



# The FORMULA Project Mentor's Guide

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## Table of Contents

1. Introduction to Mentoring .....	4
2. The Benefits of mentoring .....	5
2.1. Develop your leadership skills and advancement.....	5
2.2 Improve your communication skills and ability to listen .....	6
2.3 Learn new perspectives.....	6
2.4 Gain personal satisfaction and compassion.....	6
3. What does being a mentor involve? .....	6
3.1 Should mentor be the mentee's friend?.....	7
3.2 Should the mentor be an advisor, a teacher or a coach? .....	7
3.3 Should the mentor be a psychologist or a therapist? .....	8
4. Good relationships .....	9
4.1 Be a positive role model (but still interact as equals) .....	12
4.2 Do activities together .....	13
5. Important factors to create good relationships.....	14
5.1 Expectations .....	14
5.2 Motivation and attitude .....	14
5.3 Trust and confidence.....	15
6. Your Sessions.....	15
6.1 The subsequent sessions.....	17
6.2 Before the last session .....	18
6.3 Conclusion .....	18
7. Possible Pitfalls .....	19
8. Practical advice.....	20
8.1 Questions that may be helpful to ask yourself as a mentor .....	20
9. Reading List .....	21

## Welcome to FORMULA

**Congratulations! You** have been selected for an honorary duty which will be a unique opportunity to develop.

Your experiences as an adult learner and a positive role model are very valuable - you can serve as a supportive person and promote learning. You can help your mentee to develop and access her/his rights by taking her or his view; showing respect and treating the mentee with dignity. Mentoring is also a powerful tool to support and encourage a person to realise her/his own potential and develop. It is also an opportunity to see how life experience can be transformed into guidance and knowledge for others.

You will not only get to know someone that you would otherwise not have met, but may also learn something about yourself. If you are open and sensitive, you will find genuine opportunities for reflection and learning. So, take the opportunity and let your mentoring challenge you a little to be able to learn something new. Try to be constantly investigating and examining your own actions, reactions, prejudices and thought processes throughout your mental journey as a mentor. Let this experience be a means with which to access a more objective view of yourself, broaden your horizons and embrace new ideas.

My experiences of mentoring have convinced me that mentoring has a positive impact and can support mentees in their development. But it is also a trip into the unknown.

The aim of this Mentor's Guide is to prepare you for this trip. By reading, thinking and reflecting, you can prepare yourself mentally for your undertaking.

I wish you good luck on your journey!

*Carina Sild Lönroth*

Malmo University





## 1. Introduction to Mentoring

Mentoring is widespread across the commercial, education and not-for-profit sectors as a developmental, supportive activity. It is also used in business areas where the partnership between two people helps newcomers to integrate into the organisation. Mentoring most often works on a one-to-one basis and is normally organised in a set pattern which helps regulate the mentor/mentee relationship, usually called the “matching process”.

In the FORMULA project, a survey of adult learners was carried out to determine both how they felt about mentoring and what they perceived as barriers to a return to learning and whether having a mentor would help them – and that is where you come in. The results from this demonstrated that the majority of participants in the survey would like to have a mentor to help them in their decisions on further education and that the barriers perceived to be greatest to participation in the learning process are financial problems, lack of time and low, or no, qualifications.

A report on the outcomes of the questionnaire is available on the project website [www.formulamentoring.eu](http://www.formulamentoring.eu), together with this Mentor’s Guide, the Facilitator Handbook and lots of other useful information. To support you further, we have an Adult Volunteers Network available on Facebook, [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)

This Guide was developed for use in the FORMULA Project and adapted following the pilot training sessions in all five partner countries using comments and additions from the Mentors’ evaluations.

The **purpose** of this guide is to describe what being a mentor can mean and to provide you, the mentor, with some practical advice on how to become a mentor.

Some of our mentors who completed the programme gave us comments about their experience. We hope that you will find these as helpful and as inspirational as we did:

“The experience as a mentor helped me to become more self-confident, more sociable and to think positively”

“Personally for me being a mentor is an extension of who I am. I like to help and support people when I can. This gives me the opportunity to do so in an informal way.”

