A Mentor’s Guide to Power Mentoring

This manual is written for those who wish to serve as mentors. We encourage you to review it as part of the preparation for your mentoring experience. The guide also assesses the practical aspects of mentoring, and offers some recommendations on how to make the most of the mentor/mentee relationship.

The rewards of mentoring are great! We hope this Mentor’s Guide will be a useful reference as you begin the exciting journey of developing and nurturing a strong mentoring relationship.

The goal of the L. Patrick Mellon Mentorship Program is to promote diversity and inclusion in the communications industry by pairing seasoned industry professionals with NAMIC members looking to leverage their talent, motivation and dedication in with strategic career planning.

NAMIC initially established a national mentoring program in 1993, and renamed it the L. Patrick Mellon Mentorship Program in 1997 in honor of one of NAMIC’s founding members, the late L. Patrick Mellon, a respected mentor in the cable industry and an executive with ESPN, Inc.

“We make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give.”

– Winston Churchill
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1. PROGRAM OVERVIEW

GOAL
To facilitate diversity in the communications industry by providing NAMIC members with mentors to assist them with their career strategies.

METHODOLOGY
To offer support, guidance and advice over the course of a formal nine-month mentoring cycle and potentially beyond.

PROCESS
Industry professionals are recruited to serve as mentors and are paired with individual mentees. NAMIC members may apply to participate in the program by completing an evaluation process managed by NAMIC’s manager of education programs. This process helps assess interests, expectations, and needs of the prospective mentee in order to match him/her with the appropriate mentor. Mentor and mentee enter into a mentorship “contract” that is monitored by NAMIC throughout the formal mentoring cycle to ensure that the expectations and accountabilities discussed and agreed to by both parties at the beginning of the relationship are being honored.

NAMIC will initiate the mentoring relationship in the following manner:

- Conduct the initial discussion with prospective mentees
- Identify and select appropriate mentors
- Disseminate all program materials
- Coach mentors and mentees where appropriate
- Monitor the relationship to lend support where needed
- Track program success through periodic surveys
2. FIRST THINGS FIRST!

TIME COMMITMENT: Mentors are asked to make a minimum commitment of two hours per month to the mentoring relationship.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Both mentor and mentee agree to keep all information discussed strictly confidential.

Both parties agree that it is inadvisable to create any expectation of guaranteed career advancement with either the mentor's company or that of the mentee during the formal mentorship cycle.

If either the mentor or mentee is uncomfortable with the match for any reason, NAMIC’s manager of education programs, who has oversight of the L. Patrick Mellon Mentorship Program, should be contacted as soon as possible for assistance in addressing the problem.

3. WHAT IS MENTORING?

Mentoring has been described as a process of forming, cultivating, and maintaining a mutually beneficial, developmental relationship between a mentor and a mentee. A mentor helps his/her mentee set goals and standards and to develop the skills necessary to succeed. In an increasingly complex and high-tech environment, we all experience the need for special insight, understanding, and information often not readily accessible within the established organizational channels or learning infrastructure. Ideally the mentor serves as a trusted guide who works with the mentee to help him/her learn things more quickly or sooner, or to learn what may otherwise remain unlearned. A mentor is an advisor, teacher and coach who engages in deliberate actions aimed at promoting knowledge and strategic career decision making.

The effective mentoring relationship has been described as having five components:

1. Focused on acquiring knowledge
2. Involving support, direct assistance, and role modeling
3. Having reciprocal benefits
4. Personal in nature
5. A mentor who possesses greater experience, influence, and achievement than the mentee

An effective mentor can be described as practical, generous, direct, honest, having clarity of ideas, energy, passion, high expectations, and a vision for the mentee’s future. The mentor facilitates qualitative changes in the mentee’s approach to problem solving and quantitative changes in his/her own professional legacy through the insight, judgment, understanding, and knowledge accumulated over the years.
Mentoring is largely the art of *making the most of the situation at hand* and parlaying it into improved opportunities. Such a seemingly unstructured view may initially alarm those individuals who expect, and perhaps need, a cookbook approach to any task. They want to know exactly what they are supposed to do, how to do it, and when to do it. To tell them that mentoring is part intuition, part feeling, and part hunch leaves them with a degree of uncertainty that may be difficult to surmount. But that is largely what mentoring is, and from that reality it derives its power.

