

The Two-Way Street: How to Mentor Effectively and Get the Most out of Mentorship

Session Handout — Key Strategies for Mentors and Mentees — Julie Frew, MD & Heather Vestal, MD

FOR MENTORS

Build the Foundation

- Create psychological safety — make it safe to be vulnerable, ask for help, and not know.
- Anticipate anxiety and name it directly.
- Share your own setbacks and nonlinear path, not just successes.

Set Up for Success

- Clarify frequency, format, communication norms, and scope early. Mismatched expectations are a common cause of mentoring failure — a written or verbal “mentoring compact” helps.
- Offer a “menu” of topics you’re willing to discuss (career planning, scholarship, teaching, work–life integration, politics, promotion).
- Be responsive between meetings. Accessibility — technical and emotional — separates good mentoring from great mentoring.

Coach and Calibrate Growth

- Coach mentees to drive: schedule, set agendas, follow up, send updates. Tell them this is expected.
- Balance support and challenge (Daloz model) — the sweet spot is high support plus high challenge; too little of either leads to stagnation, apathy, or withdrawal.
- Give timely, specific, balanced feedback (affirming + corrective). Ask permission before offering unsolicited feedback.
- You don’t have to know everything — be honest about your limits and connect mentees to others who can help.
- Help build a diverse mentoring network (peer, near-peer, cross-department, varied expertise). One mentor can’t meet every need.

Navigate Differences and Sustain the Relationship

- Prepare for difficult conversations across identity, generation, or values — “undiscussables” left unaddressed erode trust silently.
- Sponsor, not just mentor: use your influence to nominate, recommend, and amplify. Especially critical for women and underrepresented faculty.
- Address impasses early, with curiosity rather than accusation.
- Re-calibrate as needs evolve (directive → collegial → peer). Frame endings as graduations, not breakups.

FOR MENTEES

Get Started

- Expect some uncertainty at the start — it’s normal. Be open about what’s hard, not just what’s going well.
- Discuss expectations early: meeting frequency, format, communication style, and scope.
- Ask what topics your mentor is comfortable helping with — don’t assume it’s off-limits.

Drive the Relationship

- Take ownership: schedule meetings, set agendas, follow up, and send brief updates between meetings.
- Come prepared with clear goals and specific questions.
- Build a network of mentors — peer, near-peer, cross-department, and sponsors — rather than relying on one relationship for everything.

Get the Most Out of It

- Invite honest feedback and stay open to it, even when it’s hard to hear.
- Raise concerns early and directly if something feels off in the relationship.
- Show follow-through — act on suggestions and report back on what happened.
- Remember: sponsorship (someone advocating for you when you’re not in the room) is different from mentorship (guidance) — seek both.

It’s a Two-Way Street: the mentor provides support, challenge, perspective, and connections; the mentee brings goals, questions, ownership, and follow-through.

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