“...everyone should be a mentor at least one time in their life”

## 2. The Benefits of mentoring<sup>1</sup>



As a mentor, you will have many opportunities to develop your own personal skills as well your role performance. This need not require a huge time commitment. Mentoring can give you a feeling of happiness, of forward wisdom and experience, and satisfaction in helping the mentee to succeed. It can also enrich your own life on both a personal and professional level. Mentoring can give you the opportunity to reflect on your own experience from a new perspective.

### 2.1. Develop your leadership skills and advancement

Mentoring experience is more and more important to advancement in today's labour market business world.

When you motivate and encourage your mentee, it also strengthens your own leadership skills and job performance which will help you to become a better employee or team member: skills you also need if you want to advance in your working career.

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<sup>1</sup> The term “mentor” originates from Homer's almost 3,000-year-old poem “The Odyssey” where Odysseus entrusts the upbringing of his son, Telemachus, to his friend named Mentor- but it was not Mentor who guided Telemachus, it was, in fact Athena, goddess of war and wisdom, disguised as Mentor.

## 2.2 Improve your communication skills and ability to listen

Your mentee might come from a different background than you and not "speak the same language" which may lead you to develop your own way of communicating more effectively but it can also strengthen your ability to listen.

## 2.3 Learn new perspectives

As a mentor you will meet someone you otherwise would not meet and learn something about yourself too. The insight might give you a better understanding of people's different lives and living conditions, broaden your own perspective and learn new ways of thinking and acting. These new perspectives can help you in your work life as well as in your personal life.

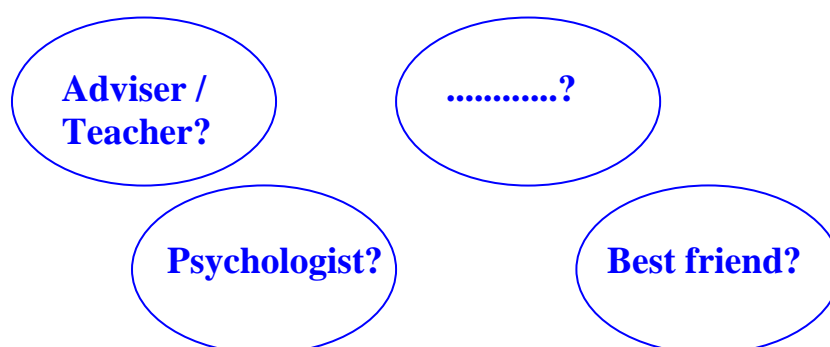
## 2.4 Gain personal satisfaction and compassion

It is a reward in itself to see your own experiences transformed into knowledge and to contribute to someone's growth and development. Research has found that compassion even makes you happy! In mentoring you swiftly move from the "me, myself and I" perspective when you do something for someone else and it makes you wiser too. One reason is that happiness is rather in what way we can give not in material gifts, but gifts of time and a gift of ourselves.

## 3. What does being a mentor involve?



Is it to be a coach, an adviser, best friend, psychologist or therapist?



No, none of these - but be humanitarian.

A mentor is a role model who should offer him/herself, his/her knowledge and his/her experiences as a discussion partner and a sounding board to widen the mentee's thinking.

Above all, you must listen - show that you care and make the effort to try to understand what your mentee says and does, and what meaning it has for her/him.

You should make the mentee feel comfortable in your company and encourage them to express their views, but always do so in a respectful manner.

Ensure that your mentee is consistently involved in the decisions you make.

### 3.1 Should the mentor be the mentee's friend?

No, but mentoring has some similarities with friendship - sharing, listening, perhaps doing activities together, but in mentoring it is **you** who should take responsibility for your relationship. It is **you** who will strengthen the mentee through active listening and guidance, using your position of trust to enthuse and inspire. It is **you** who should be a positive role model and be available as a sounding board, supporter and guide.

