Ending the Mentoring Relationship

All relationships change over time, and mentoring relationships are no exceptions to this rule. When you first begin a mentoring relationship as mentee, you probably had a great desire to make progress in a certain aspect of your career or life. As a mentor, you may have had the motivation, time and energy to give to helping another person in your field. Over time, however, your needs, availability and priorities change. While many mentoring relationships will last six months, changes are natural and inevitable. With a little foresight, you can handle the situation gracefully.

For Mentors:
If you are a mentor who would like to end the mentoring relationship for any reason, please alert your mentee as soon as you are certain that this change is on the horizon for you. Your mentee will appreciate knowing that you can only offer a few more mentoring conversations. With this advance notice, the mentee will be able to use these last sessions strategically and can also begin to seek another mentor if needed.

We encourage you to be straightforward and clear when you communicate about the end of your commitment as a mentor. While you may regret ending the mentoring and have the urge to offer to continue informally, it is best to be honest about what you can realistically provide. For example, rather than stating, “Call me anytime,” you might simply say, “I wish you well. Please keep me posted about your progress with an occasional email.”

As you conclude your support as a mentor, your mentee will appreciate if you reflect back on progress and changes since the beginning of the conversation. By noticing and drawing attention to the mentee’s progress, you will provide encouragement that is likely to motivate more growth and action on the part of the mentee. Acknowledge challenges and obstacles that the mentee faced during your time together. Your recognition of the mentee’s efforts will help the mentee to see his or her efficacy and capability in a new light.

Many people find it helpful to end a mentoring relationship with a sense of purpose and direction for the future. We encourage you to use the last session to focus on future goals and the support systems that the mentee will put in place to support continued development.
In summary, you can conclude your responsibilities as a mentor in a positive and productive manner by:
- Giving as much advance notice as possible.
- Being clear about how you would like to relationship to work after the formal mentoring is completed.
- Acknowledging specific areas of progress and growth that you have observed in the mentee during the mentoring period.
- Giving verbal recognition of challenges that your mentee has faced and/or overcome.
- Helping your mentee set goals for the future.
- Asking your mentee to identify the support system and resources that will support achievement of those goals in the future.
- Encouraging your mentee to continue on the journey of his life as a lifelong learner.
For Mentees:
If you are a mentee who would like to conclude your mentoring relationship, you may feel awkward about telling your mentor. We find that many people feel confusion about how to express gratitude for a mentor’s voluntary commitment and also to let the mentor know that the mentoring conversations are no longer needed. The good news is that most mentors are seasoned managers who understand the ebbs and flows of professional life. Often, the mentor may sense the diminished need for the mentoring conversations or feel that the conversation has grown stale over time. By communicating that you would like a change, you are freeing up yourself and your mentor from a commitment that may have served its purpose. Remember that ending the formal mentor relationship may not mean ending the relationship. Many mentors and mentees continue to stay in touch informally and support each other in a variety of ways over time.

A best practice for communicating with your mentor about ending the formal mentoring is to tell the mentor in person. Plan to spend five to ten minutes at the end of your next session talking about it. While every person’s situation is unique and requires individual explanation, here is a straightforward approach that may help you plan this conversation:
• Begin with a simple, clear statement about how you see your career and the mentor relationship at this time. Explain how your situation may have changed. Express gratitude to the mentor for his or her time and contribution to your progress. For example, “I’ve come a long way during the past several months. At this point, I realize that I need some time to focus on the areas that we’ve talked about. I am grateful for your guidance and support. I feel that we’ve accomplished what I needed at this time, and, rather than take more of your time and focus, I’d like to suggest that we conclude our mentoring relationship at our next session.”
• Let your mentor know how the mentorship has benefited you. “Thanks to you, I have a much better understanding of how to navigate in a large association. You’ve helped me interpret and apply the feedback that I got from my boss. I really appreciate your insights and support.”
• Ask for the relationship to continue informally if you would like to maintain the relationship. “Would you be willing to hear from me now and then in the future?”
• Offer your support to the mentor. “I would love to support you in some way in the future. Please don’t hesitate to contact me if I can ever be of assistance.”
• Suggest a focus for the final session. You might like to celebrate all that has been accomplished and have a more informal session. You could also ask for help in identifying “next steps” for your career.
• Write a personal thank you note and mail it to your mentor within two days after your last session.

Perhaps the most important advice for ending a mentoring relationship is to handle the situation in a forthright way rather than avoiding it. If you manage yourself with integrity and respect for the other person, the communication will go well. After all, it is natural for the relationship to evolve for both of you. By allowing for the relationship to come to closure, you are respecting each other’s time and potentially freeing yourselves for other kinds of development and mentoring.

For more information regarding mentoring, visit www.infocomm.org/mentor
**this resource is courtesy of ASAE**