

A field guide for post-docs: How to be a good MENTOR and MENTEE

A quick guide for making the most of your time with your mentor(s)
while being the best mentor to post-bacs, summer students and other junior scientists

Good MENTORS will ...

Interact and regularly meet with mentee(s):

- Be approachable, available, and willing to share their knowledge and experiences
- Build a relationship with mentees based on mutual respect and understanding
- Share expectations (e.g. what do you hope to accomplish by meeting?)
- Listen effectively
- Respect confidentiality
- Provide encouragement and constructive criticism – offer ways to improve weaknesses
- Describe preferred mentoring and communication style (see back for details)

Suggest career development strategies:

- Work with mentees to set long-term and short-term research and career goals and create a timeline to achieve them through the development of an Individual Development Plan
- Offer expertise and guidance in their field

Help mentees build a network and identify resources:

- Share their network – introduce mentees to individuals who can help
- Encourage interactions with others in the field both intra- and extramurally
- Seek the assistance of institutional resources when necessary (e.g. contact OITE when career advice is outside of expertise).
- Encourage attendance at professional meetings to network and present research
- Commit to being a supportive colleague as mentees transition to the next stage of their careers and throughout their professional lives

Help mentees develop non-research skills needed to further their careers:

- Encourage mentees to attend career development workshops (e.g. grant writing, leadership, and other skill building)
- Recognize that there are multiple career options and provide assistance in exploring them - Direct mentees to resources for exploring non-academic careers, and discuss these options

Good MENTEES will ...

Interact and regularly meet with mentor(s):

- Be respectful of their mentors' commitment
- Make good use of time (e.g. come prepared - bring a list of preliminary questions/discussion topics and a current resume/CV)
- Have open and timely discussions with their mentor
- Listen effectively
- Respect confidentiality
- Seek regular feedback on their performance and progress
- Describe preferred mentoring and communication style (see back for details)

Be pro-active in their career development:

- Be honest and self-critical (recognize both strengths AND weaknesses)
- Work with mentors to set long-term and short-term research and career goals and create a timeline to achieve them through the development of an Individual Development Plan
- Take responsibility for researching career options and take initiative in pursuing them
- Follow a path that matches their individual skills, values, and interests

Utilize additional resources for career development and build a professional network:

- Seek out mentors beyond their immediate supervisor(s)
- Actively seek opportunities outside their current office- for example, attend professional development seminars and workshops in oral communication, writing, and teaching to develop the full set of professional skills

For more information and examples, visit our website:
www.training.nih.gov/felcom/mentoring



A field guide for post-docs: MENTORING

Topics for discussion between mentor(s) and mentee(s)

Mentors and Mentees should discuss their preferred mentoring focus and communication style:

- How can I help and where do you need the most help?
 - Do you need help with resume writing, networking, or advice on work-life balance?
- What is your preferred mentoring style?
 - Do you prefer a hands-on, tough love or open door approach?
- How often do you want to interact and by what method?
 - Do you prefer a rigid or flexible meeting schedule?
 - Do you prefer to meet face-to-face or email questions and answers back and forth?

Mentors and Mentees should discuss career trajectories:

- What are your short-term and long-term goals and what is your timeline?
 - Post-docs - Create an Individual Development Plan at myidp.sciencecareers.org
 - Post-bacs/Summer students –goals may include collecting data to become an author on a paper, getting a letter of recommendation for when they apply to future jobs or just exploring careers in science
- What motivates you and what are your biggest challenges?
 - Are you goal oriented? Are you a procrastinator? Are you shy?
- What interests you? And what do you dislike doing?
 - In order to find the best career fit, figure out what you like and dislike doing.
 - Do you enjoy reading/writing or interacting with people?

Suggested questions to ask your mentor about future careers in science:

*These questions may be useful when finding the right mentor for you, for an informational interview or networking

- What do you like most/find most interesting about your work?
- What kinds of problems do you face? Find most difficult?
- What skills/abilities do you find are most important in your work?
- Are there any prerequisites or training needed to succeed in your field?
- What jobs are currently available at my level and are there opportunities to advance?
- What special advice would you give to a person entering your field?
- Is there current and/or future demand for people in your field?
- How much flexibility do you have regarding: innovation (creativity and problem solving?), work-life balance (opportunity to telework or take family-leave), self-expression (appearance and work attire), working colleagues (opportunities to work with individually or with a team) and decision-making authority?

MORE INFORMATION:

- OITE mentoring guidelines: www.training.nih.gov/mentoring_guidelines
- How to make an Individual Development Plan: myidp.sciencecareers.org
- Example compact for postdoctoral mentoring: www.aamc.org/postdoccompact
- NIH-HHS Mentoring Program: trainingcenter.nih.gov/hhs_mentoring.html
- NIH sourcebook on Training and Mentoring in the Intramural Program at the NIH – sourcebook.od.nih.gov/ethic-conduct/TrainingMentoringGuide_7.3.02.pdf

Remember your shared mentoring objective is to achieve a successful career!

