Mentorship Best Practices

This resource guide is meant to provide information and links to additional resources to:

- Help mentors build their relationship with their mentees;
- Provide practical tips and guidance on inclusive workplace best practices; and disability etiquette throughout the employment lifecycle, from the application process through to the job offer stage.

If you have any questions or need more resources, please contact Teresa Danso-Danquah or Lynn Simonye.

Are you IN? Learn more about getting your company involved with the NextGen Leaders Initiatives and submit an application to become a Mentor by contacting Mackenzie Ward.

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Mentoring Plan & Suggested Activities

Mentees should be asked to prioritize a list of career development mentoring activities in order of importance, in an effort to outline the mentoring plan. Mentors and mentees can use this prioritized list as a checklist of activities they can complete together. These activities should be included in their Mentoring Plan, along with a timeline of when these should be completed. Mentors and mentees should feel free to add other activities that they determine as beneficial.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Resume review/critique
- Mock interview/informational interview
- Worksite Visits & Job Shadowing
- Learn about job opportunities in the field of study or area of interest.
- Develop a long-term career goal and identify steps toward accomplishing it.
- Obtain links to other professionals for networking purposes.
- Practice disclosing a disability and communicating disability-related work support and accommodation needs.
- Assistance in reviewing potential college courses and making recommendations for course selection.
- Receive coaching to support successful work performance during summer employment, internship, and/or upon attainment of full or part time employment.
- Obtain a list of opportunities or resources for:
  - Conferences, workshops, seminars, and courses
  - Professional memberships and peer groups
  - Leadership opportunities
  - Books, articles, reports, and submissions
  - Websites
  - Listservs
  - Develop or refine social media presence (i.e., LinkedIn, etc.).
  - Develop and/or increase confidence in marketing oneself to future employers

INDIVIDUAL MENTORING PLAN

The Individual Mentoring Plan should be a “living document” and include:
• Goals to be accomplished
  • Activities that the mentor and mentee agree to work on together
  • Action plan and status report

Mentoring Tips for Mentors

**DO:**

• Get to know your mentee. Try to really understand how things are for him or her now.
• Be positive, patient, dependable, honest and sincere.
• Be consistent, but flexible.
• Encourage, praise and compliment.
• Be an active listener.
• Give concrete explanations.
• Be fair, straight, honest and sincere.
• Ask for opinions and participation in decision-making.
• Share your knowledge rather than giving advice.
• Be enthusiastic – it’s contagious.
• Stress the positive.
• Be firm. Have your mentee assume responsibilities and hold him or her accountable.
• Help your mentee use mistakes as learning experiences.
• Tell your mentee about yourself, especially what you remember from your college years and your first job.
• Help them identify the significance of their own lives in the information you are discussing (e.g., possible future profession, similar experiences, etc.) – tell them how they can use the information.
• Have activities planned in advance. Work with your mentee to define the agenda for your mentoring calls/meetings. Utilize his or her priority list of career mentoring activities to plan your time.
• Be open to what your mentee can teach you or share with you.
• Honor your commitment.
• Have fun!
DON’T:

- Expect to have an instant rapport with your mentee.
- Lecture, moralize, or preach.
- Tell them what to do (instead, you should suggest, invite, encourage).
- Share personal problems unless it is to explain your current disposition (e.g., tired or irritable).
- Make promises you can’t keep.
- Be afraid to admit that you do not know an answer or that you have made a mistake. Instead, find the correct answer and learn together. It helps the mentee to see that you are learning too.
- Interpret a lack of enthusiasm as a personal rejection or reaction to you.
- Violate confidences, with the single exception of crisis intervention situations.

Tips for Mentoring a Student Intern Who Has a Disability

Although the NextGen Leaders Program is a career development program for students and recent graduates with disabilities, we found the below excerpt from Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) provides some excellent tips for mentoring a student who has a disability, whether or not this is a student intern.

Ask Your Mentee What Support He or She Wants from You

The beginning of any mentoring relationship involves identifying and agreeing upon the goals and outcomes to be attained. While you may have your own ideas about what sort of help or support you can provide, ask your mentee what his or her expectations are. This may include professional guidance or assistance navigating the workplace or profession; help meeting and networking with other professionals in the office or field; and input on how to address challenging situations at work. Your mentee may also simply want someone to listen and provide encouragement as she or he experiences successes and challenges. Ask your mentee about how you can be helpful each time you communicate and proceed accordingly.
Create a Mentoring Plan

Once you know what your mentee wants, develop a plan for how you will provide the desired support and assistance through the mentoring relationship. A mentoring plan is a written document that clearly defines the mentoring goals and objectives agreed upon by the mentor and mentee. The plan also outlines action steps the mentor and mentee agree to take to achieve the goals and objectives. Creating a plan clarifies expectations and responsibilities for both individuals and provides a tool for tracking the progress and outcomes of the relationship.