But there is an important difference between a mentor and a friend - mentorship lasts for a limited time and it has clear limits and an end. Mentoring is not a life-long mission.

If you are becoming too close to one another, in the manner of best friends, this can compromise the mentor's role, hindering your ability to ask critical and challenging questions, and making it harder for you to end the relationship. So stick to the boundaries of your mentoring role. You should not be the mentee's best friend, but someone they respect, seek acceptance from and aim to identify with.

### 3.2 Should the mentor be an advisor, a teacher or a coach?

Mentoring is sometimes comparable to the role of the teacher - you'll share your own experience and knowledge, inspiring, supporting and occasionally



providing guidance. But a teacher has a whole group of students to be evaluated. This will not be required of you. A mentorship is both an instructive and a supportive relationship.

You should therefore not go into a teaching role - but converse and be an equal partner in exchanges. Mentoring is like a scale that you are constantly learning to balance.

Mentoring is often more informal than coaching and focuses on career and personal development where coaching often focuses on development issues at work.

### 3.3 Should the mentor be a psychologist or a therapist?

No, as you probably have no training as a therapist you should not adopt that role. Certainly there are some similarities; neither position should judge, criticise or preach, although a mentor can sometimes achieve the same results as a therapeutic relationship: deep empathy and authenticity.

As you can see some of the requirements of mentoring overlap with some of the duties associated with different roles, so it might be easier to focus on what it means to be a mentor. That is to:

- Establish a good relationship with a personal bond, by listening, supporting and encouraging your mentee.
- be generous; share your inner thoughts and knowledge.
- be a positive role model, but still be an equal during any interaction.
- be someone your mentee wants to identify with.
- perhaps do activities together.



## 4. Good relationships



A relationship is always a process.

Research shows that mentors who are most successful in a relationship view their role as supportive; they want to help their mentee to grow and develop, and expect no recognition or thanks for their efforts.

First and foremost, you must get to know each other in order to create a good and equal relationship. In your relationship, it is the mentee who should occupy the principal role and is subject to your guidance – not vice-versa! Your task as a mentor is to listen, encourage and guide (in the light of your own knowledge and experience).

Try to pay attention to your mentee, not only with empathy – but also with understanding. Listen actively and try to understand the mentee's point of view regarding their situation and what it means to them. In what terms do they view and understand the narrative of their own life?

Your attitude is very important. To understand your mentee, you must be curious and try to discover how your mentee thinks and views the world. Respect how the mentee perceives the world around her/him and don't jump to conclusions or oversimplify their vision. This is especially important if the mentee has a different background or values that differ from your own. Remember that values are never absolute truths, they are just values!

Sometimes it can actually be useful and challenging to try to see oneself from the mentee's point of view, seeing with their eyes and daring to question one's own values and standards.

Too often we attribute to cultural differences greater significance than they really have. Think instead of the conclusions you might make based on their own situations. Would you, for example, reach the same conclusion about your

mentee if they had the same ethnic, social or cultural background as yourself or if the mentee was male or female?

It is understanding your mentee's way of thinking and their logic that should enable you to relate to them – you should not rely on your own way of thinking for drawing any conclusions.

It is only when you try to understand your mentee's way of thinking, to think in their terms and draw conclusions accordingly, that you will be able to challenge yourself.

***Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves.***



Carl Jung

However, you are not necessarily required to agree that what your mentee thinks or does is right - but always respect their opinions, choices and actions.

A good mentor can say, "I do not always understand the choices you make, but I respect you for the decisions you make and that you think they are important".

Try to demonstrate a positive reaction to the efforts and progress that your mentee makes, no matter how small they are. It can strengthen your mentee's self-esteem.

A competent mentor sees opportunities, finds solutions and tackles difficulties.

Think about the positive traits that your mentee displays and what strengths you think she/he can be proud of and acknowledge them. What potential for development do you see and how you can help your mentee to get the best from their qualities?

