

# Follow the Leader: Mentoring

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**A**n ancient Chinese proverb says, “If you want 1 year of prosperity, grow grain. If you want 10 years of prosperity, grow trees. If you want 100 years of prosperity, grow people.” Mentoring is just that—people growing. In virtually every profession imaginable, a mentoring relationship is considered an excellent route toward ensuring not only the vitality of a profession but also the growth of the workers within that profession. The Public Health Student Caucus (PHSC) of the American Public Health Association has a program to connect students early in their studies with field practitioners who can help them grow into public health professionals. The caucus’s national mentoring program in public health (NMP) pairs public health students with public health professionals across a variety of disciplines throughout the nation and then helps facilitate the development of effective mentoring relationships between these novices and their mentors. Program goals are to improve the relevance of the academic training that public health students receive, increase the professional success and productivity of public health students and professionals, and strengthen the field of public health through the growth and retention of strong and committed leaders. For more information on NMP, visit [www.apha.org/ppp/mentoring.html](http://www.apha.org/ppp/mentoring.html) or contact program coordinators Rishi Dholakia, MPH ([rdholakia001@aol.com](mailto:rdholakia001@aol.com)) and Resa M. Jones, MPH ([jones\\_r@epi.umn.edu](mailto:jones_r@epi.umn.edu)). Because all of us have the opportunity to be both mentees and mentors, we wanted to share this tool. It is taken from “A Guide to Building Effective Mentoring Relationships,” a booklet on mentoring developed by PHSC for NMP mentors and mentees.

### DEFINITION OF MENTORING

*Mentoring* is a personalized, one-on-one approach to learning grounded in a personal as well as a professional relationship between a mentee (the learner) and the mentor (the teacher).

### BENEFITS OF MENTORING TO MENTEES

#### Mentors Can Open Doors

Opened doors increase social interaction and networking possibilities within a profession.

Interactions and networking magnify career contacts and job opportunities.

#### Mentors Can Provide Invaluable Advice and Specialized Knowledge

They provide counseling, guidance, and advice.

Mentors save mentees time, money, and sanity, because it is often difficult to find this advice elsewhere.

#### Mentors Can Help Increase Professional Success and Productivity

A study of women in academic medicine published in 1991 showed that women with mentors had significantly more publications in peer-reviewed journals and spent significantly more time in research activities than women without mentors.

#### Mentors Can Help Enhance a Mentee’s Overall Career Satisfaction and Sense of Well-Being

Mentees in an effective mentoring relationship feel they are worth the investment.

Mentees gain self-confidence and inspiration.

## BENEFITS OF MENTORING TO MENTORS

### Mentoring Keeps Mentors Sharp

Teaching is a great way to learn.

Helping requires mentors to be aware of advances in the field.

Duties inherent in mentoring can improve mentors' job performance.

Mentoring keeps mentors on their toes: changing, improving, never stagnating.

### Mentoring Enhances Mentor Creativity

Answering questions often stimulates new ideas.

Discussions often inspire creative thinking.

### A Mentor Receives by Giving

Mentors who give of themselves often win the hearts and respect of people who will be forever grateful for the gift.

### Mentoring Can Preserve a Legacy

Mentors convey knowledge and experience they have worked hard to gain over the years to someone who might be inspired to carry on that work.

### A Good Mentee. . . .

- Is open and eager to learn.
- Is aware of benefits gained from a mentoring relationship.
- Puts time and energy into the process.
- Takes the initiative at the start.
- Respects the time and effort put in by the mentor.
- Acts on information provided by the mentor.
- Passes on the gift of mentoring to another novice in the future.

### A Good Mentor . . .

- Is proficient in his or her field.
- Upholds standards of excellence in his or her field.
- Is an exemplary role model.
- Shares knowledge and expertise.
- Is comfortable with own ignorance and limitations.
- Lets a novice see struggles with the unknown and the search for answers.
- Creates a supportive learning environment.
- Balances praise and criticism.

- Nurtures independence while providing guidance.
- Is committed to the mentoring process.
- Donates time and shares knowledge.
- Assesses the learning needs of mentees.

## HOW TO ESTABLISH AN EFFECTIVE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

Together, the prospective mentor and mentee should:

Conduct an opening interview in person or over the phone; come prepared with questions, but let interview unfold naturally.

Clarify goals and objectives for the mentoring relationship as well as needs and expectations. Define the desired outcomes. Identify the areas and/or skills and/or professional goals that will be the focus of this learning experience.

Set boundaries and be clear about information you feel should remain private.

Be honest, open, and direct when communicating with each other.

Get acquainted with each other as people first. Find out what makes each other unique or special, then move on to career-oriented topics.

Familiarize each other with educational and professional experiences. Share resumes or curricula vitae as well as past or present course work.

Discuss visions of each other's profession.

Establish a regular meeting time.

## MAINTAINING AN EFFECTIVE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

Consistently refine and operationalize your goals.

Share both successes and failures.

Encourage the independence of the mentee.

Be accessible and respond promptly to each other.

Regularly elicit feedback from each other on performance.

Periodically take stock of the relationship.

Remember, there is no one right mentoring method.

Have fun!

## CAVEATS

- Mentors are not perfect.
- The mentor's way is not the only or best way.
- Mentors are there to point out the stepping stone—not to be one.
- Mentors should be thanked.
- Mentors get discouraged when mentees do not act on their suggestions.

**RELATED READINGS**

Kirk, E., & Reichert, G. (1992). The mentoring relationship: What makes it work? *Imprint*, 38, 20-22.

Wickman, F., & Sjodin, T. (1997). *Mentoring: The most obvious yet overlooked key to achieving more in life than you dreamed possible*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

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