

Mentoring - Guidelines and Ideas

What Is Mentoring?

Mentoring is an equal partnership with two-way learning. Both the mentor and mentee should be gaining insights from the mentoring process. Typically, the focus on mentoring is to enhance skills, expand networks and provide career guidance to the mentee. To do this, both participants must clearly define goals, expectations, and time frames. Meeting, either face-to-face, by phone, or by other means that is agreeable to both parties, with a routine schedule and agenda, is important to establishing the relationship and moving forward. At the end of each mentoring meeting, specific expectations should be agreed to for what both mentor and mentee will do to prepare for the next meeting. Mentoring isn't a meeting: it is a process.

Graduate students could benefit from a variety of mentors. Consider finding a mentor in each of the three categories, with specific mentoring targets developed for each:

- Academic/Research Advisor
- Peer - one or two students in IH Program
- OEH Professional – a program alumni or local professional section member

There is no *one way* to mentor. Key to a successful mentoring process is to identify goals and commit time to the process. Below are some recommendations to help build a relationship that provides meaningful guidance to the mentee and rewarding sense of contribution to the mentor. The following information was assembled from a variety of resources, including the AIHA SECP's mentoring program work products, the US Air Force Mentoring Program, and feedback from successful mentors and former mentees. This guideline was written for both student and professionals as mentors. Although these two groups may have different mentoring goals (e.g., guidance to successfully complete your degree vs guidance to be a successful industrial hygienist professional), mentoring skills apply across all opportunities, so the experience is discussed in both contexts. The two mentoring relationships are identified first, for clarity. Then, ideas on how to select a mentor, be a mentor, and structure expectations and meetings are provided.

For Students with IH Students as Mentors:

The IH Student mentee will be partnered with a fellow IH student mentor, who will be eager to answer questions and provide guidance on your academic career. This relationship can help you streamline your academic program, provide guidance on timeline, and otherwise coach you. Opportunities may also exist to help you develop your network, which can aid in long-term career opportunities and advancement. The goals of this mentoring relationship should be to help you progress through your academic program and hopefully continue throughout your career.

For Students or Early-Career Professionals with OH Professionals as Mentors:

This relationship is a structured partnership in which you will be partnered with a professional who will be eager to answer any questions you may have and to provide guidance on entering into or advancing

within the profession. This relationship can help you develop your professional network that can aid in career opportunities and advancement. This program will lead to relationships that you can use throughout your career, and many previous mentees stay in contact with their mentors in local sections, national meetings, or other formats throughout their working careers.

Selecting a Mentor

Before entering into a mentor-mentee relationship, it is important that the mentor understands the needs of the mentee. What does the mentee want out of the relationship? Does the mentor have a good understanding of your situation? For IH students, for example, does the mentor know what is required to successfully complete a graduate program in industrial hygiene? After graduation, you may want to find a mentor that knows what it is like to be a new hygienist in your business sector with similar occupational health staffing -- if you are the sole EHS manager in an industrial manufacturing setting, select a mentor with similar job responsibilities that can address the career pressures that are unique to your setting.

Think about what you want out of your mentor-mentee relationship before establishing the mentor-mentee relationship and settling on a mentor. While options for mentors may appear limited, identify a few individuals (some recommend 3 to 4) who you think would be a good personality match. Think about why you have selected them and evaluate their familiarity with your situation (school / job... both apply; we all have "situations") and prioritize your list.

Next, schedule some time to talk to each person about the possibility of mentoring. Note the word "schedule." Invite the potential mentor to lunch/coffee and discuss what you are looking for in a mentor. A conversation passing in the hall or "fitting it in" between classes /meetings may not be perceived as professional behavior, and a casual "sure" given in the hallway may be indicative of the limited amount of time your mentor might be willing to give you in the long run.

After talking, your mentor might identify that you are not a good match or that he/she is overloaded; don't take it personally and work down your prioritized list. If the qualities of the individual are such that you thought he/she would make a good mentor, others may have recognized that as well and your highly ranked mentor may already be a mentor to others and cannot commit additional time to you... know that you selected well and that person simply may not have the resource (TIME) to give you the best mentoring he/she can. Remember, you are trying to seek commitment for at least a year (hopefully longer!) and while many of us want to mentor upcoming students and professionals, there is little payback for a mentor other than developing a lasting professional relationship. Therefore, taking a thoughtful approach to selecting a mentor is wise.

What Should a Mentor Be?

