

5 Ways to Engage Your Student Mentee

As a mentor, the goal is to help support and guide an individual through their own personal and academic career by sharing your own life experience and knowledge with your time and commitment to that individual.

1. Meet Your Mentee

The most important part of a mentor's role is developing a meaningful relationship with their mentee. Establishing common passions and values through conversations with your mentee, as well as working with them collaboratively is the best way to help them grow as a student and a professional.

Finding Commonalities:

- Why do you both love the biological sciences? What do you have in common outside of your academic focus? What are some relevant stories from your work or student life that the mentee might learn from?
- **Prompting Sentence:** "What first inspired to choose biological sciences...?" or "What do you do in your free time...?" or "I have a story to share that I think you'd really appreciate...".

Establishing Trust and Openness with your Collaborative Relationship:

- Be sure to ask your mentee's opinion, as well as discussing your own to foster a collaborative environment where your mentee can feel as though the only "wrong" answer is inaction.
- Collaborating with a more experienced mentor can either be freeing or intimidating, and the mentor's ability to collaborate with the mentee as a future-colleague is the best way to learn and develop a trusting relationship.
- **Prompting Sentences:** "I want to let you know that your voice matters in this space..." or "I want to hear your thoughts and opinions to whatever I am saying...".

2. Share Your Journey

Being personable is important, and sharing your journey from college to career helps build your relationship with your mentee. Sharing your own journey may also allow for the mentee to learn about different learning and professional opportunities which may help them choose the career path that suits them best.

Open up about your academic and personal journey:

- Discuss your reason for joining the field and encourage mentees to examine their own motivations. Your professional guidance can help them identify specific ways to achieve their goals.
- **Prompting Sentences:** “I chose this line of work because...” or “What motivated me to choose this field was because...”.

Access to learning or career opportunities:

- Underrepresented student groups (first generation, women, historically underrepresented groups) often don't have access to knowledge about the depth and breadth of opportunities available in a given field, and these conversations may illuminate opportunities they didn't know existed.
- **Prompting sentences:** “What kind of resources or mentors did you have available growing up...?” or “Well you actually may have not known this but actually...”.

3. Sharpen The Mind

The largest part of your mentee's life is most likely comprised of their studies. It is important to recognize their academic concerns and have them look forward to how this will impact the tools and skills they need for the future. Also establishing the importance of communication and receiving feedback will help your mentee learn a valuable skill set of collaborating with others.

How their Academics/Skills has an Effect on their Future Work:

- Addressing how their studies or skills they are learning may relate to their future work. Even addressing how the struggles or concerns they may have now, is a great learning experience for them for their future work.

- Give *very specific* examples of times you have used what you learned in school or early in your career to accomplish something in your career.
- **Prompting Sentence:** “How are your classes going?” or “It is important that you continue to craft your skill...” or “Actually learning great time management skills is helpful in the workplace especially dealing with deadlines...” or “When I was in school, I learned _____ that eventually helped me in my workplace...”.

Establishing the Importance of Communication and Feedback:

- Give them constructive feedback on some of their work or study habits. Also to establish the necessity of receiving feedback, ask for your mentee’s opinion on any constructive feedback you may have given.
- This also allows for the opportunity to ask them why they agree or disagree with you. This exercise will help them understand what communicating and the benefit of providing feedback looks like.
- **Prompting Sentences:** “I think that it would be best if you completed _____ for this assignment/project...” or “Do you have any feedback for me on your end...” or “Thank you for sharing that with me, now I get to grow from this feedback...”.

4. Preparing For Future Workplace

Once your mentee has amassed academic knowledge in school, they’re going to need to apply it the real world. Discussing problems your industry faces, common misconceptions of people entering the field, and the collaborative process with other departments will give mentees a window into what the current workplace looks like.

Insight into the Industry:

- Have conversations about how your industry is developing or the problems that your industry faces. This will open doors to conversations about future solutions and ways to make an impact.
- Talk about the misconceptions associated with the field in which you work. Encourage your mentee to investigate opportunities and find the field most suited to their interests.
- **Prompting Sentences:** “Let me tell you about my current workplace and some of the limitations we may have...” or “People have thought _____ about this type of workplace but actually...” or “I encourage you to research companies and types of

positions they have available or even contacting some of the associates on LinkedIn...”.

Collaboration with Other Departments:

- Collaborating departments are potential sources of interest to students who don't have a professional's understanding of the breadth of career opportunities available to them within the same general field. Discuss the importance of cross collaboration related to your team's productivity and success.
- **Prompting Sentences:** “It is also important to collaborate with other teams, as they might be able to give you more information on a specific topic...” or “Some of the other departments I work with do _____ for our department...”.

5. Networking

Networking is a powerful tool for anyone at any level of their professional career. Helping your mentee introduce themselves to new people will be the most valuable single skill you can impart to them. As an additional benefit, being collaborative with your mentee throughout this process will create a future colleague and resource for both of your networks!

Expanding Networks:

- Seek opportunities to break the ice between your mentee and their peers. Connect with your mentee's network (professors, other mentors, etc). Likewise introduce your mentee to some of your network - as their networks grow, so do skills and results.
- You may even find a future mentee or find a mentor of your own through this expanding your network, just like your mentee may meet another mentor amongst the group of people you introduce them to.
- **Prompting Sentences:** “I would like to introduce you to my colleague via email/lunch...” or “Let us make sure to follow each other on LinkedIn...”.

Note: Your mentee may ask for your input about job opportunities or internships at the company you represent or at another company. If specific job opportunities at your institution are available, you should broach this topic with your mentee as you see appropriate.