



# ALL Program Resource Guide

## First Meeting Guide for Leaders

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**Getting started** in a new mentor mentee relationship can be awkward and uncomfortable. The following guide includes tips, suggestions, and questions to use to get your first meeting started on the right foot.

Mentoring is ultimately about supporting your mentee as they learn by doing. What we've articulated here are some ways to nurture the ecosystem of trust and empowerment necessary for that to be effective. As you start your relationship with your learner, we recommend being explicit about the ideas we've discussed. Use it to set shared expectations about your collaboration and to promote and monitor the health of your relationship.

## Great Questions Every Mentor Should Ask

A good, open-ended question can get your learner thinking in new ways, give you insights into their aspirations, and prompt fruitful conversations. But what do these questions look like? Generally, many such questions will arise naturally out of your conversation with your learner and the specifics of your learner's situation, but here are some suggestions that work well in a wide variety of contexts.

- **What's another way of looking at this?** Often your mentee is looking for you to show them a different way of looking at a problem, but putting the onus on them can often work better. Sometimes people are locked into one way of thinking, but asking this question will tend to prompt a period of reflection, followed by: "Well, I suppose I could..."
- **Where do you see yourself in five to ten years?** It may be a staple of job interviews, but that doesn't mean that it's a bad question. Mentors help their mentees achieve their full potential, and in order to do that you need to direct your mentee's efforts.
- **What are you doing well that will help you get there?** It's helpful to build up your mentee's confidence by reminding them of all the resources they have at their disposal that will help them reach what may (seem to) be a distant goal. It also helps you to understand their strengths and to help them devise a plan accordingly.
- **What could prevent you from getting there?** Besides identifying strengths, you should consider obstacles. What is your mentee lacking in skills, resources or know-how? You may be able to provide necessary resources, make introductions, or, best of all, help mentees determine how to leverage their strengths or develop new ones in order to overcome challenges themselves.
- **What will you do differently tomorrow to meet those challenges?** This is based on one of Harvard Business Review's "Five Questions Every Mentor Must Ask." In that HBR article, Anthony K. Tjan writes, "People also have a tendency to practice and repeat what they are already good at doing. It is human nature to show off your best side and hide weaknesses." Asking this question will help you understand whether your mentee is



willing to adapt his/her behavior in order to tackle and solve problems.

- **What else?** It's a simple one, but it works. Often a mentee will hold something back, either intentionally or because of mere oversight, and this prompt can draw out extra details – often the ones that hold the key to solving the problem at hand. It also shows your mentee that you are truly interested in hearing everything they have to say and that mentorship isn't constrained to a narrow set of issues.

## Setting Ground Rules

Mentoring relationships are so important, but can also be a new dynamic to navigate for both parties. To help both parties feel comfortable and optimize the relationship you should be sure to set clear ground rules at the first meeting.

- **Be explicit about confidentiality** - be clear about what the two of you will and won't share outside the relationship.
- If you share acquaintances, whether via work or your personal life, **disclose that up front**.
- **Set expectations** about how and how often you both want to communicate to avoid people feeling abandoned or intruded upon.

## Tips and Tricks

- **Mentoring fails without trust.** To build trust, you need to be open and honest, clear about boundaries, discreet, reliable, and fully present. Common trust breaking mistakes include lecturing, not listening, not being discreet, and not being open and honest yourself.
- In any mentoring interaction, **ask your mentee open-ended questions** that may arrive at the answer, instead of simply giving your mentee the answer or instructions on what to do. A general rule of thumb: listen more than you talk.
- As a mentor, you should **lead by example**. Seek mentors for yourself to set an example for you. Also, being a mentee may help you understand what works best in your own mentoring relationships.
- The mentor-mentee relationship **does not always have to be a one-way street**. Try allowing your mentee to mentor you from time to time, especially in areas where your skill set may be lacking.

*Concepts in this document are adapted from materials created by Adam Neaman and Colin Schiller at [Everwise](#)*