IMPROVE
DEVELOP
INSTRUCT
MOTIVATE
SUPPORT
INSPIRE

BEING A MENTOR – AN INTRODUCTION
Supporting Mentees on their Path

UNIVERSITÄT BONN

land-
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CONTENT

MENTORING IN SCIENCE

Mentoring programs in the science system are characterized by great benefit for all participants. They strengthen the interdisciplinary, cross-hierarchical networking of the participants as well as their integration into the scientific community.

The mentees benefit in particular from the strong empowerment provided by their mentors. At the same time, the mentoring process contributes to the development of the personality and sharpens the leadership and scientific profiles of the mentees. Mentoring gives mentees the chance to explore structures, processes, and informal rules of the game within and outside the science system.

Mentors expand their advisory and gender competence by assuming additional responsibility as a leader through their involvement in the personal development of young scientists. In addition, they gain insights into the living and working environments of upcoming generations as well as into specific fields of research.

M E N T O R

SUPPORT & EXCHANGE

M E N T E E

Role Model & Experience

Advisor & Counselor

Supporter & Contacts

Career Goals & Realization

Confidence & Self-Reflection

Openness & Esteem

PREREQUISITES OF A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

There are a number of prerequisites for a successful mentoring relationship all of which help both the mentor as well as their mentee to best fulfill their role. The mentor-mentee relationship is built upon these qualities and characteristics and should be lived practice by both sides:

Voluntariness
Mentee and mentor participate in the program voluntarily.

Independence
There is no direct relationship of dependency between mentee and mentor.

Personal Contact
The personal contact (face-to-face) of the tandems already at the beginning or during the mentoring process is important and can be supplemented by mail correspondence, telephone calls or video conferences.

Confidentiality
Mentoring discussions take place in a protected setting and are to be treated in strict confidence by the participants.

Commitment
The binding and reliable handling of appointments and agreements is an essential prerequisite for a successful mentoring relationship.

Expectations and Agreement
At the beginning of the mentoring, concrete expectations and agreements on the formal goal, rules for establishing contact and feedback have to be set.
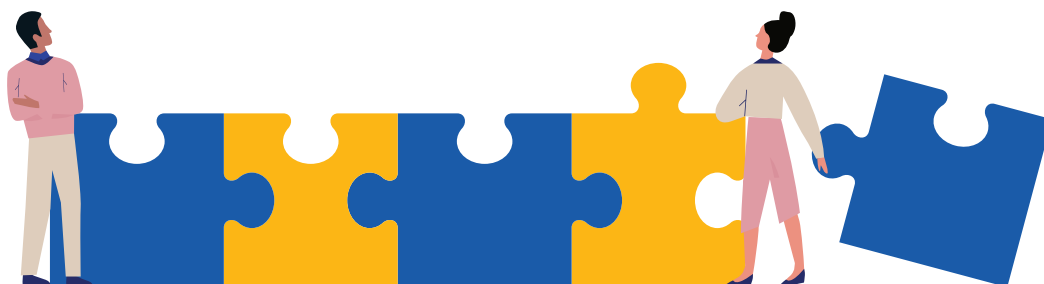
WHAT ARE THE CONCERNS OF MENTEES?

The motivation to participate in a mentoring program is diverse. Depending on the target group, the concerns of the mentees differ. While students often want to explore the possibility of a doctorate, PostDocs and junior research group leaders are more likely to have questions about specific aspects of their academic profile or leadership. Basically, though, it's mostly about career advancement. The following aspects are often in focus:

- Looking for a role model
- Expanding the network
- Questions about academic career
- (Independent) assessment of profile and next career steps
- Questions about compatibility of family and career
- Get to know and understand unwritten rules
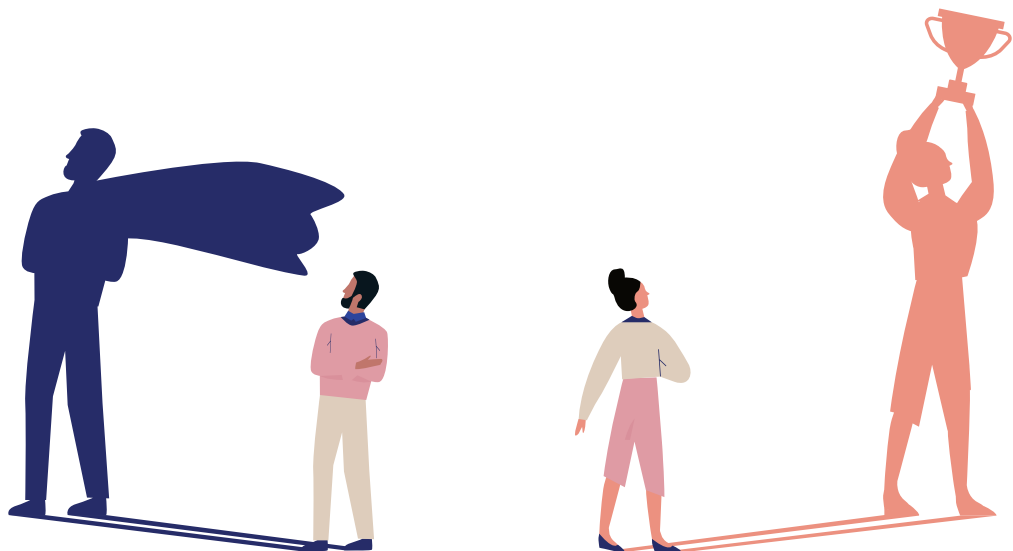
HOW CAN I SUPPORT?