*Kind words can be short and easy to speak,  
but their echoes are truly endless*



**Mother Theresa**

Dialogue is the bridge between people. As a mentor, you should be mentally present and give the mentee undivided attention. This will provide you with an opportunity to practise your listening skills.

Being curious about your mentee may enable a dialogue. You have no prior knowledge of each other, may not look at the world in the same way but by sharing your thoughts and hearing one another's points of view; you can both enhance your image of the world and yourselves.

It is always the mentee's concerns and questions that should be the focus, but your task is to encourage investigation and ask questions when something is unclear, as well to put subjects into words and challenge the mentee.

It does not matter if there are lulls in conversation or it gets quiet at times. To think quietly allows space for uninterrupted contemplation without distraction, and can contribute to insightful thoughts. The silence may provide the time and opportunity to reflect.

*Words must be weighed, not counted*



**Polish Proverb**

Allow your mentee to always have the opportunity to express their thoughts without too much intrusion from you. Listen to what your mentee has to say,

but let her/him come to their own conclusions and support them in their decisions.

Feel free to ask follow up questions if there is anything that is unclear or you do not understand, but respect your mentee's privacy and wait until you have the full picture before you give feedback.

Encourage your mentee to express their own opinions and desires, and encourage them in making their own decisions.

Always be careful with regards to giving advice - it is the mentee who will act on it - not you! Having a dialogue is not the same as giving advice.

After the mentee has come to a conclusion about what s/he wants to do, be supportive of their choice (assuming it is a reasonable one). You don't have to agree that it is what you would do in the same circumstances though. Also, avoid universal solutions.

A good mentor builds trust by talking openly not only about her or his successes, but also about his or her failures.

#### **4.1 Be a positive role model (but still interact as equals)**

A positive role model neither condemns nor criticises others. You should show helpfulness and thoughtfulness, and lead by example.

Carefully consider how your attitude can make you a positive role model. As you have promised to be a positive role model, call when you say you will call and always be on time for your meetings and appointments. Try, whenever possible, to remain positive in your attitude and your approach to others, and try to find positive ways of looking at things.

Show that you care about your mentee and demonstrate that she/he is worthy of your interest. Emphasise that their happiness is important to you.

Remember to always be mindful of how you express yourself.

## 4.2 Do activities together

Doing activities together consolidates your relationship - a mutual exchange is the foundation of a good relationship.

Joint activities can also be a good starting point for your discussions and can lead to a more personal conversation about, for example, life issues, career, hopes, etc.

Try to visit cultural venues, museums, and exhibitions or take walks together. Or why not visit each other at home, cook together, go to a cafe or restaurant? Perhaps you could even visit venues where you spend time like community centres, college, etc.?

Take this opportunity to have fun, enjoy yourself and enjoy each other's company.

Another important feature of social interaction is humour. Finding reasons to laugh together creates a sense of community and shared pleasure always strengthens a relationship. A mentor who can laugh at their own mistakes and who deals with everyday life in a jocular manner often evokes joy in others and can be a humorous role model.

If meeting up isn't possible, mentoring can also be done on the phone or by email. This allows you to still have a conversation and be supportive but without face to face meetings. Be aware though that you will not get the body language clues that are so important in everyday conversations from a phone or email session. You will need to "read between the lines" to get the meaning of some phrases and make sure you check that your understanding of this is correct. You will have to be careful too of the language you use, as a jokey aside can be taken the wrong way when written down or said on the phone. Face to face meetings are ideal and it would be good to at least start in this way, even if you move to other modes later.



## 5. Important factors to create good relationships

Whether a good relationship can develop between you depends on several factors: expectations, motivation, and the degree to which your mentee is able to trust and have confidence in you

### 5.1 Expectations

Developing a good relationship takes time and patience. More often than not, the bond is not instantaneous, but is something that is formed gradually. Therefore, don't hold too high expectations about being the one who will visibly influence your mentee's situation or way of thinking and acting. Change is a steady process that often takes a long time. The rewards of mentoring are often also subtle and more discreet.