### 4. THE STORY OF MENTOR

The story of Mentor comes from Homer’s *Odyssey*. When Odysseus, King of Ithaca, went to fight in the Trojan War, he entrusted the care of his household to Mentor, who served as teacher and overseer of Odysseus’ son, Telemachus. But Mentor was more than a teacher. Mentor was half-god and half-man, half-male and half-female, believable and yet unreachable. Mentor was the union of both goal and path; he was wisdom personified.

Eventually, father and son were reunited and together they cast down would-be usurpers of Odysseus’s throne and of Telemachus’s birthright. In time the word *Mentor* became synonymous with trusted advisor, friend, teacher, and wise person. History offers many examples of helpful mentoring relationships: Socrates and Plato, Hayden and Beethoven, and Maya Angelou and Oprah Winfrey.

Mentoring in organizations is seen as a process wherein mentor and mentee work together to discover and develop the mentee’s potential. The goal is the empowerment of the mentee through enhanced skills and insights, thereby enabling more strategic management of the career journey.

### 5. PREPARING FOR THE MENTORING EXPERIENCE

#### A. YOUR ROLE AS A MENTOR

Your role as a mentor will be to help your mentee to set goals and to develop the skills necessary to succeed. The relationship between you and your mentee is supportive, nurturing, and protective, and is structured to facilitate the mentee’s professional and personal growth. A mentor provides constructive criticism yet allows room for risk and failure.

A mentor’s role is to serve as a counselor and coach and to provide moral support by sharing information and personal insight. Mentors do not have all of the answers. Mentoring requires a heightened awareness of the needs of the mentee, combined with the willingness to pause for a while and LISTEN! The personal satisfaction will be well worth the time and effort spent.
B. THE MENTORING PARTNERSHIP

Mentoring is often perceived as a one-way street, with the mentor giving and the mentee receiving. Traditionally, this top-down, parent-to-child relationship was often based on the assumption that the mentee was not in a position to do much in return except be a dutiful and appreciative follower.

Mentoring, however, is a partnership, with both parties freely contributing in an atmosphere of mutual respect and confidentiality. A stronger degree of identification may exist between a mentor and mentee than in any other work relationship. The degree of emotional involvement also makes mentoring relationships unique. A mentor may well have greater experience, insight and wisdom, but the relationship is at its best when the mentor demonstrates rather than commands. After all, the mentor helps facilitate the process, but the mentee is ultimately responsible for execution.

The mentoring relationship can be briefly characterized as a series of mentor-mentee dialogues for:

- Collaborative critical thinking and planning
- Mutual participation in specific goal-setting and decision-making
- Shared evaluation regarding the results of actions
- Joint reflection on the merits of areas identified for progress

In addition, mentors enable mentees to:

- Take appropriate risks
- Deal better with the stress and uncertainty that accompany risk-taking
- Develop more self-confidence
- Make informed decisions that increase the attainment of current and future objectives

“The teacher ... gives not of his wisdom but rather of his faith and his lovingness.
If he is indeed wise, he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom
but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind.”

– Khalil Gibran
EXERCISE 1: What Mentors Do

Your mentee will be working with a similar list to determine his/her top three expectations of the mentoring relationship. Your first conversation should include a discussion of this list. Please be aware that these are your mentee's expectations of the program and the relationship. Even though you will have developed your own list, ultimately you will be working to achieve his/her objectives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OTHERS HAVE DONE THIS FOR ME</th>
<th>I’VE DONE THIS FOR OTHERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Set high expectations of performance</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Offer challenging ideas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Help build self-confidence</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Encourage professional behavior</td>
<td></td>
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<td>5. Offer friendship</td>
<td></td>
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<td>6. Confront negative behaviors and attitudes</td>
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<td>7. Listen to personal problems</td>
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<td>8. Teach by example</td>
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<td>9. Provide growth experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Explain political situations</td>
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<td>11. Support in difficult situations</td>
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<td>12. Offer best advice based on personal experience</td>
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<td>13. Encourage winning behavior</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Trigger self-awareness</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Inspire others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Share critical knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. Assist with strategic career advice</td>
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</table>

