

Mentoring FAQs

The following FAQs and answers were compiled from regional mentoring orientation sessions and workshops held earlier in the year. All questions and answers were generated by session attendees and participants in BC HRMA's Professional Mentoring Program.

How do I get “buy-in” from all levels of the organization (e.g. executives, participants, etc) when rolling out a mentoring program in an organization?

- Tie into bottom line through tangible facts & stats (e.g. retention, succession planning, cost savings, etc)
- Clearly outline benefits (e.g. enhancement of resume and skill set, etc)
- Plan a framework for the program (e.g. cost, alternatives and risk analysis, time commitment)
- Launch a test pilot

How do I manage time constraints, geographical challenges, age/culture barriers between partners in the relationship?

Time?

- Establish ground rules by communicating current time commitments and setting a schedule early in relationship
- Make the partnership a priority and do not cancel unless absolutely necessary
- Outline deliverables at beginning and structure objectives to make best use of time
- Plan meetings during already scheduled activities and debrief
- Be flexible and adjust schedules accordingly (e.g. coffee, breakfast, lunch, after work, etc)
- Maintain accountability
- Use all methods of communication (e.g. phone, email, in-person meetings)
- Mentor on effective time management skills

Geographical challenges?

- View the opportunity as a new challenge that is increasing in importance in the general business community
- Set clear expectations and set meeting schedule well in advance
- Work towards having at least two face-to-face meetings by:
 - o agreeing on a mutually convenient place to meet
 - o inviting your partner to the BCHRMA events that you will be attending e.g. conference, networking event, roundtable, etc.
 - o taking advantage of each other's regular activities e.g. attending a meeting together, etc.
- Use other methods of communication. For example:
 - o set regularly scheduled telephone meetings noting each other's time zones, call (or be ready for the call) exactly on time, create an agenda, take notes and date them, send a summary of agreements by email)

- commit yourself to making a few spontaneous calls to encourage your partner, recognize them for a recent achievement or follow up with a previously discussed issue
- use email and fax to touch base, send quick questions, send draft documents to critique but also to send random ideas, cartoons and inspirational articles, etc just to let your partner know you're thinking of them
- use regular mail to send appreciation/thank you cards or gifts
- experiment with on-line software

Cultural/language/age barriers?

- be open-minded and have patience
- recognize and respect the differences (e.g. welcome new perspectives, new ideas, etc)
- remember that it's a two-way learning street
- value the type of experience rather than the number of years experience
- identify the value each brings to the relationship

How do you manage lack of chemistry or personality conflicts?

- Allow participants to request a specific partner on the application form or provide participants with background information on their partner
- Provide training or support documents on communication skills
- Get to know your partner
- Don't write them off right away – give the relationship more than a few meetings
- Be up front and honest while being open and respectful
- See the situation as a challenge and invite a third party to mediate to learn about different styles of communication
- Contact the person responsible for the coordinating the program to discuss solutions (e.g. may have a waitlist of other participants that would be a better fit).
- If all else fails, give yourself a break. Matching mentors and mentees is very challenging and it may be that some mentor/mentee matches just do not work.

What do I do if my partner shares confidential matters or very personal issues with me?

- Early in relationship, discuss what confidentiality means to both parties and respect what you decide
- Share the parameters of the relationship with the mentee's supervisor
- Establish ground rules to help develop trust with one another
- If you believe that a professional is needed, you may suggest that your partner speak to a staff member in the BC HRMA Office who will refer them to an appropriate person for assistance. Also, be sure to tell your partner that the information discussed will not be shared with friends, family members, or colleagues.

What happens if the mentor's experience/knowledge does not provide for the mentee's goals?

- Begin the relationship by thinking positively
- Establish credibility
- Clarify expectations at beginning of relationship
- Be honest - talk it through and establish how much the mentor can offer in that direction
- Allow goals to change to find value in the relationship
- Assist the mentee to find other sources of info, network, etc.

What if your partner's employer lacks the support necessary to form the relationship?

- Educate/involve employer (e.g. share goals)
- Show value to decision maker (e.g. succession planning, retention, cost benefit to organization, etc)
- Clarify time commitment outside of work time and during work hours (e.g. trade in time)

How do you end the relationship?

- Discuss the end date at the beginning of the relationship
- Participate in the structured closure to the program (e.g. attending a wrap-up event)
- Celebrate the successes of the relationship at the end

How often should I meet with my partner?

- You can meet with your partner as often as you like, but it is important to meet at least once a month in order to maintain a valuable relationship. Some professionals have less discretionary time than others; therefore, their approach for staying in contact is by e-mail or telephone calls. Accessibility and maintaining contact is essential for the relationship of mentor-mentee.

How do we ensure "commitments" are kept?

- Set reasonable expectations at beginning
- Sign a partnership agreement contract
- Schedule in follow up sessions

How do you keep the momentum in the relationship?

- Set new goals and continuously challenge each other
- Accept mutually that you've accomplished all that's possible within the relationship and move on if necessary
- Contact your program coordinator to gain exposure for your successes

How and what are we going to talk about during our first meeting?

- You and your partner have been provided with information on how to find one another (e-mail, telephone, etc.) It doesn't matter who takes the first step. Remember, you and your partner have been matched on the basis of something you have in common. More than likely you will have similar interests. If, after the first few minutes of meeting with your mentee, you do not find much to discuss, you may want to tell him or her more about yourself (e.g. hobbies, organizations you volunteer for, etc.)

What do I tell my partner about myself?

- Your partner is probably very interested in your professional life. Share with him or her information about yourself and how you became interested in the profession or research, etc. You may share personal information at your discretion. Some people may wish to connect with you personally as a general point of reference.

What kinds of activities can I do with my partner?

- There are many possibilities but the activities will depend on both parties' availability. Most of us are very busy but try to schedule a fun activity (movie, symphony, art exhibit, BC HRMA event) from time to time. In terms of mentoring about the profession, it may be done by meeting a few times and the rest of the discussions held via e-mail. Undoubtedly, there are activities that you engage in regardless of whether you have a mentoring partner or not. This is a perfect opportunity to invite him or her to play volleyball, to attend a seminar, or go to a play, etc. In a recent survey, many mentees wrote favorably of meeting their mentors for lunch or dinner. Please remember that if you decide to invite your partner to an activity you are not expected to pay for him or her.

Are mentors responsible for academic assistance?

- Mentors are not responsible for providing academic assistance. If your mentee needs academic assistance, please call the BC HRMA Office and your mentee will be referred to the appropriate person for assistance.