

TIPS FOR MENTORS

AAPL Member Toolbox

Make the most of your commitment mentoring can be a challenge that is well worth your time and effort. Use these tips to get the most out of mentoring sessions – both for you and your mentee.

Be fully present. Mentoring requires excellent listening and your full attention. Set aside your daily challenges and pressures during a mentor session so that you can devote your full attention to your mentee.

Take time to make a personal connection at the start of the session. One of the pleasures of a mentoring relationship is the sense of connection between two people. Before launching into the focus area for the day, spend a few minutes making a personal connection. “Small talk” often helps both people to relax and get ready for a deeper conversation.

Ask open-ended questions. In order to provide relevant perspective, the mentor must understand the mentee’s situation and concerns at a deep level. Rather than asking questions that can be answered with a simple “yes” or “no,” practice asking questions that call for a reflective response. Remember to ask early on why the mentee has sought a mentor and what she would like to gain from the experience.

Listen with curiosity, not judgment. Be conscious of your own listening and strive for deep listening coming from your own curiosity rather than problem solving. You will find that your mentee faces issues that you have also faced. Each person is unique and comes to their present moment from a different path.

Try not to interrupt, unless there is a need to manage time or focus the dialogue. Do paraphrase or “feedback” what the mentee says to confirm that your understanding is accurate.

Ask direct questions to focus the session. Mentoring sessions often go all too quickly. To focus the session, ask simple and straightforward questions at the beginning of the session to ensure that the conversation is focused on the topics that are “top of mind” for the mentee today.

Notice what has “heart and meaning” for the mentee. A good mentor conversation involves much more than trading information and knowledge.

Tell your story. People often learn best through storytelling. If you have experiences related to the challenges faced by your mentee, check with the mentee to see if she or he would like you to share the story of your experience. Make sure to focus on the aspects of your experience that are most pertinent.



Telling your story should take no more than 10 minutes of a mentoring session, though it may lead to a rich discussion that links directly to the mentee's situation. Try not to preach!

Share the conversation rather than doing all the talking. Sometimes, mentors mistakenly believe that their job is mainly to impart wisdom and expertise. If you find yourself talking at length, with little interruption or dialogue with your mentee, stop yourself and reorganize the conversation by asking questions about the mentee.

Set and honor boundaries. Mentoring relationships work best when each person knows what to expect – and what not to expect. During the first session, establish the way in which the mentoring relationship will be set up. How frequently will you meet? Decide on the best form of communication (email, phone, Instant Messenger, etc.). How long will the conversations last? May the mentee contact you by email or telephone in between mentoring sessions? Be clear about how you would like it to work. Attention here early on prevents misunderstandings later on.

Follow through on your commitments. Inevitably, you will find yourself volunteering the title of a book, a referral to one of your contacts, to review or pass on a resume or some other small service to your mentee. Make note of your promise and make it a priority to follow through. Dropping the ball can lead to confusion and mistrust in the relationship. Do make commitments carefully, being realistic about what you can offer and by when you can deliver it. You may want to ask your mentee to prompt your follow-up with an email to you after the session.

Be encouraging and action-oriented. Recognize that the problem isn't figuring out what to do – the problem is doing it!

Give helpful feedback. Provide constructive feedback that is specific, descriptive and nonjudgmental.

Honor confidentiality. Conversations between mentor and mentee must be considered private. It is a violation of trust to talk about the mentee's life and issues outside of the mentoring conversation without the permission of the mentee. Be careful about honoring the mentee's trust. Hold mentoring conversations in places where details shared in confidence will not be overheard by other stakeholders or interested parties