C. ONE ROLE, MANY HATS

There is no single formula for good mentoring; mentoring styles and activities are as varied as human relationships. Different mentees will require different amounts and kinds of attention, advice, information, and encouragement. Some will feel comfortable approaching you; others will be shy, intimidated, or reluctant to seek help.

Mentoring relationships have certain qualities that distinguish them from other professional relationships. An effective mentoring relationship is characterized by mutual respect, trust, understanding, and empathy. Good mentors are good listeners, good observers, and good problem solvers. They make an effort to know, accept, and respect the goals and interests of their mentees.
The multiple roles of mentors include the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADVISOR</td>
<td>with the career experience and willing to share lessons learned from that experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUPPORTER</td>
<td>to give emotional and moral encouragement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUPERVISOR</td>
<td>offering specific feedback on a mentee’s performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPONSOR</td>
<td>a source of information about and access to opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MODEL</td>
<td>the kind of professional a mentee would wish to emulate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As you begin the work of developing and nurturing your mentoring relationship, it will be helpful to bear in mind the following:

- Mentors encourage personal growth and development
- Mentors are positive influences
- Mentors help build self-confidence
- Mentors are open and honest; they have no hidden agendas
- Mentors demonstrate a caring demeanor
- Mentors understand that everyone likes a compliment
- Mentors don’t extinguish hope; they inspire
- Mentors maintain professionalism at all times
- Mentors are willing to set aside time
- Mentors build trust
- Mentors maintain confidentiality

In his *Principles of Adult Mentoring*, Dr. Norman H. Cohen describes the primary mentor behaviors as follows:

1. The mentor conveys a genuine understanding and acceptance of the mentee’s feelings through active, empathetic listening.
2. The mentor directly requests detailed facts from the mentee regarding current plans and progress in achieving career goals and offers specific comments regarding the relevance of sources and usefulness of information.
3. The mentor guides the mentee through a reasonably in-depth review and exploration of interest, abilities, ideas, and beliefs relevant to the workplace.
4. The mentor respectfully challenges the mentee’s explanations for avoidance of decisions and actions relevant to career development.
5. The mentor shares appropriate life experiences, attitudes, and emotions as a “role model” to the mentee in order to personalize and enrich the relationship.
6. The mentor stimulates critical thinking about careers in the future, and reflects on mentee’s plans for developing his/her own professional and personal potential.
EXERCISE 2: Mentor Personal Reflection

1. As you think back on your career, do any mentors stick out in your mind? Who were the mentors who really made a positive difference in your life? Make a list of them below.

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2. Why do you think they took a special interest in you? What qualities did you have that made them want to spend time with you and encourage you?

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3. What was it that made each of them a great mentor? What did these important people have in common?

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4. What lessons did you take away from those mentoring relationships that might assist you in being a good mentor?

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6. BEGINNING THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP JOURNEY

A. ESTABLISHING RAPPORT

To facilitate getting to know one another, it is important for you to first build rapport with your mentee. This process takes time. However, if carried out in a comfortable and consistent manner, it will keep the relationship interesting and meaningful.

