



Mentor Guide

—modified from work of Vineet Chopra MD and Sanjay Saint MD

Choose Mentees who are curious, organized, efficient, responsible, engaged, enthusiastic, focused, honest, and embrace feedback.

Avoid Mentees who are unassertive, expect the mentor to keep the relationship going, insist on doing things his or her way.

Test potential new mentee by asking candidate to read a paper and return within a month to discuss.

Encourage building a mentorship team to assure all tasks are covered: sponsorship for career advancement, value and goal clarification, moral support, institutional support, content expertise in area of interest, strategies for success.

Agree On Ground Rules

- Set explicit goals and expectations: consensus around written list of short- and long-term goals
- Schedule regular meetings: every 1–4 weeks
- Honor deadlines, appointments, and commitments
- Expect constructive criticism

Prevent Mentorship Malpractice

Do not:

- Steal credit for your mentee’s ideas or usurp lead positions on their projects
- Handcuff your mentee to your timeline; do not slow their progress because you are slow to get back to them
- Discourage your mentee from seeking other mentors
- Neglect to rescue mentees from common self-destructive mistakes (see mentee missteps)

Take responsibility for resolving disagreements and misunderstandings and keeping the relationship on track.

References

- Chopra and Saint. *6 Things Every Mentor Should Do*. HBR. March 29, 2017.
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- Chopra, Woods, Saint. *The four golden rules of effective menteeship*. *BMI Careers*. August 15, 2016.
- Chopra, Edelson, Saint. *A Piece of My Mind. Mentorship Malpractice*. *JAMA*. April 12, 2016.
- Vaughn, Saint, Chopra. *Mentee Missteps: Tales from the Academic Trenches*. *JAMA*. February 7, 2017.
- <https://www.amazon.com/Mentoring-Guide-Helping-Mentors-Mentees/dp/1607855399>

Recognize & Address

Common Mentee Missteps

The Overcommitter frequently says “yes” but often doesn’t deliver, resulting in high-output failure typified by diminishing quantity and quality of work product.

Solutions: Add new tasks only after old ones are completed. Stick to projects that clearly align with explicit career goals.

The Ghost appears extremely enthusiastic and energetic, but then disappears without a trace and without notice.

Solutions: Mentees should gauge their true interest in projects and be allowed to decline. Set goals to address problems forthrightly and praise mentees for their candor when issues raised.

The Doormat exhausts their energy on things that do not further their career, or for which they do not receive credit.

Solutions: Evaluate potential projects to confirm they are in the best interest of the mentee. Allow mentees to use you as an excuse not to participate in another’s project.

The Vampire requires constant attention and supervision, typified by countless emails, messages, and meeting requests.

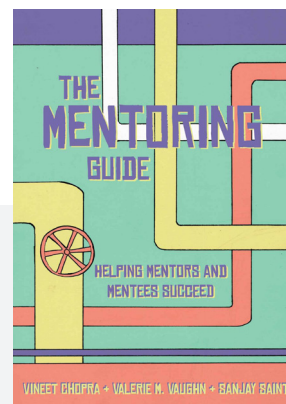
Solutions: Set clear goals and boundaries, including what questions require approval and what do not.

The Lone Wolf appears to have no need for a mentor—appears stubborn and confident—and prefers working alone, but, internally, fears asking for help.

Solutions: Be specific in what can be done with and without mentor consultation. Define roles of mentee and mentor(s).

The Backstabber resents criticism and makes excuses for every failure or assigns blame to others.

Solutions: Emphasize that honesty, not perfection, is critically important in a mentee. If mentee cannot accept this responsibility, end the relationship.



Chopra, Vaughn, Saint. *The Mentoring Guide: Helping Mentors and Mentees Succeed*. Michigan Publishing. 2019. (Available at www.amazon.com)

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Choose mentors who will meet your specific needs, whether a one-time need, such as finding an outside job (connector), achieving expertise in a particular method or content domain or negotiating a job offer (coach), climbing the career ladder (sponsor), help in clarifying goals and expectations (mentor).

Choose mentors who you like, respect, and trust, and demonstrate altruism, work-life balance, and patience. Good mentors want to understand your priorities, goals, and values and don't want to remake you in their image.

Choose multiple mentors & establish a mentorship team. It is rare to find one individual to meet all your needs.

Set Firm Ground Rules

- Define explicit goals and expectations: consensus around written list of short- and long-term goals
- Schedule regular meetings: every 1–4 weeks
- Honor deadlines, appointments, and commitments
- Expect constructive criticism

How To Be The Ideal Mentee

- Under-promise and over-deliver. Mentors are looking for closers, those that finish what they start
- Embrace feedback while remaining honest and responsive
- Behave with integrity; hard work and sacrifice pay dividends down the road
- Engage and energize the relationship. The best mentees are fun to work with and are energy donors, not energy recipients
- Avoid excessive complaining. Frame your problems as growth opportunities and present several solutions
- Respect your mentor's time. Give mentor enough time to review work products (1 week for abstracts, ≥3 weeks for grants). Avoid long narrative emails—focus emails around questions that have Yes or No answers
- Set the agenda for meetings—describe what you want to discuss and what you want to accomplish
- Manage up. Help your mentor meet deadlines and prepare for meetings by requesting specific actions (eg, "please review this abstract so we can discuss at our meeting.")
- Establish a regular cadence (habit) of communication, with updates on new goals, project status, manuscripts, meetings, other mentors' advice, problems, disappointments, successes

Avoid Common Mentee Missteps

Do not:

- overcommit. Before saying Yes to a project, determine which other project is now getting a No
- "ghost" or fail to follow-up, especially when problems arise. Address issues early
- spend time on work unrelated to your own career. Ask directly how new projects align with your goals
- drain mentors with constant communications and requests. If appropriate, first seek help from a colleague
- be afraid to ask for help. Asking for help is critical for learning, and not a sign of weakness

Diagnose & Address Mentor Malpractice

The Hijacker takes hostage a mentee's ideas, projects, or grants, labeling them as his or her own for self-gain.

Countermeasure: Quick and complete exit.

There is no way to protect yourself in this relationship.

The Exploiter assigns low-yield activities and chores that serve the mentor but not the mentee.

Countermeasure: Trial of firm boundary setting; use other mentors to evaluate requests; if mistrust, exit relationship.

The Possessor smothers mentee with supervision and oversight and discourages contact with other mentors or collaborators due to feelings of inadequacy and fear of losing the mentee to others.

Countermeasure: Insist on a mentorship committee. Confront mentor with concerns about isolating/siloed approach.

The Bottleneck is so busy with their own tasks, there is little time to meet and long delays in feedback.

Countermeasure: Set firm deadlines; be clear on consequences (eg, "If I don't hear by this date, I'll submit manuscript as is.").

The Country Clubber wants to be everybody's friend and avoids conflict, eg, not advocating for mentee in difficult situations, such as negotiating for protected time, authorship, or research support, or confronting mistreatment from mentors or bosses.

Countermeasure: Develop a mentorship team so other mentors can engage on your behalf.

The World Traveler is an internationally recognized expert with little time, always away for meetings and speaking engagements.

Countermeasure: Establish a regular cadence of communication. Reserve time well in advance. Use methods other than in-person meetings for communication.