



Australia Awards

Mentoring Program: Information & Guidelines

Building and sustaining the Mentor-Mentee relationship

'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' – Chinese Proverb

Mentoring is well recognised as a strategy for personal and career development and is commonly used in progressive business enterprises and learning institutions. It is the empowering of mentee by developing his or her abilities. Mentors are those special people in our lives who, through their deeds, help us to move toward fulfilling that potential. Mentors are helpers. Their styles may range from that of a persistent encourager who helps us build our self-confidence, to that of a stern task maker who teaches us to appreciate excellence in performance.

Mentoring is generally regarded as a process whereby a more experienced person voluntarily offers guidance and advice to someone less experienced in relation to their career development. It is a process whereby mentor and mentee work together to discover and develop the mentee's latent abilities, to provide the mentee with knowledge and skills as opportunities and needs arise, and for the mentor to serve as an effective tutor, counsellor, friend and foil who enables the mentee to sharpen skills and hone her or his thinking. The mentor's role is to facilitate the development of the mentee by providing learning opportunities that will enhance knowledge, skills, wisdom and confidence, while the mentees get an opportunity to learn from a professional within the same industry sector with a higher level of experience, established industry linkages and professional networks.

The mentorship between mentor and mentees can take different forms. It could be an Alumnus or Alumna as mentor and an Awardees as mentee; it could be an Alumnus or Alumna mentoring another recently returned Alumnus or Alumna; or it consist of a senior Awardee (mentor) mentoring a new Awardee (mentee) in the same area of expertise (the so-called Peer-to-Peer mentoring).

Managing the Mentoring Relationship

One of the most important elements to an effective mentor/mentee relationship is having **realistic expectations from the outset**. To some degree it will be a partnership, though not always an *equal* partnership. The mentee seeks to 'drive' the relationship by inviting input from the mentor.

As a mentee, you need to remember:

The mentor assists voluntarily - to listen to the mentee thoughts and ideas, share some wisdom, provide information, sector intelligence and some guidance. Don't assume they will be aware of your WPR, your Australia Awards journey or where you want life to take you after completion of studies in Australia. It is all about having the courage to talk about your goals and aspirations and the quality of your conversation - not necessarily how long you talk. Keep an open mind and consider all options and opportunities, accept feedback and try to learn from it. Both parties should work towards building a cooperative and mutually rewarding relationship and seek to develop a professional relationship by practising openness and respect.

The mentor may not be aware of your gifts and talents, your capacity and capabilities so you need to *develop their awareness* of your country, your current work and highlight your unique experiences. You may explore common professional interests and there is always scope for sharing and reciprocal learning.

A mentor is NOT there to edit your WPR, *solve* your work issues, *save you* from your current job and hire you or help you with promotion. They are there to challenge you, assist you in building your self-confidence, offer alternative life perspectives, increase your network and linkages, and broaden your industry/sector knowledge. It is vital to view your mentor as a person with their own work obligations and one of several resources at your disposal to assist you further develop your career and knowledge of your sector.

Here are some hints to ensure the mentoring relationship has the best chance of succeeding:

- The mentee is to make the first contact with the mentor who has been assigned to you. Awardees are expected to initiate contact with their mentor; you may wish to send an introductory email outlining your background, area of study and what you hope to achieve from your participation.
- Confidentiality is an important element of the mentoring relationship, so don't reveal any information about your mentor to others without their consent (you should expect the same).
- While it *may* change over time and develop into a friendship, always regard mentoring as a *professional* relationship. Perhaps you both get something from the relationship and move on. That is common and quite okay.
- Discuss the Australia Awards scholarship opportunity and your obligations regarding the WPR.
- Establish clear goals for yourself and check with your mentor that these are feasible within the timeframe. Agree on methods, timing and regularity of contact. Fortnightly, monthly is ideal but the frequency may change over time.
- Respond to emails and phone messages in a timely manner.
- Be prepared to review your goals and monitor progress from time to time.
- Demonstrate initiative and be proactive.
- Avoid sharing personal history and problems unless they are impacting on your career choices or you are invited to do so.
- You are the one who needs to work on the WPR; don't expect your mentor to do it for you. However, you may wish to ask your mentor for feedback or 'bounce' some ideas. This does not mean editing. Take responsibility for your own personal growth and career development.