Agree Upon How and When to Communicate

Mentoring is most effective when mentors and mentees meet or talk regularly and maintain consistent contact. Ask your mentee when and how he or she prefers to communicate or meet. Also, let your mentee know when you are most available and the best way to contact you. You may decide together that meeting in person each week at a set time and location works best or you may agree to have a flexible meeting schedule. In addition to regular meetings or conversations, let your mentee know how they can reach you in the case that an urgent situation arises such as an unexpected problem in the workplace. Make certain you are providing any communication or meeting related accommodation requests for your mentee.

Treat Your Mentee the Same As You Would Any Student Intern

A student intern who has a disability is just like other qualified interns who do not have disabilities. Your mentee has many skills and talents to contribute to the workplace. He or she has a desire to learn and grow through the internship experience and wants to succeed and advance in the world of work. Treat your mentee just like anyone else you may mentor. Have high expectations for what mentees have to offer and an appreciation for individuality.

Don’t Make Assumptions – Simply Ask

Don’t assume anything about your mentee or make judgments based on what you see or what you hear from others. Your mentee knows himself or herself better than anyone else, so start getting to know your mentee by asking questions you might ask any student intern such as: “What are your career goals? What are your strengths? What skills or knowledge do you want to learn or improve? What do you hope to gain through the internship?” Mentees may or may not choose to directly talk about their
disability and this should be respected. However, if disclosure may be important to the success of the internship, you could approach this subject by asking for permission to discuss the disability and explain the advantages of doing so. If your mentee prefers not to engage in such discussion, do not insist. If he or she agrees, keep your questions focused on what’s relevant to the internship experience such as “Is there anything we can do to make the internship experience better for you?”

**Establish Trust through Active Listening**

The success of any mentoring relationship hinges on establishing trust. Being a good listener is an important strategy for building trust with your mentee. The more you ask questions and actively listen to what your mentee shares about him or herself and the internship experience, the more you will learn about who your mentee is and what support he or she wants from you as a mentor. While you bring a lot of professional and personal experience to the relationship, avoid the temptation of focusing on yourself. Share your experience and knowledge as it relates to the mentee’s interests and goals and respond to specific questions posed about career and professional achievements. Make mutual sharing and learning an objective of every interaction while keeping the focus on what the mentee wants to discuss. Be careful not to tell your mentee what to do but rather help them think through options so they may come to an appropriate conclusion.

**Introduce Your Mentee to Other Professionals with and without Disabilities**

As someone who already has a network of professional connections, you can play an important role in your mentee’s growth by introducing him or her to other professionals. If your mentee has a disability, they could benefit from meeting professionals both with and without disabilities. Meeting a diverse network of individuals will help your mentee start to develop contacts and gain multiple perspectives on the world of work and profession of interest.

**Disclaimer**

*The Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) is a free resource that helps employers tap the benefits of disability diversity. EARN is funded by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) under a cooperative agreement with Cornell University. [www.AskEarn.org](http://www.AskEarn.org); [askearn@cornell.edu](mailto:askearn@cornell.edu)*
Additional Resources

MENTORING & ACCESS TO ROLE MODELS

Electronic Mentoring Programs for Students with Disabilities: This is a list of electronic mentoring programs that connect youth with disabilities to peers and mentors via the Internet.

Our Ability: This website that enables young people to view, listen to, read, and interact with successful people with disabilities in the education and business world.

National Disability Mentoring Coalition (NDMC): NDMC’s mission is to increase the awareness, quality, and impact of mentoring for individuals with disabilities across the nation.

DISABILITY ETIQUETTE

General Tips, Do’s and Don’ts & other Fact Sheets for Communicating with People with Disabilities from the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability.

Accommodation and Compliance: Disability Etiquette: Etiquette strategies for employers wanting to successfully integrate people with disabilities into their organizations.

Job Accommodation Network (JAN), a Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy funded service, provides free, confidential technical assistance about job accommodations and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Working toward practical solutions that benefit both employer and employee, JAN helps people with disabilities enhance their employability and shows employers how to capitalize on the value and talent that people with disabilities add to the workplace.

Disability Etiquette, Tips for Interacting with People with Disabilities: United Spinal Association is a national 501(c)(3) disability rights and veterans service organization founded in 1946 that provides active-lifestyle information, peer support, and
advocacy that empowers people with spinal cord injuries and disorders to achieve their highest potential in all facets of life.

The ADA National Network, funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR), provides information, guidance, and training on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), tailored to meet the needs of business, government and individuals at local, regional and national levels.

Disability Sensitivity Training Video: This video was created by the DC Office of Disability Rights.

Disclosure: At School, At Work, In Social Situations: In these series of videos, youth with disabilities discuss how the decisions to disclose their disabilities have affected them at school, at work, and in social situations. This video is a companion to the publication, The 411 on Disability Disclosure: A Workbook for Youth with Disabilities.