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An Introduction to a Successful Mentor-Mentee Process

For you to achieve the greatest possible benefit from the mentor-mentee process, we have drawn up some rules and guidelines that you can refer to during the mentoring process.

The **rules** are few and simple:

1. Rules concerning the general relationship framework:
    a. The mentor-mentee relationship ends after **approx. a 1/2 year.**
    b. Both mentor and mentee commit **to allocating time** for the mentoring meetings. Also, the mentee commits to allocating time to prepare the mentoring meetings.

2. Rules concerning relationship roles:
    a. The mentee is the key person – the protagonist - in the relationship and is responsible both for calling meetings and for preparing the agenda of the meetings.
    b. The mentor is responsible for being both physically and mentally present at the meetings, for providing the benefit of his/her experience, and for ensuring that the conversation remains focused on the mentee.

Next, there are some **guidelines** you can refer to during the process. The most important thing is getting off to a good start. The requirement for a successful mentoring relationship is that both parties know each other's expectations and agree upon the type of relationship that suits them. At the first meeting, it is therefore important to start by:

Aligning expectations
The alignment of expectations should refer to both the aims and the structure of the relationship.

Aims: The mentee is responsible for describing his/her aims in entering into the mentoring relationship. What should these aims be? What concrete challenges should the mentoring meetings deal with?

Structure: The mentor and the mentee together define the frequency and duration of the meetings. Where will the meetings be held? How should the issue of confidentiality be dealt with? Last but not least, both mentor and mentee determine whether there is anything that can cause a meeting to be cancelled.

The alignment should be put in writing so that you can return to it and check whether you are still on the right track. The questions below may be helpful to clarify the alignment of expectations.

- What does the mentee want to achieve (implicitly/explicitly)?
- What kind of help does the mentee hope he/she will receive?
- What kind of help does the mentor anticipate to provide?
- How will the mentor and the mentee evaluate the meetings during the process, and how should they discuss the benefits of the process?

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- How can confidentiality be ensured?
- How should cancellations or changes be handled?

Duration and frequency of meetings

Experiences differ as to how long a mentoring meeting should be. Statistics show that meetings of under 1 hour do not achieve the necessary depth, whereas there is too much repetition in meetings that are longer than 2 hours. Generally, the mentor decides the length of the meetings, but in practice, this is most often decided in collaboration between the mentor and the mentee.

The same applies to the question of how often the meetings are to be held. In the beginning, there will be shorter intervals between the meetings: You have to get to know each other, and the mentee may have some acute needs. Generally, mentors and mentees meet about 5–6 times over the course of the six months the relationship lasts.

Before the meeting ends, it is a good idea to schedule the next meeting. This provides the mentee with a deadline for his/her mentee work and it ensures that both parties prioritize the meeting.

The good mentoring meeting

A good meeting means that the mentee has prepared for the meeting.

It is the mentor's responsibility to keep the mentee on the right track, but mentees can have so much on their plate that it can be difficult for them to focus. It can sometimes be beneficial for the mentee to unload, but the mentor must not serve as a dumping ground for the mentee's problems. If the mentee uses the meeting simply to voice his/her frustration, the situation for the mentee is likely to stay the same rather than change.

Talk about the outcomes of your meetings to ensure that the meetings are "on track." The mentor should also regularly make sure that the mentee's and the mentor's expectations are still aligned.

As a rule, a productive meeting has a fixed agenda. An agenda may look like this:

- What has happened since the last meeting?
- Agreeing on the purpose of the meeting
- Exploring topics from the perspective of the mentee
- Drawing up options for taking action
- Summing up the meeting
- Setting the date for the next meeting

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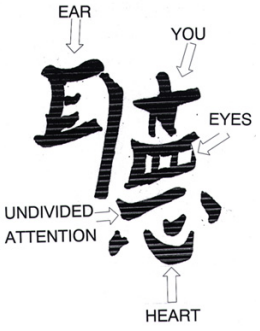
The 4 ”teaching” languages

Instruction	Advice	Guidance	Questions
The mentor typically says: *You have to do this and this!*	The mentor typically says: *If I were you, I would do this and this!*	The mentor typically says: *Have you tried doing this and this?*	The mentor typically says: *What have you considered doing?*
The mentor has all the responsibility	The mentor has a lot of responsibility.	The mentor and the mentee share the responsibility.	The mentee has all the responsibility.

As a rule, "instruction" will not benefit a mentoring relationship.
Try to keep to the right side of the above chart as much as possible. If the mentee asks for advice, then try guidance. If the mentee asks for guidance, then try questions.

Giving advice
Some mentors tend to give "a piece of good advice" even before the mentee's problems have been fully revealed. This means either that the advice will not be good enough or that the mentee is not yet ready to realize how good the advice is.
Here are a few suggestions on how to avoid giving advice too soon:

- Help each other to accept pauses in the conversation.
- Have a piece of paper close at hand, on which you can write down your piece of advice for later use.
- Let the good advice come in the form of a story or an event that you have experienced in your everyday life – and ask if this can be of inspiration to the mentee.
- Be inspired by the Chinese character for listening. The character consists of ears, eyes, heart, you, and undivided attention – meaning that the listener's attention is exclusively focused on the other party.



If a piece of advice is appropriate, remember that it is a gift. When a mentor has given a good piece of advice to a mentee, the advice is now the mentee's property, and it is the mentee's turn to adapt it to his/her everyday life.

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Logbook

Use a logbook to remember what you have learned. Experience shows that it is a really good idea for both mentor and mentee to write down learning points, ideas, realizations, and thoughts.

Short notes from each meeting will help the mentor to discover whether the mentee repeats his/her actions, or whether there are areas that still have not been touched upon.

The logbook also helps the mentee to retain thoughts and learning points. By using it systematically throughout the process – both in and between meetings – the mentee will be able to monitor his/her development, and once the process has ended, he/she will have available a personalized "development book."

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