
HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP



THE PLANK CENTER
FOR LEADERSHIP IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

#PLANKMENTOR

Information provided in this guide draws from [The Plank Center Mentoring Research and Best Practices White Paper](#).

WHAT IS MENTORSHIP?

Mentorship is when a mentor, or someone with experience in a certain field, creates a bond or relationship with a mentee, an individual who is looking to grow his or her expertise in that field. Whether it be in a personal or professional setting, mentors are encouraged to be a guide and advocate for their mentees, while the mentees can provide insight from a different perspective to their mentors in return.

"[Mentoring is] a developmental relationship characterized by 'reciprocal learning and focused on goal attainment and personal growth.'"

- *The Review of Higher Education*
(Campbell et al., 2012, p. 597)

"Mentoring is about helping other people reach their career goals. It is a formal relationship comprised of time commitments and specific discussions of topics tailored to meet the needs of the mentee."

- *Aylwin Lewis, CEO, Potbelly Sandwich Works*

WHY IS MENTORSHIP IMPORTANT?

Mentorship programs can allow mentees to advance in their careers faster, earn higher salaries and develop more satisfaction in their jobs than individuals who don't have mentors. Employers gain higher performance in employees in their organization and have greater success in recruiting, training and keeping top talent.

Did you know?

90 percent of people who have a mentor are interested in becoming a mentor themselves.

Mentorship facilitates leadership.

Studies show those who have had a mentor are 130 percent more likely to hold a leadership position.

Mentoring can foster a sense of belonging.

For anyone entering the workforce, moving to a new city or starting a new job, mentoring can help instill a sense of comfort and belonging.

Faculty interactions help students grow.

Faculty members' approachability and desire to interact with students outside of the classroom to provide career guidance are important predictors of students' self-confidence, motivation and achievement.

Mentorship leads to success in the workplace.



WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

Formal vs. Informal

- **Formal program:** Some universities, agencies, corporations or professional organizations offer formal mentorship programs where a mentor is matched with a mentee. Many formal programs use applications to best match its participants based off of industry interests, location preferences, age, etc.
- **Informal connection:** A mentoring relationship can always be established through a professional or personal connection. These relationships don't require applications and can follow their own guidelines and timeframe.

Traditional vs. Reverse

- **Traditional mentoring:** A mentor serves as a guide and acts as an avid listener and resource to help the mentee achieve his or her goals.
- **Reverse mentoring:** A mutual process where mentees teach mentors. Mentees can offer insight on new technological advances, how to target their generation or new trends that are hitting the market. In this process, mentors and mentees are both the teacher and the student, and both people are learning from each other.

"We can all be generous in helping others, and I promise you will always receive more in return."

- Barri Rafferty, Partner, President, Ketchum

Short-term vs. Long-term

- **Short-term relationship:** A mentoring relationship can be as short as one session and end when certain objectives are met, or the relationship may focus on a specific topic for a set amount of time, depending on the terms agreed upon by each individual.
- **Long-term relationship:** Extended or even lifelong mentoring relationships can be established if effective communication is reached and the relationship continues to be beneficial. An ongoing relationship allows the mentor and mentee to continually use each other for counsel.

"It doesn't get any better than seeing someone become more than they ever dreamed possible."

- Ginger Hardage, Retired Senior VP
Culture & Communications, Southwest



HOW TO FIND A MENTOR

Before seeking out a mentor, mentees must assess their own individual goals. Before entering a new mentoring relationship, they must take a look at what it is they want to get out of the relationship: career guidance, professional development, counsel in a specific focus area or all of the above? Mentees must also be sure that they can dedicate the time and effort it takes to foster a strong mentor-mentee bond.

Example: **You might already have landed an interview at the company of your dreams but need guidance on how to secure the job. You could seek advice on how to impress an interviewer, what questions to ask and how to follow up.**

Mentees must do their research and expand beyond their network. Don't just look in one particular place – mentors can come from anywhere, from coworkers to friends to bosses to professors. When a mentee finds someone he or she thinks could be a great fit in terms of career path, take Betsy Plank's advice to heart and be an "eternal student." Take the time to learn more about the potential mentor as a professional and as a person. Knowing this information ahead of time shows a mentee's enthusiasm and genuine investment in the mentorship as well as respect. Seeking out information about a possible mentor also allows mentees to gauge the mentor's personality, which allows them to find someone who can help them achieve their goals as well as interact on friendly, mutually enjoyable terms.

