

10 Ways to be a Good Mentor

Good mentoring relationships can be richly rewarding, not only for the person being mentored, but for the mentor too.

Mentors can, among other things, provide exceptional learning experiences for their mentees and, in doing so, expand their mentees' awareness, insight and perspective.

Here are 10 things you can do to be a good mentor:

1. Be credible

The best mentors I've encountered have been people that have credibility in, and have personally achieved success in, the area where I'm looking for support. For this reason, most people will seek the guidance of different mentors to help them develop specific skills or qualities, or to help them reach important decisions. Being credible doesn't mean that you need to have all the answers. The best answers for your mentee will come from their own thinking, with the help of your wisdom to support them.

2. Be a positive role model

Good mentors are respected by their mentees. A mentee can learn a lot from their mentor simply by watching how their mentor behaves in any particular situation. Good mentors will also look out for experiences, or even create situations in which their mentees can become involved to learn new things, for example, providing a look behind the scenes or a glimpse at how other people live or do things.

3. Be genuinely interested in your mentee as an individual

A mentoring relationship is a very personal one, which is often very important to the mentee, so, as a mentor, you need to get to know your mentee personally, about their hopes and dreams, so you can help them in a way that meets their personal best interest. For this reason, a parent is often not a good mentor for their child, as their parenting relationship and emotional connection will influence their guidance. That's not to say that a parent can never provide a mentoring moment for their child - they can - however, a parent can't be as objective as a person who's independent of the parenting role. In the same way, a manager is also not the best person to mentor someone on their team, as they'll often have a conflict of interest to contend with, between what's in the best interest of each individual and what's in the best interest of their team.

4. Share your experiences and insights

In doing so, choose stories that you feel are appropriate and helpful, but do so in a neutral way, without any attachment to how your mentee will use this learning. Be open to sharing your mistakes and failures too, as these are often where our biggest lessons are learned. It will also help your mentee be aware that challenges will arise, and the way you dealt with the situation might also help them gain insight about how to build resilience.

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5. Ask open questions

Asking your mentee open questions will help you as a mentor to identify their real needs, values and passions. It's also a great way to get your mentee to think through situations themselves and draw out the consequences of the various choices or courses of action they can take. During these conversations, you can share your wisdom, without making decisions for your mentee. That's their job.

6. Act as a sounding board

Mentees benefit greatly from the opportunity of having a good mentor listen to them. Allow them to explore their thoughts and ideas openly with you. This will often help them unravel their thinking and gain insights about a situation as they share their concerns with you.

7. Provide a fresh perspective

One of the benefits of working with a mentor is that a good mentor will often provide their mentee with a fresh perspective on an issue. A good mentor will often have the clarity of distance from an issue or problem that's needed to provide objective feedback to their mentee. They can also hold up a 'mirror' to the mentee to, for example, let the mentee see what their behaviour looks like to others.

8. Provide helpful feedback

Not all feedback is helpful. A good mentor knows this and will deliver feedback in a way that will help their mentee gain insight to further develop specific qualities or skills. For example, a good mentor will always ask for permission to give feedback before doing so. Giving unwelcome feedback can be detrimental to any mentoring relationship. Instead, explain what you'd like to talk about first and highlight the benefits of doing this.

9. Acknowledge achievements

Highlight for your mentee any achievements they might have forgotten, to help build their confidence. Remember to celebrate their successes on your mentoring journey too.

10. Offer your advice, but only if your mentee asks for it

It can be very tempting for a mentor to just jump in and offer advice before a mentee has actually asked for it, especially when you've dealt with a similar situation yourself. Being a sounding board for your mentee, allowing them to discuss the situation with you, then helping them to think through the situation by asking them questions to draw out the consequences of various actions, is always more empowering for a mentee than advising them what to do. It helps them work through the issue and come to their own conclusions. By doing so, you ultimately help them to learn to think through issues themselves and trust their own judgement, both valuable life skills.

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