doing in school

# Types of Mentoring

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- Social / Informal Mentoring
  - Happens naturally between people as they meet and discover each other's areas of knowledge and experience
  - Potential mentors are everywhere! Just look around: relatives, friends, teachers, ministers, custodians, secretaries, doctors, school counselors, workshop presenters, the person sitting next to you... and YOU!
  - Often more advisory than technical – not everyone can solve that partial differential equation, but plenty of people can tell you about how life works

# Why be a mentor?

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- We are all in this together
  - Collectively, we have a vested interest in each other's success
- “Without struggle there is no progress”
  - Mentors pass on what they learned through their struggles...
  - ...To give mentees a head start on struggling with all-new problems!
  - Eventually the mentees become mentors and repeat the cycle...
  - ... And that's how we progress.



# Why be a mentor?

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- Give something back to those coming behind you
  - Leave a legacy for others to build on
  - Good feeling to see someone that you've helped go out into the world and succeed
  - People can learn a lot from you
  - Keep the pipeline going! Success breeds success.
- Learn something for yourself
  - Helps you solidify your own knowledge and understanding of the world, because now you have to explain it to someone else!
  - You can also learn from your mentee... regardless of age or experience, everyone has something to teach you.

# Why be a mentee?

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- Learn from other people's experience
  - How to approach problems -- The Right Attitude
  - Pitfalls and mistakes to avoid
  - Technical, subject-specific stuff, of course...
- Tap into your mentor's network of contacts
  - The more people you meet, the more opportunities open for you.
  - Good mentors tend to know each other, and can put you in touch with other people who can help you
  - "Six Degrees of Separation"

# Why be a mentee?

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- Career advancement
  - You get to work with people who are in a position to help you move forward
  - Access to resources that you might not get otherwise
- A healthy dose of motivation
  - Encouragement when you need it most...
  - ...From someone who believes in you!
  - Suggestions on how to improve
  - The “big picture” of what you’re trying to accomplish, and how your day-to-day work fits in

# Origins of Mentoring

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- Yet another good idea of the ancients
  - Perpetuate knowledge by passing on to the next generation
  - The original “Apprentice -- ” “You’re hired!”
- The word “mentor” comes from Greek mythology
  - Mentor was an old and trusted friend of Odysseus
  - When he went off to fight the Trojan War, Odysseus placed Mentor in charge of his son Telemachus

# Principles of Mentoring Relationships

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*"No individual has any right to come into the world and go out of it without leaving behind him distinct and legitimate reasons for having passed through it."*

– George Washington Carver

# The Magic Word

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- Mentoring is a type of relationship, and shares many of the characteristics of relationships in general.
- The most important thing: **Communication**
  - Vital to make sure that both sides agree on how things are going and where they should go next
  - Honesty is crucial!
- A two-way street:
  - Mentees talk about overall goals, mentors talk about ways to achieve them
  - Mentees talk about what does and doesn't work for them, mentors talk about alternative approaches

# The Magic Word

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- The most important thing: **Communication**
  - Important enough to repeat!
- Mentor and Mentee should share information about their backgrounds, current situations, aspirations, etc.
  - Get to know each other better, build a rapport
  - Tailor the mentoring experience to best meet the needs of the mentee (and mentor)
- Through proper communication, the number of (bad) surprises can be reduced

# The Magic Word

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- The most important thing: **Communication**
  - One more time, just to make sure you got it!
- At the very least, how else is the mentor supposed to impart his or her knowledge?



# Trust

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- Another critical element
  - Relationships don't work without it...
- Also a two-way street
  - Mentors: Your mentee is depending on you, so you have to be ready to make a commitment and follow through on it.
  - Mentees: Your mentor is volunteering his or her time and energy to help you out, based on the belief that you'll follow through and do your part.
    - Remember that this is a gift, which you repay by working as hard as you can.

# A Positive Attitude

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- Both mentors and mentees need this!
- Attitude makes all the difference
  - Even when things aren't going well, staying positive will keep your mind clear enough to figure out a way to improve
  - One of the most important things a mentor can do is remind the mentee that “it's not the end of the world”

# Activeness

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- Relationships take work – again, mentoring is no different.
  - Mentors: You have to meet your mentee halfway...be proactive!
    - Contact your mentee from time to time of your own accord. You'll be surprised at how much he or she will appreciate that you remembered and cared enough to check in.
  - Mentees: Your mentor can't read your mind. Tell him or her what you need!
    - Helping your mentor help you.
- You're equal partners on the same team, working towards a common goal.

