How to Be a Good Mentor:
5 General Guidelines

Keep an Open Mind: You may have visualized the "type" of mentee you'd be best suited to help, but realize that a mentee doesn't have to be a younger you in order to learn from the situation. As long as you've mastered a particular body of knowledge or skill that your mentee needs, it doesn't matter if they're in a different industry or role.

Set Clear Expectations: Before your meeting, communicate how and when you'd like to connect with your mentee, including the amount of time you've set aside for the Quick Chat. If you have a hard stop, be sure to let them know in advance so they can plan accordingly. If you're open to extending the conversation beyond 30 minutes, feel free to share that as well.

Listen Actively: While your mentee may be perfectly happy with you doing all the talking, you'll be more effective if you ask open-ended questions about what they're looking for and listen carefully to the answers. It's not all about you and what you've achieved, but rather how those experiences can be leveraged for the benefit of your mentee's professional growth.

Criticize Constructively: Many mentors fall into the trap of being either too harsh or too gentle. While you don't want to lose your patience with your mentee, you owe it to them to diplomatically broach areas for improvement. Deliver feedback by first asking for permission to do so, and then saying: "You're doing such a great job with X. I'd like to see you get even better by doing Y."

Show That You Care: Put yourself in your mentee's shoes and recall how difficult it was to confront certain career issues. Show that you're a little vulnerable by sharing mistakes you've made in the past, be a positive role model, and consult with others if you don't have the answers. In other words, give the mentorship everything you've got. You won't regret it.

Part of these guidelines were developed by Alexandra Levit, '98, business and workplace author, speaker, and consultant. She can be found at www.alexandralevit.com.