



# UW&™

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN  
**LA CROSSE**

## MENTOR TOOLKIT

STAFF MENTORING  
PROGRAM



ADAPTED WITH PERMISSION FROM  
THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Few of us invest time and energy into anything without at least a small expectation that we will get something from the experience.

You want to know what your mentee hopes to gain from your relationship, and you should also be able to tell your mentee what you want from the relationship. That's how a partnership is built — the Staff Mentoring Program strives to create mutually beneficial relationships.

## What's In It for You?

In order to gauge the success of the mentoring relationship for you as a mentor, consider the following:

- What are you hoping to gain from this partnership?
- What types of recognition are important to you and from whom?
- What other benefits or returns are you anticipating from this relationship?

## Setting Expectations

Any type of relationship is doomed if expectations are held but not expressed. With mentoring relationships, as with other partnerships, it's critical to discuss expectations openly.

**Here are some ideas for uncovering and clarifying your and your mentee's expectations:**

- Share what you each expect from the relationship.
- Discuss the roles and responsibilities of each party.
- List any special needs or features that should be considered.
- Ask each other some critical questions:
  - How much time, effort, and enthusiasm can you devote to this relationship?
  - What do you think a mentor/mentee should do?
  - Who's responsible for this relationship? What does that mean?
  - Besides this relationship, what are your priorities?
- Independently respond to the following and use your answers to start a conversation:
  - What I expect to devote to this relationship is...
  - I can give \_\_\_ time to this relationship.
  - I anticipate meeting \_\_\_ times a month.
  - What I expect in terms of confidentiality / punctuality / communication is...



## IDENTITIES & MENTORING

Mutually beneficial mentoring relationships cannot take place without each person having their multiple identities validated.

Effective mentorship requires that mentors have an awareness of how identity impacts the living, learning, and working environments for themselves and their mentee. Culturally responsive mentorship, whereby mentors show curiosity for colleagues' cultural backgrounds and their non-UWL social identities, may be one way mentors can validate their mentees' multiple identities.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) defines cultural humility as “a lifelong process of self-reflection and self-critique whereby the individual not only learns about another’s culture, but one starts with an examination of their own beliefs and cultural identities.” Approaching the mentoring relationship through a cultural humility lens means developing an understanding of yourself and your own identities to improve consciousness.

### **Engage in constant, ongoing self-reflection**

This component of cultural humility asks us to think of ourselves as raced/gendered/etc. individuals. These are components of who we are and largely shape how we move through the world. We must engage in self-work that interrogates positionality in our dominant and subordinated groups, and how it shows up in our relationships. What identities are easier to talk about than others? What areas of growth are present for me? How can I approach these topics with a humble curiosity?

### **Center and uplift marginalized voices**

As you connect with your mentee, it is crucial to foster a safe and trusted space where listening is the priority. As the relationship grows, you may share and hear parts of your/their journey. This takes vulnerability and trust, making it crucially important that the gift (their story) they are giving you is believed.

*For more information on culturally responsive mentorship, please visit: <https://bit.ly/31SUeYz>*

*For more information on cultural humility, please visit: <https://bit.ly/3iAg0Gx>*

## Empowering Others

While you as a mentor will bring quite a bit of knowledge, experience, and insight to the relationship, it's important to note that effective mentoring is built on respect for the mentee. Some mentors want the mentee to do things "their way" and are discouraged when a mentee makes another choice. The cornerstone of mentoring is empowerment: helping another person discover their own strengths and talents, as well as allowing them to make mistakes and then learn from those mistakes.

An effective mentor provides guidance and then lets go. Think about your ability to provide information in a neutral way and allow your mentee to pick and choose what they want to use. How would this feel to you?

## Self-Image and Confidence

We've already identified that a mentoring relationship is established largely to help the mentee achieve goals and move forward in their professional growth and development. Given that premise, it's crucial that a mentor be sensitive to and willing to assist with the mentee's self-image and confidence level. Many newer professionals (and experienced individuals as well), face feelings of not being good enough, knowing what to do, and/or doubting accomplishments or competence; therefore, there is little need in a mentoring relationship to focus on the mentee's weaknesses. Instead focus on your mentee's strengths, discover opportunities to build on those strengths, and create space for new strengths to emerge.

As a mentor it's critical that you:

- Listen without judgment.
- Provide ideas and suggestions without demanding.
- Offer help once the mentee has determined the direction they'd like to take.

In addition to the insight, experience, and willingness to help that each mentor brings to the relationship, there are other specific skills found in effective mentors.

## Asking Questions

In a mentoring relationship, it is key that the focus stay on the mentee. The best way to focus on another person is to ask questions, so mentors must be skilled at asking effective questions. There are three types of high-gain or open-ended questions that encourage a dialogue, require that the mentee think through the issues.

### Investigative Questions

Just like the term sounds, investigative questions seek information facts. These questions are the familiar who, what, when, where, why, and how questions. While these questions are important, they should be limited and serve only to provide enough background to move the conversation forward. For example:

- Who else is involved?
- What have you accomplished so far?
- When is this due?
- Where do you think you lost focus?
- How long have you been working on this?