Some suggestions for building rapport with your mentee:

1. Establish regular times for meeting together.
2. Make a list of items to be covered with your mentee during meetings.
3. Help your mentee chart progress in areas that need improvement.
4. Introduce your mentee to sources of information and contacts.
5. Share success factors from your own personal experiences.
6. Model good professional behavior.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STEP 1</th>
<th>Welcome the mentee; make the atmosphere comfortable.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STEP 2</td>
<td>Communicate to your mentee your excitement about this new relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEP 3</td>
<td>Pay attention to what the mentee says (and doesn’t say). Be mindful of the message beneath the words.</td>
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<tr>
<td>STEP 4</td>
<td>Be empathetic. Let your mentee know you appreciate his/her feelings. When your mentee feels you are truly sensitive to feelings, he/she will be more responsive.</td>
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<tr>
<td>STEP 5</td>
<td>Be authentic. The key to a successful mentoring relationship is the ability on the part of mentor and mentee alike to surrender to the process — fully.</td>
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</table>

B. CLARIFYING GOALS AND EXPECTATIONS

Once you’ve established rapport with your mentee, you should facilitate a conversation in which you set mutual expectations as well as responsibilities for the relationship. Discuss what you hope to gain from the mentoring relationship and just as important, what you think you can contribute to it. Encourage the mentee to do the same. This is also an opportunity for both of you to surface any apprehensions you might have (e.g., time or logistical challenges).
C. SETTING GROUND RULES FOR THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

Be up front about your own needs and encourage the mentee to be as forthcoming. Clarity in the beginning of the relationship will help to minimize misunderstanding down the line.

D. A VIABLE MEETING SCHEDULE

Be realistic about what is manageable in terms of committing to a meeting schedule. You and your mentee enter the relationship with full professional plates and other demands on your time. Establish timeframes that you both can feel comfortable with and adhere to. Obviously, given the nature of the industry in which you both work, flexibility may be called for. However, a key element of the mentoring relationship is respecting as much as possible the terms agreed to in the early stages of the relationship.

7. PRE-WORK FOR MENTEES

A. PART 1: GOAL SETTING

Your mentee will be working through the following questions to help him/her have a proactive role in establishing the foundation for the mentoring relationship. You may want to discuss your mentee’s responses in order to gain a better sense of background and goals.

1. Where do you want to be in five years — in your career and life?

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2. What do you need to do or learn to facilitate the achievement of these objectives?

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3. What skills and attributes do you look for in your mentor to help you reach your goals?
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4. What obstacles could keep you from executing your strategy and attaining your goals?
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A. PART 2: ASSESSING PERSONAL EXPECTATIONS
A well thought out plan prepared by the mentee is a key component of the mentoring relationship. Your mentee should have worked through the following questions to determine his/her personal expectations for the program. (S/he will be sharing these comments with you and this will help set the tone for your relationship. Remember, these are the areas in your mentee's life with which your help is most required. Your role is to provide direction, act as a sounding board, and offer advice where appropriate.)

1. State your top priorities for the mentoring relationship:
   a) ______________________________________________________________________
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   b) ______________________________________________________________________
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   c) ______________________________________________________________________
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   d) ______________________________________________________________________
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   e) ______________________________________________________________________
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2. State your understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each party in the mentoring relationship:

a) Mentor
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

b) Mentee
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
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__________________________________________________________________________

2. List any special circumstances or needs you may have that might impact the mentoring relationship:
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4. Create a Purpose Statement for your mentoring relationship:
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__________________________________________________________________________
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8. THE FIRST MEETING

A. GETTING ACQUAINTED

Begin the relationship by taking some time to tell your mentee about yourself and to learn about him/her. You’ll find it very helpful to connect on a personal level before getting down to work.

Some questions to ask during your first conversation

1. How did you get your job?
2. How long have you worked in the communications industry and what’s been your experience so far?
3. Where do you see your career taking you?
4. How do you like the company you work for?
5. What do you do when you’re not working?

B. A PROTOCOL FOR ENGAGEMENT

Your mentee is responsible for initiating and scheduling meetings. But you both will need to decide the following:

1. When you should meet and how long
2. How reminders will be given (faxes, voice mail, email)
3. The best way and time to contact each other (e.g., if you are not immediately available, what is the next best method of contact)
4. How to work together (e.g., Will there be written communication? Will the mentee submit materials to the mentor? How will “problems” be resolved?)

