Keep Your Mentorship Thriving: Example Questions & Talking Points

Relationships and networking can be powerful tools to navigate your life and career, but managing a successful mentoring relationship can be stressful if there are high expectations without a clear approach.

The goal of the Women’s Board mentoring program is to have fun and encourage relaxed, yet inspiring, conversation centered on personal and professional growth.

However, it is easy to get carried away in our jobs and not prepare for our mentoring calls.

There are many ways you can keep a mentorship fresh, fun and growing. Remember that a mentorship is a two-way street. Focus on cross-functional training and ask a colleague to lend his or her expertise. Topics of interest could be category management, forecasting, customer marketing, operations, customer service, sales, finance, or another job function your partnership would benefit from learning about.

To grow, we must take initiative and risks—don’t be afraid to share your opinion with your mentor or mentee. Sharing your opinion will help your mentorship relationship grow and will offer building blocks to future meaningful conversations.

Some key factors in an effective relationship are mutual respect, acceptance and flexibility, honesty and direct communication, preparation, commitment, some shared values, trust, and willingness to work through obstacles—keep those in mind and, again, have fun!

Sample Questions:

- **How do you spend most of your time?**
  Ask this question for one reason only — digging. Most people who ask for advice never take the time to build an authentic connection. Gathering these answers will allow you to follow up with relevant articles, ideas and build a deeper relationship. Givers gain. 1
- **What would you do if you were me?**
  Tell them about your specific challenges, and ask for their recommendations. 1
- **How can I help you?**
  This is a killer question that catches most mentors off guard. Most mentees are only concerned about what they can take from a mentor. When you communicate that you are genuinely willing to give, you will set yourself miles apart from everyone else. 1
- **Is this where you thought you would end up?**
  Most experienced professionals take the scenic route in their career. How they got there is usually an interesting tale with mistakes and revelations. Learn from them. 1
- **What used to be your biggest weaknesses?**
  A good answer reveals the number one trait of a great mentor — self-awareness. You can soften this question by asking, “What did you learn about yourself in the last six months?” 1
- **What are you most proud of?**
  Give your mentor a chance to shine. He/she will love you for it. 1
- **What professional organizations are you associated with and in what ways?**
  No one becomes a rising star in any industry without going to the right conferences and trade associations. A good mentor can help you filter out the best ones, and if you’re lucky, get you access to coveted “invite only” insider groups. 1
- **Anything FORM.**
  Form is an acronym for family, occupation, recreation, and motivation, and it represents four universal

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rapport-builders. For example, you might find out that you have a location-based connection with your mentor after asking about his family or birthplace. Connection made! 1

- "What do you wish you knew at my stage?"
  "I love to ask mentors what they wish they knew when they were at my stage of life and business. It's eye-opening to hear about the experiences they had and the recommendations they'd make so that I don't make the same missteps." – Darrah Brustein, Network Under 40, Finance Whiz Kids 2

- "Who else would you recommend I connect with?"
  Making the most of your mentorship includes expanding your network. Ask your mentor who else you should contact to help you with your beginning experiences. They'll appreciate your initiative. 2

- "How can I work smarter?"
  Your mentor is there to help you improve your overall business and well-being. If they can help you learn how to work smarter and not always harder this will help you from both a productivity standard and increase your potential to be successful. 2

- "If you could do it all again, what would you do differently?"
  “You want to put yourself in your mentor’s shoes and your mentor into yours. This will open lines for sharing a number of relevant stories and give you an opportunity to learn valuable lessons from their experiences.” – Ashley Mady, Brandberry 2

- "What are you trying to accomplish this quarter?"
  “This question invites a wealth of short-term and long-term opportunities for you to learn and do a few things. It helps you understand how your mentor tends to problem solve, enables your mentor to see you in a new light as a resource to help, and gives you a chance to deepen your experience in an industry of interest.” – Mary Ray, MyHealthTeams 2

- "What should keep me up at night?"
  There's nothing more valuable than hearing the one thing a mentor believes can affect your job, industry, or business. Give them the right space to honestly answer the question. 2

- "What were your biggest failures?"
  So many times people like asking their mentors what has made them successful. Asking about mistakes and what they learned from their failures is a better gauge on their success. 2

- "How would you handle this scenario?"
  Mentors are very busy. The best question to ask a mentor is a question that they can help solve or perspective on right away. In general, the best approach is to ask, "How would you handle this scenario?" and then lay out the issues and why it's troubling you. – Luke Skurman, Niche.com 2

- "What has been your most rewarding accomplishment?"
  “Find out what successes were the most meaningful to them. You can glean sage advice from learning what’s important to your mentor on a personal level.” – Daniel Wesley, DebtConsolidation.com 2

- "What am I doing wrong?"
  “Then listen without being defensive. Many times when meeting with my mentor I would try to justify why I was doing something, when I should have just been listening. I found the above question, along with asking how I could do it better, was a great way to begin a dialogue of how to become the best version of myself.” – Adam Root, Hiplogiq 2

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