



7 TIPS over

# MENTORING

Ghent University organizes and encourages sustainable mentoring relations with its researchers. [David Clutterbuck](#) describes a mentor as “a more experienced person who is prepared to share knowledge with a less experienced person in a relationship of mutual trust”. The mentee can, thanks to the newly gained insights, evolve in a job or integrate in a workplace more quickly. Both the mentor and mentee stimulate each other by exchanging ideas, knowledge and experience. The mutual connection between the mentor and mentee is the all important factor in whether or not this relationship is successful, with personal click, ambitions, commitment and personality all playing a key role.

## 1. ROLE AND PROFILE OF A MENTOR

A mentor can combine different roles, ranging from sounding board, experience expert, right through to role model and colleague. Mentoring is not a well-defined discipline with a fixed set of rules. Each mentor has his/her own style.

A mentor is:

- prepared to share own experience, knowledge and expertise,
- open and empathic,
- supportive and encouraging,
- credible,
- confidential about the questions and concerns shared by the mentee.

## 2. THE FIRST MEETING

Well begun is half done. If both mentor and mentee feel comfortable, it will be easier to establish mutual trust more quickly. To start your work together, an extensive introduction (in a quiet and relaxed place) is very important. Plan enough time for an initial meeting. You can exchange CVs in advance. In the first interview, you also make time to discuss the goals of mentoring on both sides, as determined and initiated by the mentee. Finally, you can look ahead and see how you see the mentoring year unfold. Discuss the frequency of your meetings. It is best to select the date and time of the next meeting together.

## 3. CONFIDENTIALITY

Also take some time to look at what CONFIDENTIALITY means in your mentoring relationship. It may feel a little unnatural but it is crucial for a successful mentoring relationship. After all, everyone's view of confidentiality is different. If you discuss this in the first meeting, you can refer back to it later on when delicate issues are raised. Confidentiality remains a common thread throughout the process.

These questions can help you start a conversation about confidentiality:

- What topics are sensitive for you?
- Is there someone with whom you would definitely like to, or could, discuss these conversations, or not?

## 4. EXCHANGE

In the first meeting, you will quickly get to know each other. This will give you a sense of safety, a place where you can be open and honest about both challenges and successes. Some questions that can trigger an exchange of views:

- How was your promotion track?
- What publication hurdles did you encounter and how do you tackle them?
- How did you deal with competition/conflicts in your research group? How was that? What would you do differently?
- Have you approached colleagues with difficulties?
- Where can you turn for support?
- What do doctoral students expect from you?
- How do you tackle your work-life balance?
- What are your most urgent career goals? How do you monitor them?
- What do you hope to achieve within three years? What do you need to realize that?
- What problems do you run into at work or in your direct working environment?

## 5. MENTORING SUGGESTIONS

- Share those experiences, knowledge and networks that are most beneficial to the mentee.
- Create a sense of safety.
- Stimulate: ask questions to fire up the thinking process.
- Explore possible solutions together with the mentee.
- Leave the mentee to take responsibility for any actions taken.
- Refer to other (experience) experts.

## 6. PITFALLS

- Giving too much advice: your experience is often, but not always, relevant to the mentee.
- Projecting own (negative) experiences onto the other.
- Imposing your own opinions.
- Being too helpful so that the mentee is pushed into a passive, helpless role.
- Being too friendly, as a result of which the conversations lack depth or few concrete goals are met.

## 7. ADVANTAGES OF MENTORING

Adopting the role of mentor can also help you in the following areas:

- **leadership skills** – You become skilled at motivating and encouraging others. This can help you become a better manager, employee and colleague.
- **communication skills** – Given that your mentee has a different background, you may not 'speak the same language'. This can challenge you to explore new ways of communicating to help you accomplish the mentoring task more efficiently.
- **exploring new perspectives** - By working with someone with less experience or a totally different background, you gain new insights. You reflect with the mentee and thus increase your self-awareness.
- **personal satisfaction** – If you are able to contribute to the growth and development of your colleague, this will energize you.
- **a collegiate spirit** – By adopting a role as a mentor, you contribute to a positive-leadership and open-feedback culture at our university.