



Is Your Mentorship Actually Working? Here's How to Tell



By Allison Childress PhD, RDN, CSSD, LD

Are you a mentor or a mentee who wonders if your partnership is actually beneficial? Is it time to find a different person or is your relationship successful? Whether you are a mentor, mentee or thinking about entering into a mentor/mentee relationship these tips can help you evaluate the quality of this unique and potentially extremely beneficial partnership.

For Mentees

First, it is important that you understand what a mentor is and understand what their relationship with a mentee. Many times, we think we need a mentor when all we need is advice or a simple push in the right direction. A traditional mentorship consists of a mentor and a mentee. Typically, the mentor is a seasoned professional who has extensive experience in the field and can impart wisdom to the mentee based upon this experience. A good mentor should:

- Help you make difficult decisions
- Provide guidance in career challenges
- Offer advice when warranted
- Be willing to make a long-term commitment to your career
- Foster collaboration
- Ensure you are making progress toward your goals
- Give feedback in a timely manner
- Encourage independence
- Introduce you to leaders in your field
- Provide equal opportunity and be inclusive of all

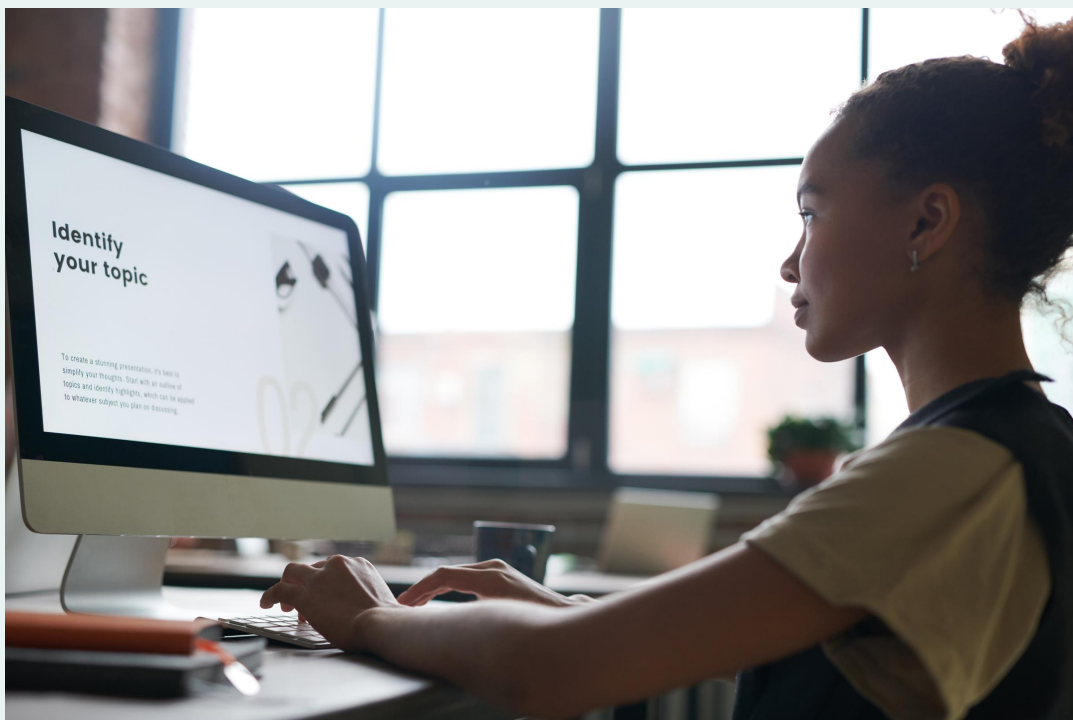
Sometimes it can be difficult to know if a potential mentor has the traits you need, so talk to others to get their feedback before setting up a meeting to get acquainted. Prepare for that first meeting by researching your potential mentor using their company biography and their previous work. Be up front with your mentor, be clear about your intentions and what you want from the partnership. Ask actionable questions, not general “what should I do with my life” questions. Remember that your potential mentor doesn’t know you, they know their business and their experience, not yours.



For Mentors

How do you know if you are ready to be a mentor? Mentorship can be very rewarding to you as well as to your mentee but reaching the decision to become a mentor should be seriously considered before you make the commitment. Some milestones that might indicate that you are ready to mentor someone include: being comfortable and established in your career, having time to devote to the mentorship relationship, possessing good people skills and the ability to teach, and perhaps having, or had in the past, a reliable and effective mentor of your own. There are four ways to develop yourself as a good mentor:

1. **Communicate and listen.** Your mentee is responsible for his/her/their career path, you are there to help them achieve their goals, not yours.
2. **Offer constructive criticism.** Use your own experiences to communicate “what not to do”. The point of a good mentoring relationship is to educate and guide your mentee, not tear them down.
3. **Be empathetic.** Help your mentee through a hard day or week by communicating that you understand their feelings and frustrations and give some guidance on how to approach those issues. You need to be able to relate to your mentee and understand perspectives and feelings that may be different from yours.
4. **Go with the flow.** As difficult as it might be, you need to be able to let your mentee make their own decisions, even if you may not necessarily agree with them. Your job is to help them learn, not do it for them. In the end, they will have much more confidence in themselves and in you as their mentor.



A successful mentorship is possible, but it takes work on both sides. If you find that a mentorship is not working for you, discuss your concerns before moving on. Then, take some time to investigate why the partnership didn't work. Figuring out what went wrong is key in helping you choose a mentor/mentee in the future. The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics has excellent resources on mentoring which can be [accessed here](#).

References

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