# Everything is a learning experience!

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- Both sides must be open to learning new things... because it will happen, whether you want it or not!
  - Mentees learn the collected wisdom of the ages (or at least of the mentor)
  - Mentors learn new perspectives on problems from mentees
- You learn more about yourself through your interactions with your mentor/mentee.
- Learning is continuous – you can be a mentor and a mentee at the same time.
- Don't be afraid to fail – sometimes you learn more if you do.

# Goals

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- Goals come in all shapes and sizes:
  - Passing Calculus I
  - Becoming an astronaut
  - Working your way up the corporate ladder
  - Getting a Ph.D.
- The right mentors can help if you let them know what you want.
  - Decide together on intermediate milestones that move you toward reaching the goal, along with specific actions for accomplishing the milestones.
  - Periodically sit down and evaluate how things are progressing.

# Mentor Hats

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- To summarize, mentors wear a lot of hats.
  - Teacher: Impart the skills needed to do the job
  - Guide: Help to navigate the vagaries of the school / work / other environment
  - Counselor: Give advice for dealing with personal / professional problems
  - Motivator: Help push the mentee “over the hump” then the going gets rough
  - Sponsor: Introduce the mentee to new opportunities

# More Mentor Hats

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- Coach: Provide constructive feedback to help the mentee improve
- Advisor: Help the mentee to define their interests and goals, if needed
- Role model: Exemplify the ideals that the mentee is trying to achieve
- Agent: Connect the mentee with people that he or she should meet

# Mentee Hats

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- The Mentee has hats to wear as well:
  - Sponge: Soak up the knowledge and wisdom from your mentor, add your own, and squeeze it back out when it's your turn to meet a challenge
  - Squeaky wheel: Talk to your mentor! Let him or her know how things are doing.
  - Mountain climber: Once one challenge has been conquered, look for another that will stretch your abilities.
  - Colleague: Often, you are working side-by-side with your mentor. Do your part to get the job done.



# The Mentors Among Us

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- Find out what you can learn from your neighbors!

# How to Be a Bad Mentor in 7 Easy Steps

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*“People will forget what you did. People will forget what you said. But people will never forget how you made them feel.”*

– Maya Angelou

# 1. Take the job without actually wanting it.

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*“I don't really want to be a mentor. But everyone says it's the right thing to do, so I guess I'll go ahead.”*

- Only become a mentor if you are willing to put in the effort it takes!
- If you're not into it, your mentee won't get anything out of it.

## 2. Don't take the job when you do want it.

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*"I'd love to be a mentor, but I don't think I know enough yet."*

- Knowledge and experience are plusses, but a simple willingness to help is the key.
  - An ounce of encouragement is worth a pound of answers.
  - If you haven't been there / done that already, then you'll learn together!

### 3. Don't listen to your mentee.

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*"I have a whole agenda planned out. I think it's so great, of course my mentee will love it!"*

- Remember the **C**-word.
  - Your mentee has an opinion on how things are going. It's a very good idea to find out what it is.
  - You'll find out if you need to make course corrections, or if you are moving in entirely the wrong direction.

## 4. Don't make time for your mentee.

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*“I have nonstop meetings, number-crunching, and proposals to deal with. But I'll definitely pencil in an hour the Thursday after next for that mentoring thing.”*

- Mentoring is an active process. There's no substitute for actually spending time with your mentee.
  - He or she may understand if you are busy, but that's still a missed opportunity.
  - Sometimes circumstances are beyond your control. If that happens, explain the situation and how long you expect to be busy.
  - Never underestimate the power of a five-minute “check-in” phone call.

## 5. Don't set (reasonable) goals .

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*“My mentee will benefit from just basking in my presence.”*

- In general, people seek mentors because they're trying to achieve certain goals.
  - Structuring the mentoring relationship around those goals will make it more productive.
- Challenge your mentee, but don't ask the impossible.
  - Enables your mentee to grow without becoming discouraged.

## 6. Offer destructive criticism.

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*“I can’t believe you don’t know that. You’ll never make a good \_\_\_\_\_.”*

- When you offer an evaluation of your mentee, you are creating a self-fulfilling prophecy.
  - If you make your mentee believe in failure, then it will surely happen. Fortunately, the same is also true for success.
- A positive attitude is key!
  - Guide toward correctness, don’t tear down



## 7. Do your mentee's work.

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*"Why don't I just go ahead and take care of that..."*

- There is such a thing as helping *too* much.
  - The point is to enable your mentee to go out and succeed on his or her own.
- Offer guidance, but your mentee is the one that has to do the work.
  - People are more engaged and learn more if they do instead of watch.
  - Your mentee has to cross the bridge, you just provide the guardrails.