Your mentor is there to advise you with truthful, objective input regarding your academic / career / life plans, as appropriate to your career phase. A mentor is not there to make decisions for you. A mentor cannot do your assignments, perform your job, or make decisions that you have to make.

A good mentor-mentee relationship is based on trust. The Air Force defines a mentor as "a trusted counselor or guide." You should trust your mentor to provide information openly and honestly and to keep private information private? In some cases, it takes time to build mutual trust, but it can take only a moment to damage it. For graduate students, it is time to move out of the world of casual friendship and focus your mentoring interactions as a reflection of your future professional self.

Once you begin your mentor/mentee relationship, begin to discuss and map out your graduate studies plan and begin to map out a career plan, particularly with an OEH professional as a mentor. While career planning is ultimately the mentee's responsibility, seek help as you plan. (Are there good instructors, those to avoid, when should I start research, should I take an internship... you know the drill.) Realize that life gives us a finite amount of time to accomplish goals, both professional and personal, so it is best to identify goals (and be willing to modify them) and to develop a plan and, yes, start putting together a timeline. Doing this in graduate school, where a two-year timeline and specific "to do" obligations outlined in student handbooks, will help you figure out how to manage longer term projects out in the professional world, where 2-, 5-, 10-year projects are not unheard of. Your mentor can help you review your progress, recommend adjustments to your timeline based on what they have experienced, and provide you with tools to keep on-track. The function of a mentor is to assist you with developing and help motivate you toward your big picture goals.

Finally, an ideal mentor wants you to do well, is willing to advocate on your behalf to meet personal and professional goals (letters of recommendation?!), and cares about your spiritual, physical, mental and social well-being (T. Mukoda, from *Who's Your Mentor?*). To be a good mentor, you need to know how your mentee is doing not just on professional goals, but life-work issues do come into play. Remember that "trust" we talked about already? See why this is a "relationship" and not just a set of "meetings"? If you put time into preparing for mentoring appointments and working on action items from previous meetings, your mentor-mentee relationship will provide you with lots of advice and career (and life) experiences that you should one day be able to pay forward to those you mentor in the future.

How to Prepare for Meetings

Mentoring is most successful when the mentee takes the responsibility for managing the relationship. Remember that the mentor is providing a valuable commodity (time!) to help the mentee be successful, so respect that time and prepare for meetings. This behavior also prepares you for the working world: meetings are not just appointments to show up to, but rather you have to be prepared, have your list of action items ready to report on and seek input from others affected by your work and decisions. This mentoring relationship should be managed the same; for some of you, this will be new, so develop a work plan to be prepared for your mentoring meeting (it will become easier over time).

So, does this seem like a lot of work (for no grade or "extra credit")? You get to decide if it is useful and worth continuing. But being mentored (... by preparing for meetings) will give you lifelong skills in time management, how to run a meeting, how to ask efficient questions to get to the core of your concern, and numerous other skills you probably won't know you are developing. You already know that no one pays you to prepare for these meetings, and your work doesn't get recognized by anyone but you and

your mentor, but professional planning and learning from a mentor will allow you to develop business skills that will be useful throughout your career. Do the preparation because it will help YOU. Honor your commitments set during each meeting and report your progress.

Top Reasons Why Mentorships Fail

1. Lack of commitment to the relationship
2. Unclear expectations
3. Lack of trust

Supplemental

Note that IH students can sign up to be mentored by professionals within the AIHA's professional organization (see the membership form or visit the Student section of the AIHA web site). Members of the local AIHA section may also be willing to serve as a mentor to help you progress professionally. Being mentored by professionals during your last year of graduate studies may be useful, if you are willing to commit the time.

Supplemental information to this mentoring guide includes the following, adapted from the AIHA SECP mentoring program.

- Your First Meeting: some ideas on structure
- Guidelines for the Mentor
- What to Consider

Your First Meeting

Congratulations, you have a mentor-mentee match. The first meeting should include a time to get to know one another along with a discussion to establish expectations on how to build the partnership. Remember that this is a two-way street here, not just one party doing all the talking

Mentee-Driven, Mentor-Guided Relationship

- The mentee and mentor should work together to establish calendar commitments for their routine meetings.
- The mentor is responsible for helping the mentee stay focused on goals and developmental needs throughout the relationship period.
- The goal of the mentor is to ask questions (versus giving advice) and help the mentee put their own action plan together.