Mentoring communication

It is important to establish some goals for yourself, although it is often not as easy as it sounds. Think about a focus for each contact/meeting - a topic. Don't forget to brief your mentor on any topic prior to your contacts/meetings, so they can prepare and get some thoughts together.

It is a conversation not an interview, so when you first meet with your mentor it is important to get to know each other's background - family life and interests. Either of you may wish to break the ice by sharing a little about yourself – significant life experiences, hopes and aspirations or how you arrived at where you are now. Contacts/meetings are unusually quite informal, with the mentor often trying to make you feel at ease and may even wish to discuss current affairs, sporting events, University life or ask about family. Summarise your career history - what have been the most important roles you've had, what were some of the milestones in your life, and where your career is at right now. You might also focus on what you enjoy about your time in Australia, what are some of the key challenges in your course and where you 'see yourself' in the future.

You may wish to ask your mentor for a short summary of their career history, and what they believe are some of the strengths, knowledge & skills that they bring to the mentoring relationship.

Some topics which you could discuss with your mentor might include:

- What is the mentor's 'story'?
- How are the goals and objectives of the organisation conveyed to staff?
- What would they do differently in their career?
- How to develop your own, unique leadership qualities?

- How to develop your profile, networks and linkages within the sector, while on-award?
- How to facilitate change and 'bring others with you'?
- How to advance your career options?
- Increasing self-awareness, getting feedback from colleagues and subordinates;
- How to use constructive feedback and criticism?
- Strategies for building self-confidence;
- How to advocate for yourself, your ideas and be comfortable with communicating your successes and accepting recognition?
- Finding work that is meaningful and matches your values and skill set;
- How to build your credibility with your colleagues, workplace, department and the sector?

Mentor responsibilities

- Manage mentee expectations and agree on communication methods, timing and regularity of contact
- Sharing your experiences (both successes and failures).
- Support your mentee by acting as a sounding board and by assisting to build self-confidence.
- Listening when the mentee has a problem and providing appropriate information when needed.
- Provide insights from your own career development where appropriate.
- Be patient, build trust, motivate and encourage.
- Guide mentee to goal set, review goals and achieve self-reliance.
- Challenge mentee's thinking (offer alternative perspectives). Encouraging exploration or options.
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- Be a facilitator- where possible; introduce mentee to your networks and/or professional associations.

The mentoring relationship

Preparation and establishment

It is essential that the parties take the time to reflect on their expectations and goals. Mismatched expectations can cause difficulties from the outset, while open and honest communication helps ensure that expectations are clear, realistic and attainable. It is important to discuss expectations openly, and negotiate a shared understanding to move towards a mutually beneficial relationship.

Complete the Mentoring Agreement: Your mentoring relationship will commence within a framework of guidelines and supported by a mutually developed Mentoring Agreement and Code of Conduct (refer Appendix). This will need to be completed early in this phase of mentoring. The program encourages the completion of the Mentoring Agreement and both parties must sign and adhere to the Mentoring Code of Conduct.

Building rapport: You can break the ice by sharing a little about yourself –your education, life experiences, hopes and aspirations and how you arrived at where you are today.

Time commitment: Both parties should reflect on how much time each can commit, taking into consideration issues such as peak times for student assessment and mentor workloads. The aim is to stay in touch on a regular basis to sustain the relationship and continue the momentum. It may help to set regular dates for meetings and then agree on who will be responsible for coordinating each contact.

Meeting places: Online communication/ meetings and where possible, face-to-face meetings can work.