Make sure your mentee knows your assistant’s name and vice-versa. Your assistant should know how to handle your mentee’s calls so as not to appear as though s/he is screening calls.

C. REVIEW YOUR MENTORING EXPECTATIONS

You should have already received your mentee’s list.

D. DISCUSS YOUR REASONS FOR PARTICIPATING

Mutual understanding of why each of you is involved in the mentoring relationship is critical to success.
E. SET YOUR NEXT MEETING TIME

It’s better to set a time during your conversation instead of waiting until later in the week. Otherwise, it tends to be put off. Initially, as with any relationship, your mentoring relationship may involve a test period and some tensions. Common problems that sometimes arise are:

- *Feelings of uncertainty may exist regarding the new relationship*
- *Your mentee doesn’t keep to the terms of the relationship*
- *You and your mentee don’t see eye to eye on certain issues*
- *Time and scheduling challenges*
- *Poor communication*
- *Miscommunication because of cultural differences*

This first meeting is critical. You need to start the habit of being candid with each other immediately by discussing any concerns and agreeing on strategies to address those concerns. The key to moving beyond these obstacles is open, frank, non-judgmental discussion, and the sooner the better. Please contact the coordinator for the L. Patrick Mellon Mentorship Program if you should encounter a problem that would benefit from outside intervention.
9. ESSENTIAL MENTORING SKILLS

A. ACTIVE, RESPECTFUL LISTENING

Active, respectful listening is the ability to become absorbed in what another person is saying, treating their words as confidential communication, and most important, not interjecting your own views, opinions or suggestions. As listener, you become the catalyst for self-learning on the part of your mentee. Listening is more than just hearing what the other person says. It takes patience, empathy, and some work on your end.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STEP 1</th>
<th>Ask initiating and clarifying questions. Remember the <strong>WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, and HOW</strong> questions.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STEP 2</td>
<td>Demonstrate that you are listening by paraphrasing. By doing so, you check for understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEP 3</td>
<td>Always summarize what you’ve heard. Summarizing synthesizes what you’ve heard to the basic facts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEP 4</td>
<td>Add information from your own experiences, views, and feelings to reinforce empathy with your mentee.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. UNDERSTANDING YOUR MENTEE’S NEEDS

Helping an individual to grow is neither straightforward nor simple. Your mentee has a life as complicated as your own, and your sensitivity to this will go a long way towards ensuring that the relationship you establish is both authentic and meaningful.

Here are some helpful hints:

1. **Pick up on subtle concerns your mentee begins to express.**
2. **Notice small or gradual changes that seem significant.**
3. **Be mindful of nonverbal cues.**

C. STRATEGIC QUESTIONING

There is an art to asking questions. In the mentoring relationship, the best kinds of questions are those that elicit rich, thoughtful answers that include information that both informs and sets the stage for follow-up. One of the most powerful techniques that the mentor can master is how to formulate and ask the **STRATEGIC QUESTION.**

Strategic questioning can reveal for both the mentor and the mentee an unexplored point of view. It is a creative process through which new ideas are generated and new possibilities exposed. Strategic questioning is, above all, a **STRATEGY FOR CHANGE!**
CHARACTERISTICS OF STRATEGIC QUESTIONING

1. Avoids the simple “YES” or “NO” response
2. Creates motion: “What would YOU like to do?”
3. Creates options: “How can we get from where we are to where we want to be?”

The most important thing is to demonstrate your own enthusiasm and your commitment to learning something from the mentee’s answers.

