

One of the most common questions that I get is this: **what makes a good mentor and mentoree?**

While the makeup will vary somewhat, there are certain traits that seem to be consistent across the board.

Below are profiles of each. Hopefully, this will help you identify good candidates for your current (or future) mentoring programs.

The ideal mentoree will...

- **Be willing to take risks:** A mentoree will be successful if they are willing to get out of the comfort zone, take reasonable risks, and flex their professional muscles. The latter could involve taking on new challenges, confronting difficult situations, etc.
- **Listen and take advice:** Hearing what the mentor is really saying and seriously considering all advice is essential. This is most critical when it comes to receiving feedback regarding what areas the mentoree needs to address.
- **Take responsibility for learning:** The mentoree (not the mentor) drives the mentoring relationship. The mentoree decides what advice to accept or reject, what course of action to follow, and what risks to take. The mentor's task is to guide the mentor. Mentorees need to own their actions.

An effective mentoree will also be...

- **Open minded:** The mentoree must be willing to consider other viewpoints and remain open to constructive criticism that can provide information about blind spots and how to deal with them successfully.
- **Motivated:** The mentoree is the driver in this relationship and must accept that role. This means the mentoree must be motivated to stay engaged in this relationship and to work toward achieving results.
- **Courageous:** Being a successful mentoree involves mustering the courage to share vulnerabilities with the mentor (which isn't always easy). The mentoree also exhibits courage when taking risks, taking on new challenges, and so forth.
- **Committed:** Honoring appointments, arriving on time, and, most importantly, completing agreed upon tasks—these are crucial if a mentoree wants the mentor to feel that the investment of time and effort is worthwhile.

An effective mentor is...

- **Supportive:** A mentor will encourage the mentoree to take reasonable risks that are likely to result in the mentoree's professional and personal development.
- **Nurturing:** A mentor creates a risk-free environment, meaning [the mentoree will feel safe and comfortable sharing](#) ideas, thoughts, dreams, weaknesses, challenges, and so forth.
- **Protective:** A mentor makes sure that the mentoree has all the information needed to make informed decisions. The mentor also provides the mentoree with critical knowledge and understanding of situations so that the mentoree gets the complete picture prior to taking any action.
- **Honest:** While a mentor should be supportive and nurturing, the mentor should also be honest. (The mentor won't be doing the mentoree any favors by lying just to

make the mentoree feel better.) Honesty is especially critical when providing feedback. Honest feedback will help the mentoree know what they're doing well and what areas they can further improve/develop.

- **Aware of boundaries.** A good mentor sets limits with the mentoree and understands that the mentor's job is *not* to create a clone of the mentor. Instead, the goal is to give the mentoree the freedom to develop in their own unique way.
- **Level headed.** A mentor should always bring a balanced perspective to any discussion. The mentor should help the mentoree see things from a variety of sides.

An effective mentor will offer...

- **Time:** The mentor needs to be willing to invest time in the mentoring relationship.
- **Access:** Mentoring cannot take place without contact. The mentor must be available to the mentoree based on what the mentor/mentoree agree on at the initial meeting (and, of course, while keeping the boundaries we mentioned above in mind). Note: Regular contact for shorter periods is more desirable than less frequent contact for longer periods.
- **Credibility:** The most successful mentors check their egos at the door and are transparent about what they know and, more importantly, what they *don't*. This transparency goes a long way in making the mentor credible in the mentoree's eyes. Providing timely and accurate information is also an important part of credibility.
- **Vulnerability:** Mentoring requires a mentor to be willing to share their own successes and failures. It also means being willing to listen when a mentoree provides feedback that the mentor might not want to hear.
- **Independence:** Successful mentoring happens when a mentor focuses attention on the mentoree's needs and not vice versa. One of the benefits for mentors is the sense of satisfaction derived from mentoring. What's important to remember is that this is a by-product of the relationship and not its purpose. Effective mentors have a strong sense of who they are and do not become dependent on the mentoree.

Here's to your mentoring success!

Best,
Rene

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