

## **Tips for Mentor-Protégé Relationship challenges**

The Mentor-Protégé relationship may get complicated if not managed thoughtfully and with a plan for success of the protégé! There are many questions that arise in this relationship that can be answered clearly to make the Mentor-Protégé relationship effective for both. Mentoring is a two-way conversation that benefits the mentor and protégé, particularly when both people understand how to make it work.

### ***What is a Mentor?***

A mentor is an adviser, counselor, coach, guide, tutor, teacher, guru, and friend whom you can trust for valuable perspective. A conversation with one's mentor should be uplifting because it helps bring clarity and a sense of new possibilities to the protégé. A mentor provides listening and sounding board advice in a casual manner. They go out of their way to help protégés set important goals and foster the development of skills to reach the goals. In a formal mentoring relationship, the mentors have an ongoing commitment to help protégés reach these goals in a planned manner over certain period of time.

### ***What is a Protégé?***

A protégé is the recipient of support from the mentor, who provides direction, welfare, and coaching to promote success in the protégé's life. As a protégé, you must be able to identify what you need and from whom you need it. Mentors exist in every community. The challenge is to find one who can provide you with the assistance you need. You may choose a different mentor at one point in your career than you need at another time. Understanding your own goals and aspirations will enable you to identify the right mentors for you. Think about the types of responsibilities and challenges you face and find out if your prospective mentor has experience in these areas. A protégé must take responsibility for one's own development and have realistic expectations and appreciation of those who serve as mentor. If you are a protégé, be well prepared before meeting your mentor and think of ways you might offer assistance so that it is mutually beneficial for both.

### ***Why become a Mentor?***

While providing mentorship, one always learns from the protégé's experiences and challenges. The protégé may have some new job skills or knowledge that you do not have. Perhaps the protégé has an insight that is relevant for you or a style of communicating that could help you to enhance your own communication skills. Being a mentor gives you an opportunity to give back, to show your gratitude for the opportunities and experiences you have had, and to reciprocate what you may have received earlier. This contribution may bring recognition from colleagues and superiors as you develop a reputation as someone who has the ability to groom people for future leadership – a strength that is necessary for rising up the management ladder. Being a mentor helps you to examine and validate what you have learned. You feel satisfied, proud, and rejuvenated with positive thoughts as you see the benefits that your experiences bring to another person. The most powerful and least expensive way to change the world, one life at a time, is to take the time to reach out to others, share your life's wisdom, and convey your respect for them.

### ***Why be a Protégé?***

Being a protégé helps you grow in all aspects of life. You first learn more about yourself and do a lot of introspection. Hence, look for several individuals who could each play a part to uplift your life. As a protégé, you can create or revise your personal vision, develop a plan to achieve your goals, improve upon your weaknesses, and overcome your challenges with the support of another individual – your mentor. A personal vision greatly benefits you with realization of what to make of yourself and your world in the next one to five years or more. By working with a mentor, you achieve greater clarity and are able to implement your vision.

***What do Mentors and Protégés do together?***

Talk, talk, and talk. You can begin by sharing past experiences, career paths, and how you reached where you are today. You can learn about each other's goals, plans, skills, and strengths. You may attend meetings, conferences, events, and even work together on problem solving. Exchange materials, articles, publications, and discuss them. One of the most important activities is to network and interact with people and introduce each other to new people who could be of help. Remember that you must follow through on commitments as a matter of integrity. Be sensitive to cultural and other differences by respecting and accepting the other person's style and approach. Remember to treat your conversations with confidentiality.

***Who should manage the relationship?***

In the past, mentors always initiated and managed the relationship process. Today, there is a big shift. Protégés often lead the mentors and are managing the partnership. It is more important to the protégé to accomplish what he/she is seeking from the relationship within the limited time from the mentors, who are usually very busy. This shift in the dynamic of mentoring has resulted in protégés initiating the relationship, negotiating meeting times for the pair, clarifying confidentiality expectations, suggesting the goals and guidelines as to how the relationship should work, and for how long etc. They usually keep track and monitor the progress as the relationship continues. It is important for protégés to be flexible and respectful of the mentor's time as mentors often have very tight schedules and real time constraints.

***What are some of the challenges in Mentor-Protégé relationship?***

These days, life is so busy that there is often insufficient time and energy to spend on the mentorship relationship. Making time for professional and personal development is a challenge, but is viewed as a top priority by people who are committed to advancing in their careers and lives.

At times, protégés are unsure of what they want and don't know how to conduct a productive conversation with a more seasoned person. In this case, it is often best to be honest about the situation and ask the mentor to share their experiences and challenges. As the mentor relays the stories, the protégé will inevitably find a theme or issue that has relevance and meaning for the situation. This topic can be the starting point of the conversation.

The challenges of having a helpful and enjoyable mentoring relationship can be overcome if both parties establish ground rules and set expectations during the initial meeting. Both people must understand and respect the other's time, needs for confidentiality, and focused goals. Communicate using the best means suited for both parties. Good mentoring doesn't have to take place face-to-face every time. Agree upon expectations with the other. Over time, both mentor and protégé will gain the experience needed to understand how to best meet each other's needs.

***How can you have an effective Mentor-Protégé relationship?***

Mentors must provide encouragement frequently with honesty and tactfully assist the protégé to recognize areas needing improvement or new thinking. Often, it is best to reserve judgment and try not to say "Yes" or "No" too quickly. Instead, pay attention to the uniqueness of the other person and the protégé's special gifts. Remember the stated goals of the mentoring conversation and try to stay focused in areas that will help the protégé most directly. Ask the protégé what is helpful or would like more conversation about. The feedback will enable your comments to be most "on target." Have an open, casual manner while leading frank and focused discussions. By being relaxed and open, you will create the right environment for a good conversation. This will give the protégé confidence in your abilities and gain your trust that will truly uplift the spirits and help in making improvements in the areas the protégé needs to.

***Tips for Mentors!***

- Be honest with yourself and have a good rationale for being a mentor.
- Identify all that you can offer including your skills, knowledge, lessons learned, opinions, and personal and professional experiences.
- Layout a guideline and adhere to the boundaries within which the relationship is expected to be productive to both.
- Show your appreciation and encouragement frequently to the protégé. If there is any unpleasantness that arises in the relationship, provide a warning first and be honest when you pull back.
- Help your protégé lead the process. Talk to the protégé about transition, make “Thanks and goodbye”, a positive and satisfying departure, and be open to future contact.
- Express your appreciation for all you have gained from the protégé as well.

***Tips for Protégés!***

Do a thorough introspection and answer a few questions about yourself. Some of them could be:

- What have I done in my past, say until a year ago? What are my strengths and weaknesses?
- What is my current situation? What do I do today/this year? Do I like what I am doing?
- What is my future? Am I doing the work that is leading me to what my future should be?
- What am I currently involved with that utilizes my experience outside of work?
- What activities do I do related to community or being a good citizen?

The answers to the above questions help you to seek the right mentors who can then guide you to what you want to improve upon and achieve in life. Collate your key learning from several mentors. During the initial discussions, negotiate several factors like time, expectations, and come to an agreement on them. Do everything that you committed to do. In effective mentoring, it is vital to smoothly transition out when it is the right time and as initially agreed upon. Recognize that mentoring is ONE key development tool for the protégé.

*“YOU ARE WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED FROM THE PAST, WHAT YOU EXPERIENCE TODAY, AND WHAT YOU DREAM FOR TOMORROW” – Author unknown*

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