D. GIVING ADVICE

Many independent-minded mentees — and this often characterizes professionals who’ve already achieved mid- to upper-mid level management status — may not really want advice, though they will value your experience, ideas, knowledge of how things work, and special insights into problems. Effective mentors stick with helping. They share, they model, they teach.

| STEP 1 | Giving advice can be tricky. Always ask permission to give advice. Watch for resistance and avoid being commanding. Avoid confrontation when it appears that your mentee is resistant to the advice being offered. |
| STEP 2 | Before giving advice, let your mentee know the intent. Your advice should have a focus, or your mentee may feel confused as to why it’s being given. |
| STEP 3 | Make sure your mentee understands the intent of advice offered. |
| STEP 4 | Give advice in the first person, providing as much contextual information as possible. |
E. PROVIDING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

Feedback will be an essential component of your relationship with your mentee. Feedback is “filling in a blind spot.” Your mentee may not be able to see something that you are able to observe. Feedback provides that insight. Unfortunately, when the feedback is perceived as criticism, your mentee is likely to feel as though you’re passing judgment, and this can damage the mentee’s self-esteem, put him/her on the defensive, be internalized as “loss-of-face,” and shift the focus from constructive action to energy spent repairing hurt feelings. Even though your mentee may trust you and believe in your commitment to his/her development, these may be knee-jerk, sometimes culture-based, responses.

In his book *A Mentor’s Companion*, Larry Ambrose offers the mnemonic device **S.E.A.T.** for giving feedback. Feedback should always be:

| Specific 
| Explicit 
| Achievable 
| Timely |

Planning your feedback according to this simple device can significantly increase the likelihood that you will be understood as you would wish to be understood.

F. PROBLEM-SOLVING TECHNIQUES

As a mentor, your job is to help your mentee grow and develop his/her own problem-solving abilities, even though sometimes it will be tempting to provide answers or solve a problem yourself. Bear in mind that what is often more important than the problem is the mentee’s “problem with the problem.” Use probing questions and apply effective listening skills. These, along with adhering to the following basic roadmap can help your mentee examine his/her own thinking process and, in doing so, get clarity on what the real issues are.

| STEP 1 | Identify the real problem. |
| STEP 2 | Investigate the cause. |
| STEP 3 | Listen for feelings. |
| STEP 4 | Identify how the mentee may be keeping it a problem. |
| STEP 5 | Push for discovery. |
| STEP 6 | Don’t take over. |
| STEP 7 | Push for action and mentee ownership. |
10. THE MENTORING LIFE CYCLE

Most mentoring relationships change as they evolve through the following four phases:

| PHASE 1 | During PHASE 1, there is usually TRUST BUILDING and a sharing of reciprocal feelings and values. Mentors usually serve as role models for mentees to look up to and admire for their behavior, values, professionalism, and competence. |
| PHASE 2 | PHASE 2 is where mentor and mentee EXPLORE POSSIBILITIES, clarify expectations and build consensus regarding how the relationship is to be managed. |
| PHASE 3 | PHASE 3 of the mentoring relationship provides an opportunity to NEGOTIATE ROUGH SPOTS, with the very real possibility that the relationship can proceed on an even stronger footing. In most relationships, regardless of their nature, there will come a time of reassessment, reclarification, and recommitment. |
| PHASE 4 | PHASE 4 is the time when mentor and mentee ASSESS THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS of the mentoring cycle, craft a strategy for the mentee to move his/her professional objectives to the next level, and determine the viability of continuing the relationship — formally or informally — beyond the established nine-month program guidelines. |

At the end of the formal mentoring relationship, outcomes can be measured against original goals. It is useful for both mentor and mentee to review the following:

- What did we expect to achieve?
- What did we actually achieve?
- What else did we learn?
- How will we use what we have learned in future developmental relationships?

“A lot of people have gone further than they thought they could because someone else thought they could.”

– Unknown
THE MENTORING LIFE CYCLE

PHASE 1
Building Trust
- Learning to communicate
- Bridging differences
- Planning initial meetings

PHASE 2
Exploring Possibilities
- Setting goals
- Choosing activities
- Celebrating accomplishments

PHASE 3
Negotiating Rough Spots
- Knowing your limits
- Remaining committed
- Seeking outside support

PHASE 4
Assessing Accomplishments
- Reaping the rewards
- Expanding the movement
- Beginning again
11. RESPECT FOR DIFFERENCES

Diversity is at the heart of some of the most subtle and special relationships imaginable. Cross-cultural and cross-gender mentoring relationships can serve as rich resources for self-expansion for mentors and mentees alike. While these may seem invisible to the mentoring relationship, they can have deep significance in terms of the quality of support that a mentor provides and how that support is perceived by the mentee. Frank, open discussion of the cultural and political nature of the workplace can reap rich, long-term rewards for both participants in the mentoring partnership, providing each with new insights and understanding that can enhance not only their individual development, but their ability to be more effective leaders and agents of change in their respective organizations.

