



2010 Spring Issue



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On Being a Mentee

By Claire Bilodeau

If you have a mentor, someone who guides you and helps you succeed on a one-to-one basis, you are a mentee. While in school, a professor or an older student may serve as your mentor. At work, especially as you begin your career, a mentor may formally be assigned to you. What can you expect from a mentor? And, just as important, what is expected from you as a mentee? As with every relationship, for the mentoring relationship to be successful, both parties have to do their part. So, what can you expect from a mentor?

First and foremost, you can expect to learn from your mentor! When in school, your mentor may tell you about where to look for an internship or how to study for professional exams. When starting a new job, your mentor may tell you about company policies and help you when facing a difficult assignment. The most obvious payback of having a mentor is that you do not have to find everything out by yourself. You benefit from someone else's experience and advice.

But you can expect more from a mentor! A good mentor should be available. I am not talking 24/7 availability, mentors have other things to do! However, if they are to play their role, they need to be available on a regular basis so as to follow your progress and answer your questions. If in a formal mentoring relationship, it may be wise to discuss the time commitment right at the start so expectations are clear.

There is something more I feel you need from your mentor: genuine concern. There has to be a sense that your mentor cares about your success. There has to be some connection between your mentor and yourself which goes beyond the sheer transfer of knowledge, so you are comfortable asking questions. The mentor needs not become your friend, but there definitely should be mutual respect.

All right, but what is your contribution as a mentee?

If mentors are there to teach, it naturally seems to follow that mentees are there to learn! If you are not willing to take a mentor's advice, chances are the mentor will become reluctant to provide you with any. That advice may come in the form of new challenges or suggestions for improvement. The latter may be harder to accept and embrace, but they are part of learning and can be more precious than the former.

Not only should you be willing to learn from your mentor, you also should be appreciative of the time your mentor takes for you and the help he or she provides. Thanks may be virtually free but they are far from worthless! Sincere gratitude always is appreciated.

Above all, you should show respect for your mentor as an individual as well as his/her time and knowledge.

If both you and your mentor fulfill your obligations, the mentoring relationship will be beneficial. That does not mean it will be eternal! Just as parents endeavour to raise independent children, mentors truly succeed when mentees no longer need them. When that time comes, you may have lost a mentor... but you may have found a new friend. The time may come for you to look for a new mentor to take your next step... and to become a good mentor for someone else!