

Making an Ongoing Mentoring Relationship Stronger and Productive

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Every mentoring relationship must find its own equilibrium and path. As time passes the partners will get to know each other, and a stronger personal relationship will develop.

As the relationship progresses, there are several things that mentors and mentees can do to make it work better. Effective communication and candid feedback are key. Both parties should try to ensure time is used effectively and efficiently as possible. And, both mentor and mentee should monitor the learning process and progress to ensure the goals and objectives are being reached.

Overcoming Obstacles

Like all relationships, this one is no different. It has its obstacles. The most common ones are:

- Time: not enough, too much to do, cancelled meetings, inaccessible, unforeseen or unexpected circumstances.
- Work: too much of it, too little resources – lean and mean. Cost containment.

The key to overcoming obstacles is to make sure both mentee and mentor expect them and are prepared to promptly and properly deal with them. The partners must be prepared to discuss the nature of the problem, why it is an obstacle, and then work together to resolve the issue.

Efficient Use of Time

A mentoring relationship will involve less time if we effectively manage the time. To accomplish this:

- Schedule meetings in advance – schedule more than you need. It is easier to cancel meetings than to get on the schedule.
- Be diligent about scheduling and keeping appointments and returning e-mails and phone calls.
- The quality of the time spent together is more important than the quantity of time spent together. Do not multitask at mentoring meetings.
- Maximize the time by fully preparing for any discussions or meetings. Make sure you have clear things to focus on – clear outcomes of your time, questions, and concerns.
- If appropriate, book a follow-up session at the conclusion of a meeting or discussion.
- Monitor the time that is being spent on mentoring and look for opportunities to more effectively or efficiently use that time.

Evaluating the Progress

Once underway, most relationships require little intervention. To improve the relationship consider meeting at some agreed interval to evaluate how things are progressing – I suggest every quarter in a year long relationship. This helps to fine tune the relationship and address minor unanticipated difficulties.

If the parties are unable to meet for a whole quarter, this should be addressed. This is not a minor issue. Commitments need to be re-communicated. Time and priorities re-established.

In preparing for the evaluation meetings, consider the following questions:

- Are we on track to reach the goals of our mentoring relationship?
- What do I think about my mentor / mentee?
- What is working well and why?
- What could be working better?
- What changes can be made to make things work better?
- What are we spending too much time on?
- What are we spending too little time on?
- How well are we communicating?
- Is there anything we can do to improve the way we communicate? The frequency?
- What can we do to use our time more effectively?
- What changes can we make to improve our relationship?
- How have we shifted in our focus – the goal changes have been altered because of what? The business, the world events, life?
- What has been the key learning I have most benefited from and what has this benefit looked like?

Ending the Relationship

The end should be seen as an opportunity to review what has been done, what worked and did not work in the relationship and to reflect on the results. There are so many lessons to be learned from the relationship regardless of the relationship – This is probably the hardest thing to recognize.

Think about:

- How did I impact this relationship? What did I do that added value? What did I do that did not add value?
- What lessons am I taking from this experience? What did I learn and how did I utilize it? What will I do differently in the future?
- What did I learn about asking for help? What did I learn about exploring options? What did I learn about mentoring?
- What one thing did I learn about me?
- How will I use all this in the next 3 months? What resources will I need?

- What characteristics do I need to look for in my next mentor? Who will I look to? When will I do this?
- How will I become a mentor within the next 6 months?
- Consider your career in the larger context of your life – how can a mentoring relationship help you with both?

Preparing for the future

As a mentee you should develop a career map and action plan that is goal oriented. Where are you today? Where do you want to get to? What do you have to do to get there? Specific goals, action steps and next steps. What resources do you need?

Remember to develop leadership. Leadership goals are different than management goals. They develop character traits – like risk taking, building resiliency, strategic agility.

Kathleen B. Cashman, CEO, Cashman Consulting LLC. *Cashman Consulting LLC guides organizations and teams through building a mentoring culture, creating programs that work and maintaining the system – managing the quarterly interactions and energizing the teams by additional training and development events. For more information on the products and services visit us at www.cashmanconsultingllc.com or call us: 609.518.3540.*