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BUILDING YOUR CAREER EDGE

'Breaking Up' With Your Mentor

By Kerrie Main

Unlike marriages or other permanent commitments, mentorships are relationships designed to help junior employees establish and achieve career goals, and they do not last forever.

Most formal mentoring programs are typically set up to last between nine and 18 months, but participants often



do not know how or when to end the mentorship. While much information is available about how to set up a formal mentoring relationship, as well as how to manage expectations and set goals, program administrators sometimes fail to teach

participants how to end the relationship when it has run its natural course. Others find themselves in informal mentorships without predetermined expiration dates or feel their formal mentorships are not working out. In all of these situations, mentees and mentors stay together indefinitely unless one of them initiates the "break up."

Never abruptly end the mentor relationship without a final meeting. Choose an end date and inform your mentor that the next meeting will be your last. Prepare in advance, and if you think nerves may be a factor, write down speaking points to have on hand. Begin the conversation on a positive note by thanking your mentor and reviewing the highlights and successes of the mentorship. Give a specific compliment about something you appreciated, such as his or her communication style.

State your reason for ending the

mentor relationship. Giving honest, yet constructive feedback will help your mentor improve in the future. Put a complimentary spin on criticism. For example, if you are ending things because your mentor doesn't give suggestions or details on how to complete tasks, you could say, "I really admire how you're able to look at the big picture, but I think that we just have different work styles – you've helped me realize that I'm really detail-oriented need those types of parameters to thrive, and I'm so grateful to have gained that self-knowledge."

If you'd like to stay in touch with your mentor, tell him or her that you'd enjoy meeting up occasionally for lunch or dinner. If you don't want to see him or her out of the professional setting, end the conversation by thanking him or her again and say that you're grateful for all the help.

Mentors are only human and some will feel embarrassed or angry, which is why it's important to communicate the reason for the meeting beforehand. On the flip side, your mentor may feel a sense of relief if he or she feels the same way but didn't know how to break things off first.

Even if your mentorship didn't go as planned or ended prematurely, it doesn't mean it wasn't worthwhile. Reflect on what you gained from the mentorship, and remember to set a target date and create a pre-planned exit strategy with your future mentor. When the conversation occurs at the beginning of the relationship, it makes for a smooth and successful transition when it's time to move on.

Kerrie Main is the in-house journalist at Nobsco Corporation's Mentor Scout Division (www.mentorscout.com).