Example: **Ask a potential mentor to describe his or her career path and to tell the story of how he or she got started in the industry. Getting people to tell their story is a great way to establish a relationship.**

To kickstart a mentoring relationship, mentees should reach out to the mentor first – not only to show their enthusiasm, but also to display initiative. Mentorship is a two-way street, and initiative on the part of the mentee shows that he or she is ready to learn. Initial communication should remain short, sweet and to the point, clearly outlining what the mentee wants from the relationship while remaining cognizant of the mentor's time by asking for a short introductory conversation. If he or she don't respond within a week or two, reach out again.

Example: **Outlining exactly what you're looking for in the relationship (formal vs. informal, frequency of conversation, etc.) can help clarify what will be expected from the mentor and increase his or her likelihood to say "yes."**

Tip:

Don't be discouraged if the first prospective mentor you reach out to is not available. Continue to reach out to members of your network and, should the timing of the request be the issue, offer to touch base at a later date. Keep lines of communication open and show your willingness to learn from them on their time.

Reference these [email examples](#) to help draft your initial message to your mentor or mentee.



HOW TO BE A MENTEE

- Be authentic and open
- Listen actively
- Reflect on growth
- Deliver on promises
- Value differences
- Give and receive feedback

List of questions to ask

As a mentee, make sure that you are prepared when you meet with your mentor. You should always have specific questions and ideas in mind.

Some examples include:

- **What is the best book on leadership that you would recommend to young professionals?**
- **What is the most powerful learning experience that you have encountered in the field?**
- **What is one skill that you wish you learned early in your career?**
- **What are your three biggest pieces of advice for someone at my level?**

Understand networking

- Start building a diverse network early because you never know when you will need to call upon connections that you made in college or as a young professional.
- Sitting in an office or classroom will not get you far on its own. You have to reach out to others in the industry and your community in order to grow.
- Take advantage of PRSSA/PRSA, business groups and volunteer organizations as resources to expand your network. You never know when or where you might meet a potential mentor.

“The best mentoring relationships happen naturally — they’re not forced.”

- Ron Culp, Professional Director, DePaul University

- The end goal of networking shouldn't be to secure an internship or job. Networking should foster mutually beneficial relationships between individuals.

Networking is a never-ending process.



HOW TO BE A MENTOR

Mentoring the next generation of young professionals can be a new and rewarding experience in helping guide the way for the future of the public relations industry. Mentors lead by example and set the tone through two-way communication and exemplary behavior. Betsy Plank often emphasized the importance of mentoring and considered it one of the strongest ways to achieve success in the public relations industry. Sometimes experience alone does not result in the most success possible, and a mentee needs guidance from an individual willing to invest time in him or her. Mentors are patient, keep the door open for questions and provide mentees with chances to grow as a professional and as a person.

Mentor tips and tricks from the experts

Successful mentoring should be a mutually beneficial experience for both the mentor and mentee. Developing the right relationship with your mentee is crucial to success as a mentor.

Seek out the opportunity to mentor.

"Talk to as many young people as possible. We are in the intellectual capital business, after all, and it's a great way to discover and develop talent."

- Andy Polansky, CEO, Weber Shandwick

Strive for authenticity and honesty.

"People you mentor want and need solid feedback. Not platitudes. And it's okay to let your mentees know you don't have all the answers. That vulnerability drives trust."

- Wendi Strong, executive vice president emeritus, enterprise affairs, USAA

Provide enriching opportunities and serve as a support system.

"Believe in your students' ability to step up and work independently with close guidance. Put another way, do not take work away from students and do not take credit for their success."

- Dr. Glenn J. Cameron, professor, University of Missouri

Understand there's always room to grow.

"Recognize that all of us can learn and benefit from having mentors throughout our careers (and lives, for that matter!), and you may need a mentor to learn how to mentor!"

- Dr. Lynne Sallot, professor, University of Georgia

Set up the structure

The key to a strong mentor-mentee relationship begins with motivating the mentee to achieve. Proactively identifying and recommending opportunities for the mentee allows for long-term visions for a career. Having the support of a more experienced individual will aid the mentee in achieving his or her goals.

