



Be the mentee everyone wants

Mentoring Programme

Some tips to make the most of your involvement with the mentoring programme.

Engage

Make it worth your mentor's while

Your mentor is part of this programme because they want to help you succeed. Thanks to the funding from Arts Council England, we are paying the mentors but that's often not the case: mentors usually offer their time *pro bono*. You have a responsibility to show them that you are committed to the relationship.

Your mentor will understand if you have to drop everything to deal with a crisis or if priorities have to change but otherwise, they can reasonably expect you to engage fully with them and with the discussion.

Drive

Take charge of the relationship yourself

You should actively set up the meetings with your mentor, not wait for them to initiate contact. The relationship is primarily for your benefit, so set the pace and create the agenda for each session yourself. If your mentor is having to push you all the time, then you may not be ready for mentoring and a different form of support may be more suitable for now.

Focus

Be clear with yourself and your mentor about your objectives

Mentoring works when there is a focus to the relationship. Of course, you are probably working on something that you do not yet understand (a “known-unknown”) but it is important that you can articulate what this is (and why it matters) to yourself and to your mentor. You will have outlined this in your expression of interest and will probably explore and refine it in the initial conversation with your prospective mentor (the chemistry call).

As you go through the process, you need to retain clarity on what you are aiming for, especially if it evolves over time.

Question

Ask (and you will receive)

Mentoring will be a two-way conversation which will probably move between mentoring, coaching and other modes at various times (the debate about the boundaries between them may never reach conclusion). At the heart though is a relationship between a more experienced mentor and a learner, whose learning will be in proportion to the quality of the questions both parties ask.

Some suggestions are provided for you below.

Goals

Agree what you're going to do e.g. by the next session and in the longer term

Part of making the relationship work is committing to making a difference to the way you work and to achieving goals. Goals will help keep you on track, so make sure they fit with your focus. Sometimes achieving one may be the trigger for your next mentoring session.

Act

Follow through

Make sure you do what you have agreed or contact the person your mentor introduces you to. Whatever the goal is that you have agreed for the next session, give it a good go. If you try but find you need more help, reflect on what stopped you so that the next session with your mentor can move you forward. Out of respect for your mentor and yourself, make some progress before your next session.

Share

Report back to your mentor

We all like to see how we are making a difference and this will be crucial to maintaining your mentor's commitment to you. They will enjoy sharing in your successes and will sometimes be able to help you see successes you missed. Remember, in this programme most of our mentors are teachers by profession.

Feeding back on what you've done will also help you and your mentor understand the next steps you need to take.

Honest

Say what's working well and what isn't

You and your mentor are both professionals and you have an interest in using each other's time productively. It is important that you can both be honest with each other about the process. As with any relationship, surfacing issues early and constructively will help you find a solution.

In extremis, there is no shame in admitting that if it isn't working. Chances are that if you feel like that, your mentor is aware of it too. That will not be the usual outcome though and honest, objective dialogue will usually enable you both to work out a better way to move forward.

Most of the time though, being honest will just be about sharing how you are growing through their interest in your career.

Thanks

Have an attitude of gratitude

Linking back to both honesty and the point about mentors (usually) offering their time on a voluntary basis, take time to let your mentor know that you appreciate their time and energy and that you are making the most of the relationship.

Return

Think about how you can give back to your mentor

Like teaching, mentoring is highly rewarding and many mentors learn both from the process of mentoring and directly from the person or people they are working with. So this less about giving direct feedback than thinking of your mentor's needs that they may share (whether intentionally or inadvertently) and taking the trouble to spot if you can help them.

Suggested questions

A quick search of the internet throws up lots of ideas for questions to ask your mentor (or, indeed, for your mentor to ask you). Many may not be suitable for your particular circumstances but here are a few for you to think about.

- Where do you think my strengths lie?
- How can I develop the right discipline to achieve my goals?
- What skills should I develop to grow in my career?
- What are some things in your career that you regret not having done earlier?
- Do you ever get impostor syndrome? How did you learn to get over it?
- Did you have a hard time starting out/when you became a manager/Head of Service?
- What are some of the hard choices that you made to get where you are in your career?
- How did you bounce back from setbacks?
- How can I handle this situation better?
- I feel stuck. What are some ways I could try to solve the issue?
- My boss/colleagues are treating me unfairly. How should I tackle this and how do you think I would know to when to move on?
- How do I prepare myself for performance reviews?
- What would you like to see me do every week to show that I'm improving throughout this mentorship? [although bear in mind comments above about your responsibility to drive the relationship]
- Am I progressing in the right direction? [closed question – but they have their place]
- Are there any other topics you'd like us to discuss?
- Do you have any feedback on how we can improve our rapport?