

**The Postdoc Action**

**What is mentoring*?***

* An inter-personal relationship based on mutual trust, confidentiality and respect, in which typically a more experienced colleague or peer (i.e., the “mentor”) supports and encourages the professional (e.g., career path, skills, ...) and personal developments of another individual (i.e., the “mentee”).

Mentoring is *“****to support and encourage people to manage their own learning in order that they maximize their potential, develop their skills, improve their performance and become the person they want to be****”* (E. Parsloe, Oxford School of Coaching and Mentoring).

**What’s in it for you?**

Every mentoring relationship is different, but having or being a mentor can and will hopefully be valuable in many ways.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **For the MENTEE, a mentor can ....** | **MENTORS** **can gain as well** |
| * serve as a valuable sounding board, providing honest and impartial feedback
* motivate you and support you to identify your goals and how to reach them
* help you by sharing own experiences, knowledge, external viewpoints, ...
* help you to build your professional network
* ...
 | * Personal enrichment
* Professional development and stimulation
* Further development of inter-personal skills
* better insights in issues / challenges / barriers for early-career researchers
* ...
 |

**How to start the mentoring relationship?**

Potential topics to discuss/clarify in the beginning are:

* **Time**: how often and how long do you want to meet? How much time do you commit to reserve for your mentee/mentor?
* **Format**: where and how do you want to meet?
* **Confidentiality:** Make an agreement on how you will handle what is discussed during the mentoring meetings
* **Expectations:** what do you want to get out of the mentoring relationship? What do you expect from the mentor? What does the mentor expect from you?
* Any other topic that you consider essential to take up in the beginning

**What kind of topics can you take up with your mentor?**

This essentially depends on the situation, the needs and expectations of both parties, but some potential topics to take up with your mentor are:

* Development and/or discussion of one’s career plan
* Difficult situations / dilemmas / problems related to or having an impact on your work
* How to prioritize different tasks, commitments, ...
* Networking opportunities; potential alternative career paths (e.g., in industry)
* ...

**What makes a good mentee / mentor?**

It is impossible to provide the perfect recipe for a successful mentor-mentee relationship, but a lot depends on the mindset and attitude of both mentor and mentee.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| A good **MENTEE**  | A good **MENTOR** |
| * takes initiative, sets the agenda, is proactive
* is open, honest, positive
* is willing to share and willing to listen
* is willing to receive critical feedback and to be challenged
* is committed and has the time and willingness to develop a good mentoring relationship
 | * is motivated by helping others to succeed
* is empathic, is able to listen actively
* asks the right questions
* is honest, open and constructive
* is committed and is willing to make time for the mentee
* respects different ways of working
* helps to open doors to opportunities
 |

**References and further reading**

Straus, S. E., Johnson, M. O., Marquez, C., & Feldman, M. D. (2013). Characteristics of Successful and Failed Mentoring Relationships: A Qualitative Study Across Two Academic Health Centers. *Academic Medicine : Journal of the Association of American Medical Colleges*, *88*(1), 82–89. <http://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0b013e31827647a0>

Zerzan, J.T, Hess, R., Schur, E., Phillips, R.S., Rigotti, N.D. (2009). Making the Most of Mentors: A Guide for Mentees. Academic Medicine (84)1, p 140-144. <http://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0b013e3181906e8f>

E. Parsloe (1992). *Coaching, Mentoring and Assessing: A Practical Guide to Developing Competence.* London: Kogan Page.

<http://www.ascb.org/compass/compass-points/behind-every-successful-career-is-a-mentor/>

<https://www.americanscientist.org/article/postdoc-mentorship-can-launch-careers>

<https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2012/aug/08/mentoring-higher-education-careers>

<https://www.nature.com/naturejobs/science/career_toolkit/mentoring>