Determine what the mentee seeks from the relationship. Often, mentees are unsure of what they want from a mentor. Discussing expectations and finding common ground is often the first step to achieving a successful mentoring relationship.

To cultivate a fruitful relationship, the mentor must set a tone of consistent and honest communication. Remaining updated on the mentee's life experiences and recognizing his or her achievements paves the way for success. Being accessible and keeping the lines of communication open also allow for a rewarding experience for both the mentor and mentee.

Let the mentoring relationship take time to develop. Mentors and mentees should check in with one another regularly in order to exchange feedback and engage in conversation, gradually developing a rhythm. Allowing this rhythm and rapport to develop and checking in at the right time lays the foundation for a successful mentoring relationship.



FINDING A PASSION – WHAT ARE YOU INTERESTED IN?

Your mentorship experience should be an opportunity for you to explore your passions. Distinguish your natural talents and interests, and use those as building blocks for your mentorship relationship. As you explore what fascinates you in the public relations world, new industries and career paths will begin to unfold that you never knew existed. Talk with your mentor or mentee to help each other find your passion, and then dive in.

Consider the following topics to explore while you search for your passion:

- **Digital Communications**
- **Facilitation & Event Management**
- **Global Engagement**
- **Issues & Crisis**
- **Brand & Reputation Management**
- **Measurement & Analytics**
- **Media Relations**
- **Nonprofit & Giving**
- **Social Marketing / Public Interest Communications**

“At the end of the day, knowing you made someone better just by actively listening, sharing your knowledge and knowing each other is what inspires me to mentor.”

- Tom Hoog, Vice Chairman Emeritus, Hill + Knowlton Strategies



PUT IT IN ACTION: ICEBREAKERS & ACTIVITIES

Break the ice by getting to know one another before diving into the newfound relationship. Taking on an unfamiliar role is not always the easiest, especially if it involves a new acquaintance, but with these activities, the relationship is bound for prosperity.

- *Ask the right questions.*
Ask “get-to-know you” questions to allow both the mentor and mentee to not only learn about one another, but also paint a picture of each other’s personalities.
- *Teamwork makes the dream work.*
Attend a local industry or professional networking event together. If mentees are new to networking, offer guidance by allowing them to experience professional mannerisms firsthand. After the mentees feel confident in their ability to work the room, allow them to venture off on their own. Meet after the event to debrief and provide feedback.
- *Bring your mentee to work day.*
Invite your student mentee to sit in on a meeting of yours, or even attend work with you for a day. This opportunity will offer him or her a glimpse of the professional world and the chance to network. Learning from doing proves to be beneficial in a mentor-mentee relationship.
- *Start a routine.*
Offer frequently to catch up with your mentee in a more informal setting, such as over a cup of coffee or lunch, and set a schedule for meeting. This allows the mentee to work through any first-meeting jitters he or she may have and allows the mentor and mentee to learn more about each other, chart each other’s progress and begin to form a relationship.
- *Set up a timeline.*
To stay on track and inspire learning objectives, consider creating a timeline that outlines what you will discuss, teach or learn each month. This gives you direction throughout the year of what to talk to your mentor or mentee about. You can use our example timeline as a guide or make your own!

Tip: If you are unable to meet in person, communicating online or via Skype/phone is still a great option to establish a genuine connection. Follow each other on social media to stay intouch with what each other is doing.

- *Engage in learning activities.*
 - Review and edit resumes.
 - Use the provided template or your own as examples.
 - Tag each other in interesting articles and blog posts about current PR trends and news.
 - Listen to the same webinar and discuss interesting takeaways.
- *Lean on each other as a resource.*
 - Inform each other about upcoming industry events, webinars, speakers, etc.
 - E-introduce one another to connections you might have in cities, industries or companies the other is interested in.
 - Discuss opportunities available in the workplace that aren’t necessarily taught in school.
 - Offer advice on professionalism — what to wear to an interview, how to follow up with a networking connection, how to write an appropriate thank-you note, etc.
 - Share interesting industry news and trends with each other.
 - Inform of any changes to course curriculums, such as technological advancements.

Mentorship is the building block to a successful career in any industry. Let this guide serve as direction to establishing your next mentoring relationship. **Who will be your next mentor/mentee?**