Research shows, however, that positive change emerges best when the mentee feels validated and doesn't feel forced to change his or her behaviour.

So get to know your mentee and show that you appreciate her/him for who she/he is. Try to focus on your mentee's strengths and positive traits and be sure to acknowledge them.

### 5.2 Motivation and attitude

Mentoring is a duet - both players must be involved, enjoy meeting, be prepared to devote time, give and take, and each be responsible for their own development.

However, your attitude is a major factor in forming a good relationship and in trust being created. A mentor who listens, who sees his/her mentee as competent, is confident, can offer support, and is there when needed, is more likely to succeed in maintaining an enjoyable relationship.

## 5.3 Trust and confidence

A good relationship starts with seeing and acknowledging the other party, only then can trust be established. If this bond doesn't exist between you, then you will not be able to fully support your mentee. Developing trust takes time - and it can be difficult, especially if your mentee has lost confidence in, or been betrayed by, previous authority figures or role models.

Therefore it is extremely important that your mentee can trust you: you will, as you agreed, be on time, keep your word, etc.

For it to be a good relationship, you must also enable a sense of belonging, a sense of being understood and respected. Assuring your mentee that *"You can rely on me"* is not going to convince them that you are reliable or persuade them to be reliable in turn. Trust can't be forced; the only way to earn trust is by giving it.

Try not to cancel or rearrange plans too often. Work out how can you reach each other: by phone, by email. What do you do if someone gets sick and you can't make it, or if you can't attend a meeting?

When you have regular meetings, the relationship will progress. Each meeting cancellation means less time and opportunity to establish a good relationship.

## 6. Your Sessions



The first session can be seen as an introduction and familiarisation event: who you are, what common interests you have, your background, experience, etc. in order to get to know each other and to plan together what you want to do going forward.

- Talk about what you expect to get from mentoring?
- Why does your mentee want a mentor?
- Why do you want to be a mentor?
- What can you offer and what do you hope to receive in return?



- Are there any special activities your mentee wants to do?
- Book a firm date for when to speak again and possibly even a date for field trips: somewhere that you'd both like to visit.

Always be open when having discussions and try to have an objective point of view.

- It might be good to give the mentee a written assignment, for example:  
"This is me today, this is me in five months.."

Possible topics:

- What are the milestones in the mentee's life?
- Important choices
- Dreams and aspirations

Use the "**GROW model**"

**G – GOAL:** What do you want?

(Do not have too many goals but have both short-term and longer-term goals.

**R – REALITY:** What is happening now?

(Describe the current situation... What made you realise that you need to do something different).

**O – OPTIONS:** What could you do?

(What could you do to move yourself just one step forward...?)

**W – WILL:** What will you do?

(What will you do next...? How, when, with whom...? What do you need from me?)

Be clear that what is said between you in person, on the telephone or in emails will always stay between you.

Make sure that your phones are switched off for the duration of your meetings.

## 6.1 The subsequent sessions

Always begin with a "gentle start" and ask the mentee what has happened since last time. Perhaps a new or acute problem has arisen that your mentee wants to talk about first. Take your time, so that it doesn't feel stressful.

Try to structure the discussions so that they don't become just idle chit-chat.

### **Remember to:**

Encourage discussion as much as possible by asking "open questions" that require more than a simple yes or no answer;

- What were you thinking?
- Could you please explain what you want/did... etc...
- When? Where? How? Describe - are good "question words".

Avoid leading questions, sometimes repeatedly asking "why" questions, or pushing too hard for an answer can be perceived as an interrogation. Questions like "What did you do today?" are better than "How have you been today?"

Always try to finish by summarising your meetings and reflecting on what was said. "What would be the most helpful thing for you to take away from this session?" And make a habit of evaluating your progress and end the meeting by asking the mentee if there are issues that have not been covered or resolved.

A logbook or diary is a good method for when you want to follow a process.