As a mentor you should recognize that your mentee may experience racial, gender, or other forms of discrimination in his/her day-to-day life within the organization. This is particularly true in organizations where the dominant culture may not always acknowledge or celebrate the cultural diversity of employees. Mentors who are not mindful of, or who treat as irrelevant, the personal or cultural characteristics of their mentees are not helping their mentees. As important, they may also be missing out on a powerful opportunity to be authentic agents of change in the organizations they serve and in the communications industry as a whole.

As a mentor, attention to the development of your own competence in interpersonal behavior will enable you to enter the mentoring dialogue with enhanced knowledge and sensitivity. You have an opportunity to demonstrate for by your own example the essential skills that enable individuals from different cultural backgrounds and worldviews to discuss a variety of ideas, attitudes, and positions, to work through different views of a problem, and to generate a range of creative solutions in the complex workplace environment.

12. CROSS-CULTURAL MENTORING

Communication is rarely a simple process of connecting the word dots. We differ in our experiences, our values, our use of language, our notions of time, how we take in information, how we make that information useful in our lives, and in so many other ways. This is true even when on the face of it we come from a shared cultural context. When we layer onto this the ways in which we all are unique, the historical and socio-political differences that stem from race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation (to name just a few), it becomes quite a task to connect with each other and to create a truly mutually shared and valued perspective.
It requires of each of us that we own up to our filters, admit that we have blind spots, and, most important, that we realize that even the most seemingly benign assumptions about others and their “meaning” all too frequently miss the mark. It necessitates a fundamental acknowledgement of the fact that while in our own minds we are crystal clear about the intent of our words and actions, we have little control over how others interpret these or feel their impact. The cultural filters of the receiver of our verbal, non-verbal, and behavioral messages determine ultimately what ends up being the MEANING!

By listening carefully, by respecting our differences, and by practicing the art of inclusion, we can build stronger and more successful organizations. Recognizing where cultural differences are at work is the first step toward understanding and respecting each other, and can help us communicate with each other more effectively. Culture is central to what we see, how we make sense of what we see, and how we express ourselves. Our cultural uniqueness can also enable each of us to appreciate special facets of a problem, approach its solution from different angles, and contribute to a more comprehensive, elegant, and lasting solution.

Cultural factors can complicate cross-race and cross-gender mentoring relationships. The ethnic or gender makeup of the mentor pair impacts the overall mentoring experience for both mentors and mentees. In general, mentees tend to have less power and greater vulnerability in the relationship, which also characterizes many of the relationships that people of color and women experience in the workplace. If you as a mentor are sensitive to these dynamics and the impact they may have on the professional experience of your mentee, you will have an opportunity to build a developmental relationship that is reinforced by a heightened measure of awareness, openness, and genuine caring.

Remember that cultural norms as such may not apply to the behavior of any particular individual. We are all shaped by many factors, including our ethnic backgrounds, our families, our education, and our personalities. As individuals, we are far more complex than any shared group norm might suggest. So what can you as a mentor do when confronted with the complexities and uncertainties of cultural differences? You can make a conscious effort to check your interpretations and seek out the kind of information that will provide you with useful insights into someone else’s cultural cues.

