

Core Principles in Mentoring Relationships

1. Maintaining Effective Communication

Good communication is a key element of any relationship and a mentoring relationship is no exception. It is critical that mentors and mentees seek to understand their own and the other's communication styles, and take time to practice communication skills.

2. Aligning Expectations

Another key element of effective mentor-mentee relationships is a shared understanding of what each person expects from the relationship. Problems and disappointment often arise from misunderstandings about expectations. Importantly, expectations change over time, so reflection, clear communication, and realignment of expectations are needed on a regular basis.

3. Assessing Understanding

Determining what you understand as well as if someone truly understands you is not easy, yet is critical to a productive mentor-mentee relationship. Developing strategies to self-assess and assess others' understanding is an important part of being an effective mentor and mentee.

4. Addressing Equity and Inclusion

Diversity along a range of dimensions offers both challenges and opportunities to any relationship. Learning to identify, reflect upon, learn from, and engage with diverse perspectives is critical to forming and maintaining an effective mentoring relationship.

5. Fostering Independence

An important goal in any mentoring relationship is helping the mentee become independent; yet defining what an independent mentee knows and can do is not often articulated by either the mentor or the mentee. Identifying milestones towards independence and setting goals are key strategies to fostering independence in a mentoring relationship.

6. Promoting Professional Development

The ultimate goal of most mentoring situations is to enable the mentee to identify and achieve some academic and professional outcomes after the training period. It is the responsibility of both the mentor and mentee to identify and articulate these goals and to strive towards them together.

7. Ethics

Mentors and mentees must engage in and model ethical behavior, while openly discussing issues dealing with gray areas. Moreover, it can be important to acknowledge when a mentoring relationship includes an unequal power dynamic and any additional ethical considerations it raises.

Resource created by Kathryn Fernandez

Excerpt from Mentoring Up chapter in "The Mentoring Continuum: From Graduate School to Tenure" edited by Glen Wright, 2015, Syracuse University: The Graduate School Press;

written by Steven Paul Lee, Richard McGee, Christine Pfund, and Janet Branchaw, pages
138-139