

ESSENTIALS OF A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

Five Essentials of a Mentoring Relationship

When you are traveling to an unfamiliar destination, there are probably some essentials you should take to make your trip a success--a road map, directions, and perhaps a contact's telephone number in case you get lost.

Well, as you begin your mentoring journey, there are several essentials that you should know to make your journey a success. These essential factors are:

Trust

Self Esteem

Partnership Building

Time

Respect

The first essential of a successful mentoring relationship is respect. Respect is established when the mentee recognizes knowledge, skills, and abilities in the mentor that he or she would like to possess. The mentee then attempts to acquire these much-admired characteristics. Respect usually increases over time.

Trust is another essential of a successful mentoring relationship. Trust is a two-way street--both mentors and mentees need to work together to build trust. There are four factors to building trust:

Communication>Availability>Predictability>Loyalty>TRUST

- **Communication:** You need to talk and actively listen to your mentee. It is important to value your mentee's opinions and let your mentee know that he or she is being taken seriously. Your mentee can help to build trust in the relationship by honestly relaying his or her goals and concerns and by listening to your opinions.
- **Availability:** You should be willing to meet with your mentee whenever he or she needs you. Remember the "open door" policy--that is, you should keep the door open as often as possible. Your mentee should also make time for this relationship.
- **Predictability:** Your mentee needs you to be dependable and reliable. You should make a point to give consistent feedback, direction, and advice. You should also be able to predict the needs of your mentee. Conversely, your mentee needs to be consistent in his or her actions and behavior.

Although your mentee will grow and change during the mentoring relationship, drastic changes in behavior or attitude could signal a problem. Look for these indicators of potential trouble in your mentoring relationship:

- Frequent switches in direction
 - Frequent arguments
 - Frustration at lack of progress
 - Excessive questioning of each decision or action taken
 - Floundering.
- **Loyalty:** Never compromise your relationship by discussing your mentee's problems or concerns with others. In addition, instruct your mentee not to discuss your relationship with others. Keep the information discussed between the two of you in strict confidence.

Avoid criticizing or complaining about Civil Air Patrol. Disloyalty to the organization may cause confusion on the part of your mentee. Remember you model culture as well as teach task and shape attitude.

The third essential is "partnership-building" activities. When you enter a mentoring relationship, you and your mentee become professional partners. There are natural barriers that all partnerships face. Natural barriers may include miscommunication or an uncertainty of each other's expectations.

Five improvement activities can help you overcome these barriers:

- Maintain communication
- Fix "obvious" problems
- Forecast how decisions could affect goals
- Discuss progress
- Monitor changes.

You and your mentee can use the following activities to help build a successful partnership.

- **Show enthusiasm:** Create a positive atmosphere by showing enthusiasm and excitement for your mentee's efforts.
- **Create an atmosphere for emotional acceptance:** Since a person can resist being changed, transformation is a campaign for the heart as well as the mind. Help your mentee feel accepted as he or she experiences professional growth.
- **Approach change slowly:** Listen to your mentee and be responsive to his or her concerns. When drastic changes occur, a person needs time to accept and experiment with these changes.

Partnership-building activities are not only useful when building a mentoring partnership, but also are helpful to your mentee when interacting with others.

The fourth essential to a successful mentoring relationship is to build your mentee's self-esteem. All people have the desire to believe that they are worthwhile and valuable. There are several steps you can take to build your mentee's self-esteem.

Encourage your mentee to have realistic expectations of:

- Him or herself
- The mentoring relationship
- The position.

Dissatisfaction can result if the mentee expects too much of him/herself, the mentoring relationship, or the position. Discuss realistic expectations together.

Encourage your mentee to have a realistic self-perception. You can help define your mentee's self-perception by identifying your mentee's":

- Social traits
- Intellectual capacity
- Beliefs
- Talents
- Roles.

One CAP mentee comments, "My mentor perceived talents in me that I had not recognized. She helped me to develop these talents by encouraging and supporting me."

TIP: Always provide honest feedback. Your mentee deserves the truth, and honest feedback helps your mentee keep a realistic self-perception.

Encourage your mentee to change a poor self-perception. Changing a poor self-perception requires a good deal of commitment from your mentee.

There are two reasons for a poor self-perception:

- The mentee "can't" be the person he or she would like to be.
- The mentee "won't" be the person he or she would like to be.

A mentee "can't" change when he or she does not have the skills or abilities to change. You can help our mentee change this self-perception by helping him or her develop the knowledge, skills and abilities to become the person he or she wants to be.

Often, a mentee with a poor self-perception claims he or she "won't" be the person he or she would like to be because he or she is not willing to do what is required. You need to instill in your mentee that a poor self-perception can be changed if he or she is willing to make the effort.

TIP: Self-esteem building is an important part of your job as a mentor. The most effective way to build your mentee's self-esteem is to listen and give positive feedback.

The fifth essential is time. During the mentoring relationship, make time to interact with your mentee. Specifically set aside time for your mentee. Try not to let routine tasks exclude your mentee. Here are some ways to make time:

- Set meeting times with your mentee and don't change these times unless absolutely necessary.
- Meet periodically, at mutually convenient times and at times when you know you won't be interrupted.
- Take a minimum of once per week to check in with your mentee.
- In addition to making time in your schedule, realize that you need to give your mentee adequate time to grow professionally.