



International Association for Society and Natural Resources

## **How to Obtain the Mentoring You Need**

A mentor is more than an adviser. A mentor provides you with wisdom, technical knowledge, assistance, support, empathy and respect throughout, and often beyond, your graduate career and professional life. Mentoring helps mentees understand how their ambitions fit into education, life, and career choices.

An effective mentoring relationship develops over time. The mentee benefits from the mentor's support, skills, wisdom, and coaching. Later, both people deepen their working relationship, perhaps collaborating on projects in which the mentee develops into a junior colleague.

After a while, the mentee may need some separation from the mentor to test his or her own ideas. This distancing is a sign that the mentoring relationship is maturing and providing the mentee with the skills needed to function independently. Finally, both mentee and mentor may redefine their relationship as one of equals, characterized over time by informal contact and mutual assistance, thus becoming true professional colleagues.

## **Benefits of mentoring**

As an undergraduate, your objective was to obtain knowledge; during and after graduate school your objective was to contribute knowledge to a field of study and begin to function as a member of a profession. Even though you may be passionate about a particular subject, your ultimate goal may still be evolving. This is an opportunity for your mentors to assist you with that evolution.

Studies indicate that graduate mentees who receive effective mentoring demonstrate greater

- productivity in research activity, conference presentations, publications, instructional development and grant writing
- academic success in persisting in graduate school, achieving shorter time to degree and performing better in academic coursework
- professional success with greater chances of securing a tenure-track position if seeking employment in academe, or greater career advancement potential if seeking leadership positions in administration or sectors outside the University.

Mentoring enables graduate mentees to

- acquire a body of knowledge and skills

- learn techniques for collaborating and networking
- gain perspective on how a discipline or profession operates academically, socially, and politically
- develop a sense of scholarly and professional citizenship by grasping their role in a larger professional enterprise
- deal more confidently with the challenges of intellectual work.

Mentoring enables mentors to

- engage the curiosities and energies of fresh minds
- keep abreast of new research questions, knowledge, paradigms, and techniques
- cultivate collaborators for current or future projects
- identify and train colleagues whose work is critical to the completion of a research project
- prepare the next generation of intellectual leaders in the disciplines and professions and in society
- enjoy the personal and professional satisfaction inherent in mentoring relationships.

The hallmark of a successful mentoring relationship is a shared understanding of expectations and responsibilities. These create the framework for the relationship, and they are largely established in the early meetings with a mentor. Here are some topics you should consider in advance and during your first few meetings.

### **Clarify expectations**

One of the strongest themes that mentees express is the desire for greater clarity on expectations, roles and responsibilities. Not all mentors and mentees establish a formal contract. Some find it useful; while others prefer to work from informal agreements ([see Sample Agreement](#)). To prevent misunderstandings, discuss frequently the expectations you and your mentor have of each other and how they may change over time.

### **Have realistic expectations**

Be realistic about what you can expect from your mentor. Be clear about what you need and try to develop a balance between seeking a mentor's help and taking on more responsibility as you develop professionally ([see Mentee Expectations worksheet](#)).

### **Clarify roles and responsibilities**

No matter how formal or informal your mentoring agreements may be, you can revise your understandings together as your mentees progress. Some responsibilities to address early, include:

### **Goals and work plans**

Develop and share with your mentor a work plan, including short- and long-term goals and timelines ([see Professional Development Goals worksheet](#)). Make sure these plans are feasible.

### **Meetings**

Talk with your mentors about how often you would like to meet. Ask mentors to be explicit if they have a heavy travel schedule, are about to take a sabbatical or are assuming an administrative position. If your mentor is unable to meet often enough to satisfy your needs, discuss alternative means of communication such as e-mail and live chats and think of others to consult.

### **Confidentiality**

Mentors and students sometimes discuss confidential issues. Be clear about the level of confidentiality you expect from your mentor, and offer strict confidentiality to your mentor.