**13. CROSS-GENDER MENTORING**

The issue of cross-gender mentoring is highly relevant in organizations today. As more and more women benefit from strategic career management, there are more women both seeking mentors and holding positions of influence in the traditionally male organizational hierarchy from which most mentors historically have been selected. Cross-gender mentoring can be of two types: a male mentor and a female mentee or a female mentor and a male mentee. Because women are still largely underrepresented at senior levels within the communications industry, cross-gender mentoring involving a male mentor and a female mentee is still the predominant model. Women professionals have a great need of strong industry mentors, and they are experiencing in increasing numbers the power of supportive relationships — of being helped by and offering help to others.
14. TIPS FOR STRENGTHENING YOUR CROSS-CULTURAL OR CROSS-GENDER MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

As you begin to cultivate your cross-cultural or cross-gender mentoring relationship, the following list of powerful hints will serve as a terrific reference. They have been adapted from Toward a More Perfect Union in an Age of Diversity by Marcelle E. DuPraw and Marya Axner.

1. **Learn from generalizations about other cultures, but don’t use those generalizations to stereotype, “write off,” or oversimplify your ideas about individuals.** The best use of a generalization is to add it to your storehouse of knowledge so that you better understand and appreciate other interesting, multi-faceted human beings.

2. **Practice, practice, practice.** It’s in the doing that we actually get better at cross-cultural communication.

3. **Don’t assume that there is one right way (yours!) to communicate.** Keep questioning your assumptions about the “right way” to communicate. For example, think about your body language; postures that indicate receptivity in one culture might indicate aggressiveness in another.

4. **Don’t assume that breakdowns in communication occur because other people are on the wrong track.** Search for ways to make the communication work, rather than searching for who should receive the blame for the breakdown.

5. **Listen actively and empathetically.** Try to put yourself in the other person’s shoes — especially when another person’s perceptions or ideas are very different from your own. You might be called upon to operate at the edge of your own comfort zone.

6. **Suspend judgment; try to look at the situation as an outsider — and we are all outsiders when it comes to someone else’s culture.**

7. **Be prepared for a discussion of the past.** Use this as an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of your mentee’s point of view, rather than becoming defensive or impatient. Acknowledge historical events that have taken place, but be prepared to discuss ways of making progress despite what may have happened in the past.

8. **Be open to hearing your mentee’s perceptions of power imbalances within his/her organization and be prepared to suggest ways of overcoming organizational hurdles.**

9. **Check your interpretations if you are uncertain of your mentee’s meaning.**
You and your mentee may not always agree about challenges and issues. Taking the time up front to plant the seeds of openness and trust will provide you the means of reducing misinterpretation due to misguided assumptions and expectations. Differences will then be experienced as opportunities to learn and grow. The recognition that people contain a multitude of legitimate, positive, and exciting differences should be considered an intrinsically valuable part of a healthy developmental relationship.

“Accept me as I am, so I may learn what I may become.”
– Unknown

15. THE END OF THE FORMAL RELATIONSHIP: GETTING CLOSURE

The time will go by fast, and before you know it your work will be done. Here are some tips to mark the formal end of the relationship with your mentee:

1. **Celebrate with fanfare:** It is a rite of passage and a powerful symbol of closure.

2. **Solidify learning with nostalgia:** Provide space to remember, reflect, and refocus.

3. **Let time pass before following-up:** Give the mentee some independence, but be sure to follow up eventually.
16. SUMMARY

Mentoring connections can be incredibly important, powerful relationships throughout a career. There will always be those who blazed the trail that we now follow and those for whom we are the trailblazers. Whether in an informal friend-to-friend or colleague-to-colleague relationship or as part of a formal, structured program like L. Patrick Mellon Mentorship Program, the support and guidance of a caring, sharing individual can mean a great deal to each one of us, no matter where we are in our professional — and personal — lives.

NAMIC looks to you as a mentor to be a motivator, a teacher, and catalyst for creativity and innovation; a counselor and friend to your mentee; your role will be to help him/her to achieve goals; to recommit to a chosen field and to the industry; and to discover the keys to satisfaction in his/her career. The rewards are great. We hope that the information in this guide has helped you to identify the practical aspects of assessing, developing and maintaining a positive and powerful mentoring relationship.

“Do all the good you can
By all the means you can
In all the ways you can
In all the places you can
To all the people you can
As long as ever you can.”

– John Wesley
SUGGESTED READING


BIBLIOGRAPHY


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