Below are some questions to help you begin the process (taken from AIHA's First things First mentoring guide). (These are worded as if coming from the mentor.) Note that meetings once every 4-6 weeks for 30 - 60 minutes are normal for mentoring, particularly during year 1.

Get Acquainted

- Are you currently employed? Are you a student?
- How long have you worked in the industrial hygiene profession?
- Where did you grow up?
- Where do you currently live?
- How do you spend your time away from school and/or work?
- What are your interests and hobbies?
- Why did you want to participate in the mentoring program?

Review Goals

- Discuss your goals for participating in a mentoring relationship.
- What do you want to get out of this? What do you want to focus on?

Establish Partnership Guidelines

- When will we meet? How often and how long?
- Where or how will we meet?
- How will we schedule our meetings? Standing date and time?
- What happens if one of us needs to cancel or postpone a meeting?
- Who will coordinate logistics for each meeting (i.e., meeting place or teleconference call-in info, date/time, materials)?
- Will we create a written agenda and document action items? (Note: In some situation, the mentor may get work "credit" or professional certification points by mentoring. If so, this discussion is important.)
- What permanent agenda items will be a part of each meeting?
- Will we have an agenda and meeting notes? If, yes, who will be responsible for these?

- How will we evaluate our meetings?
- How will we measure the success of this mentorship?
- How often will we communicate between meetings?

Confirm Next Steps:

- When and where is our next meeting?
- What is our agenda?
- What do we need to prepare for the next meeting?

Guidelines for the Mentor

Mentor Competencies (...what makes you suitable for mentoring)

1. Past experience
2. Experience and skills related to the mentee's area of interest or work
3. Well-developed interpersonal skills with emphasis on communication skills
4. Interest in developing others
5. Understanding others and ability to relate effectively with others
6. Clarity of goals
7. Relationship management: an open mind, a flexible attitude, recognition of the value of support time and willingness to develop relationships with Mentee
8. Self-awareness and committed to your own learning
9. Business savvy
10. Capable of supporting the mentee through listening, giving advice, problem solving, challenging and guiding

Guidelines for Mentors

The mentor's main responsibilities include periodic communication with the mentee, suggesting learning and outreach ideas, sharing his/her college and business experiences, and responsiveness and timely follow up to questions.

1. Take the initiative in the relationship:

- Invite your mentee to talk, suggest topics to discuss
- Discuss objectives and expectations for the relationship
- Ask about and encourage accomplishments
- Ask them to describe the tentative goals that could be part of their future vision

2. Monitor mentee's progress and give advice:

- Communicate with mentee and provide ongoing feedback
- Give guidance on searching for a career and the interview process, if necessary
- Share successful and unsuccessful job searching/interviewing techniques you have experienced

3. Respect your mentee's time as much as you respect your own:

- Be explicit about your own needs and limits, specifying times you wish not to be disturbed or ones that are particularly good for communication

4. Be explicit with your mentee that you are only offering suggestions and opinions

5. Make only positive or neutral comments about your mentee to others:

- Your mentee must trust that anything said to you will be held in the strictest of confidence unless instructed otherwise

6. If you and your mentee agree, consider discussing how you have been able to balance work with personal life demands.

What to Consider

If being paired between mentor / mentee, it is important to know what type of expertise you are looking for in a mentor. Here is a form with the type of information to provide (for UI Students who want to be mentored).

Name:

Home (where do you call home?):

Education (what undergrad/grad degrees and where?):

Employment (where have you worked):

What form of communication are preferable for your mentoring (phone, face-to-face,...):

Describe the work setting are you considering once you graduate (industry, office, medical, regulatory, research,...):

What goals to you have for being mentored?

What career objectives do you want to focus on for mentoring?

What time of the week works best for setting up mentoring meetings?

Mentoring Topics

These lists are merely a jumping off point. The more specific you can be, the better you can identify a mentor suited to your goals.

Academic Mentor

- What classes should I take (or not take)
- What recommendations do you have for a study plan?
- What are critical University deadlines
- How do I selecting a committee
- How do I balancing work/life
- How to get involved in research
- How to find an internship
- How to get done in 2-years

Professional Mentor

- Career planning – setting goals
- Industry vs Government vs Research: which way works best for me
- What should I be doing now to prepare for my career
- How to interview / write a resume / find job contacts
- What should I do now to prepare for the certification exam
- Is IH the right field for me
- How can I improve my confidence / public speaking / professionalism
- Where do I find information on...
- How do I select between job offers
- Can you juggle an IH career with a family?