### Discovery Questions

Discovery questions are used to encourage the mentee to tap into their own knowledge, experience, and insight. These questions lead mentees into drawing their own conclusions and learning from their experiences. These types of questions are not as familiar as investigative questions, but they are far more fruitful in the mentoring relationship. For example:

- What have you learned from this experience?
- What does it tell you about your approach?
- What's the best thing that could happen? What's the worst thing that could happen?
- What could you have done differently?
- How do you fit into this problem?

## **Empowering Questions**

Empowering questions get us to explore what happens next. They call upon the mentee to take ownership and plan how to proceed. Empowering questions push for action and ask for commitment. For example:

- What is your next step?
- What do you have to do to make it happen?
- What resources do you have; what do you need?
- What's your goal?

## **Listening to the Answers**

Because you have experience, it may be tempting to correct your mentee and give them the “right” answer. It's tempting, but doing so takes ownership, power, and learning away from your mentee. Instead of correcting your mentee, lead them to their own right answers by asking additional questions.

When your mentee is speaking, watch their body language: are they nervous, upset, or frustrated? Listen to their tone of voice and pace; are they talking loudly and quickly? Ask follow-up questions not only about the content of your mentee's responses, but how they feel about what they're telling you.



In addition to the insight, experience, and willingness to help that each mentor brings to the relationship, there are other specific skills found in effective mentors.

A large part of your job as a mentor is giving feedback based on your observations of your mentee. Mentees are depending on your reactions and, because mentors are often not in a supervisory position to their mentees, the feedback can be shared and received in a safer environment.

Providing honest, genuine feedback is a challenge; sometimes it is even uncomfortable. Many of us are hesitant to give feedback because we don't want to come off as judgemental. Feedback doesn't need to come from that place, and it doesn't need to be a lecture.

### **Feedback as a Dialogue**

Instead of providing feedback directly, enter into a dialogue with your mentee: Ask them discovery questions about their performance, behavior, or attitude, establish yourself as a listener, and then react to your mentee's self-assessment. This approach allows you and your mentee to be partners in the process. It also allows you to agree or disagree with your mentee, which usually results in a more open pathway to both be heard.

It's important that you not shy away from providing honest feedback. Feedback is a gift you are giving your mentee because it signifies an investment in their continued growth. We don't allow ourselves to learn and grow if we aren't invested in giving and receiving feedback. Embracing feedback is critical to a full mentor and mentee partnership.



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Often we feel stuck because we are unable to see our situation from any other perspective. Mentors, because of their experience and distance from the mentee's situation, can often see things from a different angle. Mentors help turn situations around by asking questions and listening carefully. Mentors offer mentees the opportunity and the invitation to see things from a different perspective.

As a mentor, you may find yourself in a position of encouraging your mentee to "think outside of the box," to perhaps consider a different career path or other options for themselves. This is often one of the outcomes of a mentoring relationship. Your role in this situation is never to recommend a change, but to provide an opportunity and maybe even resources for your mentee to explore options and make their own decisions



Recognize the distinction between factual information and your opinion. Be clear with your mentee which one you are giving and why

**Consider the following:**

- Think back to an important decision you had to make in your own life where you were torn between alternatives. What things did you need from those close to you?
- Think back in your life to a point where you made, or were about to make, a serious mistake or error in judgment. What did someone do, or what could someone have done, to keep that situation from turning out badly?
- In these situations, what difference could a mentor have made?



There are behaviors that some mentors may believe are helpful but are actually counterproductive and may harm a good mentoring relationship.

### **Criticizing**

A mentor may have a big impact on the self-confidence and self-image of their mentee. Criticizing your mentee has no place in the Staff Mentoring Program. This is not to say that you, as a mentor, cannot provide difficult feedback to your mentee; quite the contrary. The difference is that criticism is at its core evaluative and judgmental: typically the outcome of criticism is not to encourage positive change, but rather to create fear and hesitation in the recipient of the criticism.

To avoid criticizing, take the time to think through how you will provide a mentee with feedback. Use a dialogue approach (asking discovery questions) to allow your mentee an opportunity to identify how they might do better.

### **Giving Advice**

While the breadth of your experience may make you a valuable or knowledgeable mentor, a mentor relationship is not an opportunity for you to prove to your mentee how much you have learned through your experiences. Instead, it is an opportunity for you to provide a safe space for your mentee to learn from their experiences. Giving advice takes away this opportunity. It produces little or no growth or learning in your mentee. You might have an opinion or information which may be appropriate to share, but beware when you begin a statement with “What I think you should do ...” or “If I were you, ...” By giving advice, you’re cheating your mentee out of the essential experiences of a mentoring relationship and out of professional growth.

### **Rescuing Your Mentee**

There may be times when it would just be easier to tell your mentee what to do. After all, the appropriate action may be obvious. It may also seem easier sometimes to just do it for them.

Resist the urge to rescue. While it may make you feel great, it doesn’t help your mentee grow. Focus on supporting your mentee in the way they want to be supported.



## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

<https://www.insperity.com/blog/how-to-build-a-successful-employee-mentoring-program/>

<https://blog.higherlogic.com/2016/07/29/5-steps-to-start-an-effective-employee-mentoring-program-that-people-want-to-participate-in>

<https://blog.higherlogic.com/2016/07/29/5-steps-to-start-an-effective-employee-mentoring-program-that-people-want-to-participate-in>

<https://www.mentoring.org/new-site/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/A.-Fostering-Culturally-Relevant-Practices-Reflection-Activity-Packet.pdf>