

Preparing a Mentoring Meeting Agenda

Preparing a good mentoring meeting agenda will ensure you make the most out of your time with your mentor. Thought and planning are necessary to develop your agenda but it does not have to be a complicated process. Think of it as a roadmap to stay on track.

Start right away. It is best to start planning your agenda well in advance. Doing so gets you thinking about what you want to accomplish and more importantly, it gives you time to refine your objectives. Say you want to discuss the topic of Marketing. That's a good start, but it's also very broad. If you've started your agenda well before the meeting, it is likely that you will come to realize that your interest lies in a more specific area of Marketing. Perhaps it is to discuss ideas to create a successful promotion for a product in your startup. Your mentor will appreciate the narrow focus and will be able to prepare accordingly.

Establish the standard topics. Like all meetings, your time with your mentor will include its own version of "on-going business". While your introduction will not be as formal as that of a ten person work meeting, it is likely that the first few minutes will be devoted to catching up. Whether things are going well or you are facing a challenge, there is always much to share since the last meeting. Even when you have known your mentor for a while, avoid lengthy background stories, complaining and random conversation. Be mindful instead of those key topics you must touch on at every meeting. These usually include: New Developments, Progress on Goals, Current Challenges and Questions. Having the conversation flow through your standard topics will ensure you cover and think about these interrelated pieces.

Allocate time. First things first, arrive early. This will give you the chance to settle, gather your notes or organize your devices. Taking even five minutes to just close your eyes and get into the right mindset will do wonders to increase your focus and the productivity of your meeting. You have a limited amount of time with your mentor, it is up to you to get the most out of it. The best way to get through your agenda is to allocate time to each topic. You may choose to allocate less time to "reporting" topics and more time to "collaborating" topics, such as brainstorming ideas or working on a practical problem.

Assemble your questions. Chances are the minute you leave the meeting you will think of that one great question you should have asked. It's not too late, but you must write it

down because I guarantee you will not remember it in a week's time. I used to rely on sticky notes to gather all my questions. Now I use Evernote. Find the method that works best for you and when you prepare for your meeting, sort through all your questions and move the most pertinent ones to your agenda. Even mentors with years of experience may want to brush up on a topic before the meeting or they may like having enough time to find tools, resources or even touch base with a colleague to be able to make an introduction for you.

Keep track of actionable items. The point of mentoring relationships is to learn and make progress. You will have set some goals and micro-steps in one of your first meetings. Clearly defined goals are an essential element in your mentee toolbox and while these are unlikely to change, your mentor will regularly suggest ideas and resources to support you in your journey. Leave space on your agenda to make notes of actionable items and ideas for follow up. I once had a mentee who forgot to get in touch with a contact that I had provide and as a result he missed an opportunity to attend a great workshop. We are all busy and things will slip, write it down!

Leave time for review. Just like you settled in before the meeting, take some time at the end to review. First review your action and follow up items to ensure both you and your mentor leave the meeting with the same expectations. After you have confirm the next meeting time and place, it is a good idea to stay behind and go over your notes one more time. In fact, this is the perfect time to take out your calendar and plan the time you will devote to your goals before your next mentoring meeting comes around.

Send your agenda out in advance. It is best to send the agenda 3 to 4 days in advance to allow enough time for your mentor to prepare. However, if your mentoring meetings are weekly, a four day old agenda will not reflect your up-to-date progress. In those cases, you should send the agenda 48 hours before the meeting. If you are consistent, your mentor will know to expect your agenda and allow enough time to review and prepare.

Follow these guidelines to make the most of your mentoring meetings. And remember, your meeting will not stay on track perfectly the first time but the more you work with an agenda the better skilled you will become. The ability to prepare a good agenda is useful in mentoring meetings, business meetings and community organization meetings such as boards or committees. A Mentoring Meeting Agenda template is available at inspireconnect.ca