# How to Be a Bad Mentee in 5 Easy Steps

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*“I can’t understand it. I can’t even understand the people who can understand it.”*

– Queen Juliana of the Netherlands

# 1. Suffer in silence.

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*“This mentoring thing really isn’t working out for me, so I’m just going to relax and play Solitaire until it’s over.”*

- If things aren’t going well and you don’t do anything about it, you’re wasting your time and your mentor’s time.
- Speak up!
  - Have an honest discussion with your mentor about how your needs can be better met.
  - If there is still no resolution, it’s probably time to look for a new mentor.

## 2. Don't listen to your mentor.

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*“My mentor keeps telling me stuff about a positive attitude and work ethic instead of giving me the answers to my homework problems. I don't care about that stuff!”*

- Chances are that your mentor actually is trying to tell you something important, based on his or her experience doing what you're trying to do. It's a good idea to listen and think about it.

### 3. Don't look at the big picture.

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- *“My mentor is asking me to do all of this boring stuff that’s not related to what I really want to do.”*
- Think about it for a minute – your mentor might just be having you develop a necessary skill that you’ll need later on when you tackle the real challenges.
- If you still can’t figure out what’s the point, ask your mentor to explain it.

## 4. Don't be serious.

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*“This mentoring thing is cool and all, but it’s cutting into my Playstation time.”*

- Your mentor doesn't want to have his or her time wasted any more than you do. If you're not serious about holding up your end, you'll find yourself losing a mentor and an opportunity.

## 5. Do just enough to get by.

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- *“I get my work done, but that’s all I’m trying to do.”*
- The point of the mentoring process is to help you grow. In order to do that, you have to step up and take on challenges that stretch you, utilizing your mentor’s guidance.

# Tips for Assorted Situations

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*“Nothing astonishes men so much as common sense and plain dealing.”*

– Ralph Waldo Emerson



# Work / Internship Environment

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- Mentors:
  - Explain the overall goal of the work that you're doing, and how your mentee fits in.
    - That gives him or her a sense of purpose, and something to say when someone asks, "what kind of work are you doing on the job?"
  - Make sure that your mentee has meaningful work.
    - Your mentee will take pride in knowing that he or she is making a real contribution.
  - Don't hide your mentee away in a corner.
    - Introduce to your coworkers – they are also valuable sources of help.

# Work / Internship Environment

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- Mentees:
  - Learn everything you can about the organization, including the “unwritten rules.”
    - A lot of these tend to be the same no matter where you go, so learning them from your mentor now will help you later.
  - Learn what your mentor’s work is like
    - Job activities, working hours, interactions with colleagues, etc.
  - Ask about your mentor’s history
    - How he or she got started, previous jobs

# Graduate School

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- Mentors:
  - Get a good understanding of your mentee's background
    - People come from all types of undergraduate programs
    - What is motivating your mentee to go to graduate school?
  - Introduce, Introduce, Introduce
    - Networking is the key to future research collaborations, so get your mentee talking to people early.
  - Be encouraging.
    - Graduate school is a particularly tough environment for the uninitiated. Remind your mentee that “if you can get into grad school, you can get out of grad school.”

# Graduate School

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- Mentees:
  - If you need help, ask for it!
    - In grad school, it's not about the pride of doing everything by yourself. It's about getting your work done and getting out.
  - Find a mentor that you can talk with regularly about the emotional ups and downs.
    - Not necessarily someone in your department, just someone that you trust.

# College

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- Mentors:
  - Show your mentee the ropes, offer guidance, but know when to step back
    - College is an important time of personal growth, you have to let your mentee become the person he or she is supposed to be
    - But, try to keep them away from patently self-destructive behavior!
- Mentees:
  - Stay afloat! College is a whole new world, where you are responsible for your actions.
    - Listen to your mentors when they warn you of an impending mistake.

# K-12

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- Mentors:
  - Be as encouraging as possible, and expose your mentee to as much as you can.
    - He or she will pick a career someday, so the more options you introduce the greater the chance of finding something that makes him or her happy.
    - Remind your mentees that what they think of themselves is more important than what other students think of them.
- Mentees:
  - Ask questions!
    - About anything! About everything!
    - Don't stop until you're satisfied with the answers.
  - Make a note of things you enjoy doing, and things you would like to try.
    - Your mentor can help you do research on them.

# Summary

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- Being and / or seeking a mentor can be a highly rewarding experience that can have a lasting impact on your life.
- Once your mentor has helped you get to where you're going, turn around and help the next person!

# Thanks a lot!

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- Any questions?