

Building a virtual mentoring relationship

Technology has resulted in distance no longer being an obstacle or hindrance when developing a mentoring relationship – virtual mentoring can be a powerful tool in someone's development when done right.

Here are some tips to assist you to build a strong virtual mentoring relationship:

1. Accept that it takes time to build a virtual relationship

Forming the initial bond in a virtual relationship can be more difficult than in a face to face relationship, due to the lack of non-verbal cues during phone discussions. However this can be overcome by conducting initial meetings through video conference/ webcam where possible, and being open to sharing information about yourself to help your mentee / mentor understand you as a person.

2. Communicate frequently

Regular communication, whether by phone, email, instant messenger or other communication channel, is key to developing rapport and maintaining a strong mentoring relationship, particularly in the early stages of the relationship. Messages do not need to be lengthy or scheduled – a quick call to check in after an event or important meeting, or a short email to share a relevant article make a significant impact in developing / strengthening your connection.

3. Show your commitment

Just because your meetings are virtual rather than face to face, you still need to extend the same respect and courtesy of being on time and prepared for meetings, and not cancelling last minute. Arrange meetings in advance and commit to them – if you do need to cancel be sure to provide an apology and a reason and reschedule immediately. Be sure to follow up on agreed actions, and mentees show your appreciation for your mentor's time.

4. Be present during meetings

When you are on the phone at your desk there are many distractions that can affect your focus and attention away from the conversation at hand. To avoid this, book yourself into a meeting room – changing location also enables you to speak more freely, rather than being concerned about what you say with colleagues sitting around you in an open plan office. If conducting a webcam meeting close down all computer applications, especially email, to avoid interruptions. Value the time you have with your mentee / mentor and show them respect by giving them your full attention.

5. Seize any opportunity to meet in person

Be sure to let your mentee / mentor know if you will be visiting their location, whether it be for work or holiday. Make the most of any opportunity to meet face to face, even just for a short coffee catch up. Even a brief meeting will further develop your rapport and contribute to more successful future virtual meetings.