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How to Be an Amazing Mentor: 12 Ways to Make a Positive Impact on Others



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How to Mentor

At its core, being a mentor is being a teacher. A mentor involves making yourself available to someone when they need it, delivering advice that makes sense to them, and always keeping their interests in mind.

Here are some amazing leadership lessons from HubSpot's founder, Dharmesh Shah.



This doesn't have to be someone at work, although it certainly could be. But mentors come in all shapes and sizes: It can be your manager, a colleague, a parent, a friend, a coach, a college professor ... anyone who's been a particularly excellent advisor at some point in your life.

Now, think of what made them stand out to you. Was it the example they set? That you felt like they really understood your communication style, your working style, or your goals? That they seemed to always point you to the right resources or give you the right advice when you needed it?

At some point in your life (and, if you're lucky, many times), you're going to find yourself playing the role of a mentor to someone, somewhere. It can be both exciting, and a little confusing. What exactly does it mean to be someone's mentor, and how can you really stand out in the role?

[Click here to download leadership lessons from HubSpot founder, Dharmesh Shah.](#)

Let's touch on what a mentor is, including the three main types of mentors: peer mentors, career mentors, and life mentors. Then, we'll go through 12 tips for being an amazing mentor.

What Does It Mean to Be a Mentor?

At its core, being a mentor is being a trusted advisor. It can mean a lot of different things, but it all boils down to making yourself available to support and advise someone when they need it, delivering that support in a way that makes sense to them, and always, always keeping that person's best interests in mind.

A mentor/mentee relationship can last for years, or it can last one coffee date. When you mentor someone long-term, you really get to know and understand their personality, learning style, and goals, which can set you up to offer richer, more relevant advice over time.

But mentorship doesn't have to be long-term. It can also be a one-off or short-term relationship like when someone needs help working through a specific problem --



In an article for *Harvard Business Review*, Venture Capitalist Anthony T. Khan wrote about three types of mentors. Let's explore each one below.

Peer Mentors

This one is more of an apprenticeship than a mentorship. Whether someone is onboarding in a new job or simply at the early stages of their career, they may benefit from having a peer mentor working at their same company to help them settle in to their new job and climb the learning curve faster. A peer mentor focuses on helping with specific skills, working toward specific goals, and basic organization practices for how to get things done.

Career Mentors

When most people think of mentorship, they're thinking about career mentorship. Career mentors are senior to their mentees at the same company or a former company. Their purpose is to serve as a career advisor and advocate, and to help reinforce how a mentee's job contributions fit into their long-term career goals, and perhaps even how they fit into the bigger picture of the company's goals.

Some companies have career mentorship programs built right into their people development strategy. This seems to work best when it's not a bureaucratic system, but instead more of a volunteer system where existing employees volunteer to mentor newer employees. "It should be something people know is embraced as part of the ethos of a firm," writes Khan.

Life Mentors

A life mentor is usually someone outside of their mentee's workplace. This person can serve as an objective sounding board when that person finds themselves faced with a difficult career challenge or is considering changing jobs. Khan writes that life mentors shouldn't replace a peer or career mentor, but "they are there to impart career wisdom."

Chances are, you'll be more than one of these types of mentors for multiple people, and you may have a few mentees at a time. There are a few pieces of advice that



hold true regardless of the type of mentorship you find yourself in. Here are 12 tips on how to be an amazing mentor.

12 Ways to Be an Amazing Mentor

1. Approach each mentorship differently.

While you can do your best to categorize a mentor/mentee relationship, every one is unique. When you first start out, it's important to take the time to assess your own style and readiness, and think about what kind of commitment you can and want to make.

[Rebecca Corliss](#), who leads team development and culture for HubSpot's marketing team, recommends asking yourself and reflecting on the questions on this list that are relevant to you:

What kind of [manager style](#) do you naturally have/want?

What expectations will you set in regards to your style and how best to work with you?

How will you know when your mentee is successful?

How will you communicate what success looks like to him/her?

What do you hope your mentee's development looks like over the course of your mentorship?

How can you segment out his/her experience into phases to get to that point?

How will you [use one-on-one time](#)?

How will you explain your expectations for one-on-one meetings (if applicable) so you're on the same page?