You can offer support on very many levels and in many different ways within the mentoring relationship.

- Creating a space for reflection

- Being a role model ("How did I do it?")

- Offering an experienced perspective

- Sharing expertise, field and experiential knowledge

- Providing feedback on the career profile

- Providing feedback on behavior and competences

- Interpersonal support (encouragement and sympathies)

- Fostering actively through integration into the own network, enabling experiences or sharing information

DIRECTION

FEEDBACK

EXPERIENCE

COACHING

SUPPORT

PERSPECTIVE

MENTORING

KNOWLEDGE

MOTIVATION

TRAINING

EXPERTISE

ADVICE

METHODOLOGICAL HINTS

There are a number of traits you should foster in your mentor-mentee relationship, while there are others that you should avoid. It is important to define and perform your role for the benefit of both sides. Here are some things you might want to look out for:

What you **can** be:

- Personified treasure trove of experience
- Door opener
- Impulse generator
- Listener
- Confidee
- Encourager
- Coach

What you **should avoid** to be:

- Supervisor
- Parental advisor
- Rescuer
- Omniscient
- Taker of the whole responsibility
- Problem solver
- Guarantor of success

BASICS OF CONVERSATION MANAGEMENT

Open communication is the foundation of the relationship with your mentee. Some basics of conversation management might help you with fostering an open and supportive communication environment.

Create a Conductive Conversational Attitude

Openness

Acceptance

Honesty

Use Proven Conversation Techniques

Empathic listening (paraphrase to seek understanding, focus on speaker's emotions, avoid judging or criticizing)

Guided discovery (understanding the problem, supporting the mentee's self-check of own hypotheses, creating space for suitable solutions)

Questioning techniques (sharpening problem understanding, request solution attempts, foster solution visions)

Design the Initial Conversation

Initiation of a resilient mentoring relationship

Clarifying the expectations for both sides

Please, do not forget to give **feedback**. Giving feedback often is an intricate task that nonetheless should not be avoided. You are welcome to use the advice on giving feedback, that can be found in the *Appendix*.

APPENDIX

General Feedback

When giving feedback, always be attentive to "I-messages" but chose your words accordingly.

DON'T

"I feel exploited!"
=
This is an interpretation/implication from your side.

DO

"I spent a lot of time giving you feedback on your presentation. I would have liked feedback on how the talk went!"
=
This is factual feedback without any interpretation/implication.

Also, always be careful with the sandwich rule when using it to combine positive and critical feedback. Make sure to stay **authentic** throughout your conversation and **separate positive and critical feedback**.

DON'T

"Everything went well **but**..."
=
A "**but**" always weighs heavily.

DO

"There are some aspects that I noticed very positively. There are also some things that could be improved from my point of view. I'll start with the strengths..."
=
Positive and critical feedback are structurally separated.

Performance Feedback

A well formulated and **specific** statement is the basis for a good form of performance review. Furthermore, by including **action-oriented** statements in your feedback, you will help your mentor tackle possible problems.

"You need to be more visible." **SPECIFIC →** "In the colloquium, you didn't even come forward and ask a question. And following the colloquium, you immediately walked out of the room and looked at your cell phone."

"You are way too reserved."

ACTION-ORIENTED →

"To be visible and network within the community, you should always ask at least one question in the discussion at opportunities like lectures and stay in the room afterwards without looking at your phone."

Addressing Problems

Addressing problems is one of the more difficult tasks when giving feedback upon one's performance. Usually it helps to follow this very easy pattern in order to communicate problems in an adequate manner:

PERCEPTION – IMPACT – REASON – REQUEST

Perception (What happened?)

"We agreed, after going over your presentation together at the last meeting, that you would get back to me after the conference. You didn't do that. Besides, you've already rescheduled our next meeting twice now at short notice."

Impact (What impact does this have?)

"That irritates me. I got the impression that I can't rely on our agreements."

Reason (What does the mentee think about it?)

"Do you understand my irritation? What reasons do you see for your behavior?"

Request (What might be the solution?)

"How do we want to proceed in future concerning the schedule of appointments?"

The Guidelines are based on the explanations of:

Schain, C. & D. Kuchenbrandt (2023): Mentor*in sein-Eine Einführung (Video und Handout), http://www.schainundkuchenbrandt.com/en

For further information see:
Downs, L. J. (2008): Listening Skills Training. Vereinigtes Königreich: ASTD Press.

Jaeger, A & A. J. Dinin (eds.): The Postdoc Landscape, Academic Press, 2018, ISBN 9780128131695, https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-813169-5.00005-7.