



Five Easy Steps for Making the Most of Your Mentorship Meetings

By Aubree Sepler



Ever feel like you should be maximizing your limited time with field supervisors or individual mentorship meetings, but aren't sure where to start? By following these five conversation guidelines, you can turn any supervision meeting or informational interview into the professional leadership lesson of your dreams.

1. Follow the “context + problem = solution” equation: One way to learn from your mentor is to use your guidance meetings as opportunities to discuss issues you may be facing and how you seek to address them – while also asking for feedback from your mentor. When you provide a few sentences of context about yourself as a professional, outline the problem, and propose your course of action, your mentor will be able to generate an idea of who you are as a rising professional. They will learn how you think critically about your dilemmas, and connect via a solutions-oriented approach. This process lets you “shadow” them as they teach you new ways to assess and respond to challenges in the workplace.

2. Put your best face forward in an authentic way: Talking about your accomplishments within and outside of field is always a personal boost, but also think of your mentorship meetings as the precursor to an interview. In the limited time allotted, you should be seeking professional development and career-oriented answers to Big Questions. Getting face-time with certain professionals in your field of interest should always be taken seriously – and they may even offer

you a chance to interview or apply for their agency after you've met. (Note: Even if they are not exactly where you want to be professionally, they might know people who are.) You have an opportunity to network while you meet, and it is absolutely okay to ask your mentor if they know anyone in a specific field or at a certain agency, and whether they would connect you.

3. Students can expect authenticity too: Because you are learning and meeting with them in an educational capacity, you have every right to ask Big Questions that may seem harder to ask once you're a professional in the field. For instance, asking for an honest read on an organization or about workplace culture would likely produce answers that an agency website would not. Take advantage of learning moments, and aim to clarify a few elusive professional points in each meeting.

4. Save improvisation for the stage: Heading in to a supervision or mentorship meeting cold is never a good idea. Prepare before your meeting. Asking questions that you could easily research for yourself may be a waste of your most valuable resource in these meetings – time. Instead, ask them questions about how they got to where they are today, challenges they may have faced in diverse professional environments, and more, depending on your specific interests.

5. Always follow-up: An important element to understand is that you will never be able to ask all of your Big Questions, and that's okay. These are introductory networking opportunities on the road to developing a longer-term relationship. As such, never leave the meeting without verifying that you would be permitted to contact them again about questions that may arise in the future, and that you would appreciate receiving their preferred email address. Soon after your meeting, send them a follow-up note to thank them for their time, and recap a few helpful details of your meeting. Now, should you hope to seek their guidance in the future, you have built strong foundations for a lasting professional advisor.