2. Set expectations together in the very beginning.

Once you've reflected on the questions from #1, both you *and* your mentee will find it helpful to sit down and go over expectations -- especially if you're just getting to know each other.



you that because they want to work for your company, or whether they're just curious about what a company in your industry is like. Understanding exactly where they're coming from is going to help drive your discussion in the direction that's helpful for both of you. If your company isn't hiring or you aren't comfortable helping them get a job, for instance, then you'll want to set those expectations early.

3. Take a genuine interest in your mentee as a person.

A mentor/mentee relationship is a very personal one. You can give mediocre advice without really knowing a person, but to stand out as an amazing mentor, you're really going to have to get to know your mentee on a personal level.

You probably have some of the more career-oriented questions down: what their working style is, their dream job, goals for their current job, and so on and so forth. But what about the stuff that makes them ... *them*? Getting to know your mentee on a deeper level will help you build a strong relationship, and it'll also help you understand who they are as a person, their likes and dislikes, how they interact with others, and so on.

So if your mentee tells you they had a great weekend, don't just move on with the program. Ask them what they did, whom they did it with, or what their relationship is like with those people.

One great way to get to know someone? **Become an active listener**. This is easier said than done: It means making a conscious effort to really, truly pay attention to what your mentee is saying, instead of thinking about what you're going to say next. You might worry that you need to come up with something helpful right away, when in fact, the best thing you can do for your mentee is to listen closely to what they're saying, ask open questions to dig deeper, and act as a sounding board.

Which brings me to my next tip ...

4. Know when to wait before giving advice.

When you're mentoring someone, you might feel pressured to give them advice straight away. But not all feedback is helpful feedback, and giving unhelpful -- or



knows how to determine whether or not a situation lends itself to off-the-cuff feedback or really thoughtful feedback.

Corliss calls this "hitting the pause button."

"A good mentor knows when to hit 'pause' during a conversation," she told me.

"Once in a while, a conversation might catch us off guard. For example, maybe someone raises an HR issue or a serious problem with an employee. Maybe someone says something that makes you mad or upset. If you don't have the right information, experience or emotional state to react to a scenario properly, hit 'pause.' That will give you a chance to get more information, talk to your resources, and come back with a clear and valuable response."

What might that look like in a real conversation? *"Thanks for sharing this with me. I'm going to take some time and give this some serious thought before we continue. It's important to me that I'm giving you the best possible solution. Why don't we continue talking about it [tomorrow/next week/next time we meet]? I'll book some time."*

5. Improve your emotional intelligence.

Being emotionally intelligent is a big part of being an amazing mentor. Any time you become a mentor for someone, you'll find yourself getting to know their unique personality, their wants and needs, the experiences that have shaped them, and how they deal with different situations.

The best mentors know how to unlock this information by asking the right questions, reading their mentee's body language, being open-minded, and even acknowledging and controlling their own emotions. ([Read this blog post for tips on becoming more emotionally intelligent.](#))

6. Don't assume anything about your mentee -- ask.

It's easy to fall into stereotypes or not see a situation from another person's perspective. But great mentors recognize that it's their responsibility to break through common assumptions by asking questions and digging deeper. This is



or if the two of you are just getting to know each other and they aren't sure how transparent to be.

For example, let's say you're mentoring someone who's having trouble getting through to their manager. Instead of launching into a story about a time you had communication issues with a manager of yours, spend time asking questions that draw out the important details of their problem. Ask your mentee detailed questions about their relationship with their manager. Don't assume you understand their working style simply based off of the conversations you've had with them, as they probably work and communicate differently with their manager than they do with you.

Only once you've gotten an honest background on a problem can you share helpful, relevant feedback -- without making decisions for your mentee. That's up to them.

7. Be really forthcoming about mistakes you've made.

Being open to sharing your own mistakes and failures is one of the best gifts a mentor can give. Not only is it helpful information for problem-solving purposes, but it also helps build trust, gives them permission to share their own mistakes, and strengthens the relationship overall.

"Junior people don't always feel comfortable owning up to a mistake or admitting that they're struggling in a certain area," says [Emma Brudner](#), who manages HubSpot's Sales Blog. "If you cop to your failures and struggles, you make it okay for them to chime in and help them share with you."

[Leslie Ye](#), who writes for HubSpot's Sales Blog, agrees. She suggests reflecting on the problems you faced and what has tripped you up at the same point in your career that your mentee is in. "Hearing how someone else approached a challenge is always helpful for someone going through it for the first time," she says. "Even if you don't solve problems the same way as your mentee, it's always useful to hear multiple perspectives."