Strategies & Goal setting

Once a mentoring relationship has been established, you can move to discussing what each wants to achieve and plan strategies to achieve program goals. Success in this phase will require the practice of good communication skills, including active and responsive listening, the open and honest exchange of ideas and the use of the open questions that encourage discussion.

Considering goals: For Awardees, goals could include developing a career plan, gaining work insights or work experience, investigating potential careers, focusing on certain work-related skills or learning about the work environment.

Mentors may seek the satisfaction of helping a student keen to learn about the latest innovations in their field, or be interested in developing skills in coaching and facilitation.

Planning strategies: Having established goals, how will you go about achieving them? Explore together what skills may be needed, what assistance may be required, and what types of experiences or networks may help. Where an Awardee has career interests outside the mentor's field, the mentor may wish to involve colleagues or other professional contacts for workplace interviewing

Implementation and Engagement

You will be working together on your agreed activities while maintaining your commitment to the relationship. Focus on practical strategies for reaching your goals. The frequency and duration of meetings will vary, but participants must be committed to maintaining contact. Email, skype and phone can be used to maintain contact when a face-to-face meeting is not practical.

Implementing strategies to achieve goals will be critical to the success of your mentoring. Implementation may involve discussion where the mentee continues to draw on the experience of their mentor, networking where the mentee connects with the mentors' colleagues, work shadowing where the mentee is invited to observe the mentor's work routine, and even work experience where the mentor may choose to assign the mentee a specific task or project.

Mentors *may* sometimes choose to involve Awardees in activities beyond their immediate workplace, for example, professional or industry functions and other events. (Rotary, Lions Clubs)

It is necessary that Awardees prepare appropriately for each engagement, while mentors are encouraged to explore the full range of opportunities at their disposal to support student objectives. Mentors should consider the suitability of planned activities, ensuring they are appropriate for the experience and maturity of the student, as strategies appropriate for some students may not always suit others.

Frequently Asked Questions for mentees (FAQ's)

What if I am not sure I can commit?

Mentoring requires a genuine and sustained commitment, and the parties must be prepared to commit to the partnership for the duration of the Agreement. It is important to be aware of potential difficulties that may arise during the mentoring relationship. The most common challenge for participants is managing time pressures and unexpected changes in workloads. Potential problems can often be diffused at an early stage through discussion and negotiation.

What if I have a mentor in mind but haven't had a response after my initial contact?

Mentees who are having difficulty in contacting their mentor should make another effort or have alternative mentor in mind. Mentors usually have many other commitments and there is usually a simple explanation when making initial contact appears difficult.

How much time am I willing to commit?

Negotiating appropriately about the time you intend to commit is a key requirement for mentoring success. Mentees should ensure they are clear and realistic about what they are seeking, and mentors need to be open about the time they can commit. Mentees should ensure they maximise the time available by preparing appropriately for all meetings with mentors and following up on agreed tasks. (e.g. monthly contact over twelve months - some contact face to face, some over the email/phone)

What is my role in progressing the mentoring relationship?

Mentees will need to be proactive in progressing the relationship in the direction of their goals, but considerate in their expectations of mentors. Mentors on the other hand should be sensitive, and where possible responsive to students' needs.

What if I want to cancel the mentoring agreement early?

That is fine and perfectly okay, it is voluntary! But there is a right way and a wrong way to do this.

The right way - *you would have initially discussed your mutual expectations for the Mentorship Program to ensure expectations were compatible; if they have changed or are no longer mutual, discuss it and negotiate. If you don't want to continue, thank the mentor for their time, for their efforts and agree to move on with smile on your face.*

The wrong way – *do not just ignore the mentors' calls or emails or miss scheduled meetings. Have the courage and take the initiative to send an email or call. Should mentoring end prior to the conclusion of the Program, ensure you are honest (i.e. be professional and demonstrate sensitivity) with your mentor about the reasons for this. (e.g. 'your study/work commitments may have changed and so you deciding to end the agreement early').*