



5 Ways People Stuff Up Mentoring and How To Make Sure You Don't!

By Ann Rolfe

Mentoring is critical to career success and satisfaction and it offers significant benefits to both mentors and mentorees but mentoring is not always effective.

When a mentoring relationship fails it leaves people disappointed. They can blame themselves, their mentoring partner, the mentoring program or the organization.

It is a promise unfulfilled and can leave a lasting, poor opinion of mentoring and close people to new opportunities in the future.

Recent research in an academic setting identified 5 characteristics of failed mentoring relationships. The good news is they also revealed 5 characteristics of successful mentoring! I've listed them in the table below.

Features of Failure	Secrets of Success
Poor Communication	Reciprocity
Lack of Commitment	Mutual Respect
Personality Differences	Clear Expectations
Perceived/Real Competition	Personal Connection
Mentor's Lack of Experience	Shared Values

Based on Straus, S., Johnson, M., Marquez, C., and Feldman, M. (2013) *Characteristics of Successful and Failed Mentoring Relationships* Acad Med January 2013; 88(1): 82-89

No one *wants* to fail. To set yourself up for success from the start, I recommend these 5 steps.



#1 Build Rapport

Make your early meetings as relaxed as possible, perhaps over coffee. Spend some time getting to know each other. Look for what you have in common in your personal as well as professional background including interests, hobbies or sport. Finding common ground makes it easier to build rapport, you feel like you're on the same wavelength. It is the basis of a harmonious relationship. Building Rapport develops mutual respect, personal connection and identifies your shared values.

#2 Discuss Expectations

Share and clarify what you each want from the mentoring relationship. This is a very important step. An initial conversation can include:

- Your purpose and goals – why are you each engaging in mentoring?
- Scope and boundary of the relationship – what will and won't be on the agenda?
- Roles and Responsibilities – who does what?
- Logistics - practical aspects, how often, where and when you want to connect?

Discussing Expectations helps deal with failure factors such as poor communication and lack of commitment and clarifies expectations .

#3 Create an Agreement

The beginning is the best time to negotiate the ways you will respect each other's time, needs and differences. It's good to agree on:

- Ground rules or guidelines.
- Etiquette - do's and don'ts
- Ethics - code of conduct

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An **agreement** deals with most, if not all of the features of failure, demonstrates respect and makes explicit expectations

#4 Understand mentoring is 2-way

Mentoring is a partnership that benefits both mentors and mentorees. Each will develop and grow. It also helps to recognize that mentors are not expected to have all the answers. They will listen and ask as much (or more) than they show and tell.

Seeing mentoring as 2-way builds the reciprocity. It can also overcome a mentor's lack of experience.

#5 Schedule a Review

After a few meetings have a conversation about:

- What you've achieved
- What's working well
- What you'd prefer to do differently

A review allows you to: Confirm your commitment to continue mentoring; seek additional support, guidance or resources; or, agree to exit the relationship without fault or failure.

Taking these 5 simple steps at the start is the best way to ensure your mentoring works.

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