- What conclusion can I draw?
- Am I pleased/dissatisfied with these aspects?
- Ideas on how to improve.

This is something that can be useful to both of you and a good way to keep focused on the goals you have set.

It also provides a place where you can write down your thoughts after your meeting and how you want to proceed at the next meeting.

## 6.2 Before the last session

Before the end, it might be good to ask if there is something that you've said you would do, but have forgotten or not had time to do. Maybe you should take the opportunity to do it before you end your time together?

- Try to tie up any loose ends and do a recap of your time together
- Summarise the process and look back over the logbook
- Do you feel a sense of achievement?
- What worked well and what didn't?

It may be nice to look back and talk about, for example:

"Do you remember what you were thinking when you decided to have a Mentor?", "How do you think it was?", "Has it lived up to your expectations?", "What has been the most fun, most instructive?", "What do you think we have learned from each other?", "What will we/you miss from our time together?"

Do you want to stay in contact and if so, how should the subsequent contact take place? It is important to be very clear on this matter.

When scheduling your last meeting, you should decide together whether or not you want to do something extra? It might be good to do something special that somehow denotes a closure.

To give a small gift or a letter can be a great way to mark an end to the process.

## 6.3 Conclusion

As previously mentioned, mentorship is not a lifelong commitment. So it might be good to have something special planned for the final meeting unless your organisation/scheme organises a communal ending for everyone.

A final meeting marks the end of your relationship. It is an occasion to summarise what you have done together, and maybe even provide a satisfying conclusion to the process.

Remember to give feedback on the positive traits that you have seen displayed by your mentee and point out the potential for development that you think your mentee possesses.

## 7. Possible Pitfalls



- Unrealistic expectations
- The goals are not clearly defined
- One of the parties fails to invest enough time or interest
- The sessions are not planned carefully enough and become "chats".
- Personalities aren't compatible: too big or small age difference to fit comfortably into the respective roles.

These are some of the factors that can make a couple stop the programme ahead of schedule. Normally, problems emerge in a mentoring relationship when no real bond has been formed. The most common reason is that the mentor and mentee don't meet regularly or they expect too much. Those who end their relationship prematurely have often thought that they could change their mentee and have tried to accelerate this change. Those, however, who have been most successful, have viewed their role as primarily supportive, have wanted to help the mentee to develop and have seen themselves as more of a companion rather than an authority figure.

If you must exit early:

- Decide on a date when you are to meet for the last time
- Be honest about why you have to cancel your mentoring and reassure your mentee it is not due to any deficiency on their part.
- Don't make any promises that you can't keep (do not say: "we'll definitely keep in touch", "I might call you", etc.).

## 8. Practical advice



Here are some practical ideas/tips to help you to become a successful mentor:

Establish a mentoring agreement - can be made in writing or verbally, where you lay out the guidelines for mentoring: how many times you are going to meet, how often, for how long each time and cancellation policies. Should you, for example, remind each other before your meeting via email, SMS?

It might be helpful to list the skills that the mentee hopes to develop, as well as the goals that you want to achieve through being a mentor, in the mentoring agreement.

The mentoring process is confidential and will be characterised by openness and responsibility. Everything said is confidential and should stay between you.

### 8.1 Questions that may be helpful to ask yourself as a mentor

- Do you have any preconceptions about your mentee that may hinder the relationship?
- Are you prepared to offer yourself and your experiences - both successes and failures?
- Are you a good listener, or can you become one?
- Which of your network of contacts do you want to share with your mentee?
- What are your expectations of yourself?

Consider the importance of asking yourself the following questions, in light of becoming a positive role model:

- How do I express myself?
- How do I dress?
- Do I lead by example and not smoke, drink too much alcohol or take recreational drugs?
- Do I live a healthy lifestyle?

If you meet your mentee in five years what do you think she/he would say? *It was you who...*

How do you respond to that? Try to think of concrete examples from your time together that might explain why they'd feel this way.

## 9. Reading List



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