



Supervisor NEWSLETTER

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7 Tips About How to Mentor Someone

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January is National Mentoring Month, making it the perfect time to start a mentoring relationship and take part in this time-honored practice.

For people who might be mentoring someone for the first time, you may be wondering about how to start or what to do to help your mentee. Here are seven ideas to help you as you begin working with them and becoming a good mentor.

1. Ask Questions

One of the core actions a mentor can take is to ask their mentee questions. When you ask questions, you are looking for clarity, searching for meaning, trying to help the mentee find patterns, and guiding them on a path of self-discovery. You never want your mentee to become dependent on you; you want them to be able to eventually outgrow their need for you. By teaching them to ask questions of themselves, the situations they're facing, and the choices they'll make, you are giving them the tools they need to be independent and successful.

2. Share Ideas

Mentees come to you because they value your opinion. While you don't want to dominate the conversation or dictate to the mentee what they should or shouldn't do, you can certainly offer ideas about whatever situation they are facing. Ask them if they want to brainstorm ideas together; if they say yes, then start a conversation where each of you shares ideas and builds off one

another's thoughts. You can act as a sounding board for many of their ideas. Sometimes just hearing options is enough to help the mentee know what they do or do not want to do in a career path or beyond. It can also help them see options they hadn't considered.

3. Tell Stories

A great way to convey an idea is by sharing a story. Stories offer a way for you to connect with your mentee and show them that you understand what they are going through. It also shows your mentee that they are not alone nor is their situation unique. Someone has been through this before and navigated through the resulting challenges. Stories also allow you to build a personal connection with the mentee by showing a vulnerable side of yourself. This most effectively takes place when you share a story in which you failed or struggled. These can be great ways to help illustrate how things can be turned around and how a positive outcome can come from a negative circumstance.

4. Dig Deeper

While a mentee shouldn't come to you and expect you to solve all of their problems, they also should not come to you and expect you to just listen and nod and agree with everything they say. A part of being a mentor is to ask questions and dig deeper into what you hear the mentee telling you. Maybe this means challenging them on their assumptions and taking them out of their comfort zone. Or maybe this means looking for the reasons why they feel a certain way or believe a certain thing. You can ask probing questions to help the mentee discover truths, which can then lead them to finding solutions. You can even try asking "why" multiple times in response to each answer the mentee gives you so that you can start peeling away the layers and find the root of the issue for long-term success.

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5. Listen With Compassion

Sometimes, though, the best thing a mentor can do is just listen—but there is a caveat. That doesn't mean you don't ask questions, tell stories, or any of the other things suggested here, but you should be conscious of the times when your mentee needs for you to stop talking and start listening. As you listen, do so with compassion. Try to understand your mentee's point of view and grasp any of the outside influences that might make themselves known through what the mentee says. Once you listen, you can ask the mentee questions to probe deeper into what was shared and gain clarity about what it is the mentee wants to gain from the conversation. Sometimes we just need to vent; other times we need a fresh perspective. No matter what the case is, listen.

6. Offer Encouragement

Mentors are often chosen because they have been through a similar situation as the mentee, and the mentee wants to learn from them about their experience. When this is the case, it can be easy to fall into the trap of telling the mentee what they should do, especially since you have already been through this. Don't do that! Instead, offer encouragement to the mentee and provide a safe relationship where they can ask questions, share ideas, vent frustrations, and seek a better understanding of the situation at hand. Encourage your mentee to push through difficult situations, cheer them on as they attempt a new (or uncomfortable) task, and celebrate with them when they learn something and grow.

7. Make Introductions

One reason why someone may ask you to be their mentor is to access to your network. If you are comfortable with this situation, then make introductions between your mentee and people in your network who can help them. But don't feel obligated to do this; it's not a requirement that a mentor open up access to their network for their mentee. If you do choose to do this, consider making very targeted introductions with a clear and express purpose that everyone agrees to. You don't want to put an undue burden on the people in your network nor make them feel uncomfortable by the request you are making.

Mentoring someone can be as rewarding for you as it is beneficial for the mentee. Help make the mentor mentee relationship a wonderful experience for both of you by being a quality mentor who cares about the relationship and values the journey you and the mentee are on.

References:

<https://www.td.org/insights/7-tips-about-how-to-mentor-someone>