8. Celebrate their achievements



Because people often look for or call upon a mentor to help them with tough situations, many mentorship conversations revolve around the negative stuff. When you take the time to highlight and even celebrate your mentee's successes and achievements, you're not just balancing out the mood of those conversations -- you're also building your mentee's confidence, reinforcing good behavior, and keeping them focused and motivated. Depending on the relationship, mentees might also be seeking approval from their mentors -- and acknowledging their success is a way to satisfy that psychological need for recognition.

How you go about celebrating their achievements is entirely up to you. For example, if you're a peer mentor helping onboard a new employee, you may choose to publicly acknowledge them either by sharing their success with their team or even just with their manager.

9. Give more than you ask for.

I believe in the principle of "what goes around, comes around." I like to think about my mentors who've gone out of their way to meet me for coffee, give me feedback on job choices, point me to resources, and so on. The best mentors I've had have selflessly offered their time and wisdom to me -- and I'm sure the best mentors *you've* had have done the same. Think about the impact they've had on your career, and offer the same to your mentees.

"Give more than you ask for," is how Ye puts it. "Most mentees inherently have less to offer because they're typically younger and less experienced. It can be hard to ask for help if you feel like you're a burden on someone else. Giving advice or help freely -- and making it clear you're happy to do so -- is a huge help to easing those anxieties."

10. Seek out classes or projects related to skills your mentee wants to develop.

Great mentors look for situations -- and some even create situations -- where their mentees can get involved to learn some of the skills they've been hoping to learn. It doesn't matter how much or how little experience you have in your mentee's current



It can be anything from connecting them with someone with experience in their dream job or industry, or sending them a website to a conference or class they might want to sign up for. Take note of the areas in which your mentee wants to grow, and always be looking for opportunities to point them in the right direction.

If you work at the same company as your mentee and have some involvement in their experience, Corliss suggests introducing new projects to them over time as a way to build a strong foundation.

"First, start with something that gives context," she says. "This could be something that requires research and is genuinely valuable. Then, hand off something small that you normally do for your intern or mentee to own, like a weekly email, or a blog post. This will help your mentee learn how to develop ownership over something, including how to execute and reach a goal on his or her own. Then, build upon that foundation."

11. Solve for the long-term.

Work with your mentee as if you'll be their mentor forever. That mindset will make it easier for you to give them long-term guidance, which will help them make decisions that outlive their time with you.

This is particularly important if you work at the same company as your mentee because it'll help them make a larger impact at your company. "Giving [them] a lot of ownership may leave a gap when they leave, but why limit the impact your intern can have in order to solve for an easier transition out?" says Corliss. "It's better to have loved and lost, than to have never have loved at all. "

12. Lead by example.

Last, but *certainly* not least, be a positive role model. Your mentee can learn a whole lot from you by simply observing how you behave. They'll pick up information about your "ethics, values, and standards; style, beliefs, and attitudes; methods and procedures," [writes E. Wayne Hart for Forbes](#). "They are likely to follow your lead, adapt your approach to their own style, and build confidence through their affiliation with you. As a mentor, you need to be keenly aware of your own



At the end of the day, being a great mentor takes practice and patience. The more you work with a given mentee, the more you'll learn a lot about them: their communication style, how they process feedback, how they go about pursuing their goals. At the same time, you'll **learn a lot about yourself**: how effectively you can explain ideas in a way others can understand, how well you're able to control your emotions, whether you're able to provide a vision that motivates others, and so on.

In the end, being a mentor will likely be as rewarding an experience for you as it will be for your mentees.

What tips do you have for being a great mentor? Share them with us in the comments.



The image is a promotional banner for a free ebook. On the left, there is a graphic of the ebook cover titled 'How to Be a Leader: Lessons from HubSpot's Founder' by Dharmesh Shah. The cover features a geometric design with orange and teal squares. Below the cover is a white button with the text 'DOWNLOAD NOW' and a right-pointing arrow. To the right of the cover, the text 'FREE EBOOK' is displayed in large, bold, orange letters. Below this, the title 'HOW TO BE A LEADER: LESSONS FROM HUBSPOT'S FOUNDER' is written in white, bold, uppercase letters. At the bottom right, a smaller line of text reads: 'Get actionable leadership advice and helpful guidelines from HubSpot founder Dharmesh Shah.'

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