

10 Tips about Mentoring

(Copyright 2010 Grace H. Kim)

1. Think of Mentorship as capacity building for future leaders

Often the best leaders will attribute their success to having good mentors. Every mentoring relationship is an opportunity to share best practices for leadership, integrity, and professionalism. The advice or experiences you share can prepare someone else to be a better leader or mentor.

2. Assume everyone to be a potential mentor

Don't expect your mentor to be the wise old sage with grey hair. Your favorite barista, dentist or a fellow daycare parent can turn out to be a mentor – be open to learning from everyone around you. If you have preconceptions of who your mentor may be, you may miss out on some really important life lessons.

3. You can be a mentor

Regardless of whether you have just graduated from college or are a leader in our field, you have something valuable to offer – your experiences. Invest your time in mentoring someone else and you will be rewarded with a great sense of personal satisfaction and sincere appreciation of the individual you have mentored.

4. Why Mentor

Mentoring is a chance to give back, to ensure the future of your profession; to help others avoid the same mistake you made early in your career; and leave a lasting impact for those who follow. The mentor may benefit as much as those being 'mentored'.

5. Mentor through your actions

You might be a mentor/role model to someone else without your knowledge. Even if you are not in a formal mentor relationship, people are observing and learning from you. If you are in leadership roles, your actions will speak volumes about your integrity and leadership style.

6. Formal mentoring

Formal mentoring is kind of like blind dating. Someone can make the initial introduction or "assign" a mentor to you, but the resulting relationship relies on the chemistry between the two individuals. Give the relationship a chance to flourish. If after a few meetings it's not working, don't feel bad about calling it quits. (Just be sure to communicate that with the other person.)

7. Group / Laddered Mentoring

Consider mentoring a group of individuals. By doing so, you maximize your own mentoring capacity while also providing a greater diversity of opinions/viewpoints for people to hear before making their own informed decisions. If the participants in a group situation are staggered in experience level, you have the added benefit of individuals learning from each other as well as providing them opportunities to gain experience in mentoring along the way.

8. Say hello to the solo person in the room

If you are in a room full of people, look around for the person standing by themselves or sitting engrossed in the agenda/program information. That person is probably a newcomer to the group or the one most likely in need of a mentor.

9. Be honest

Don't be afraid to peel off your 'professional facade' and tell your mentor about your personal story and how it affects your career decisions.

10. Good, bad, and the ugly

You can have both good and bad mentors. Negative experiences can often be a great way to learn... even if that means learning what it is you don't want to do.