In a good mentorship, mentees get the benefits of learning from someone who’s been there before and mentors get the reward of paying it forward. Whether you are seeking or offering to provide advice, the guidelines below offer suggestions on establishing a good partnership for both mentee and mentor.

The best mentoring relationships are reciprocal. Mentors usually learn a lot from their mentees about subject areas or generational attitudes that they are not conversant in; after all, the conversation is meant to be a two-way street. Although the focus of the discussion should be on developing the capabilities of the mentee, the two parties may find it beneficial to carve out some time for some explicit “reverse mentoring” on specific topics.

**REQUESTING A MENTOR**

Remember that your fellow alumni are volunteering their time to help. Prepare thoughtfully for each conversation with your mentor to maximize the value of the time you spend together and be sure to complete actionable items from your meetings.

Mentors are not recruiters. Avoid temptations to ask for a job, or for references. Remember that they’re not volunteering to solve your problems; they’re volunteering to help provide guidance and suggestions.

**Be prepared**
Look at your mentor’s alumni profile on ConnectSYA to better understand his/her background and experience. Check out their digital footprint. Are they on LinkedIn? Twitter?

**Consider your goals**
When a mentor asks you, “What do you want to achieve through this mentorship?” be prepared with an answer.

**Expectations**
It is your responsibility to drive this relationship. Think about what your expectations are and talk these through with your mentor. Consider how often you want to touch base. Will it be an email, phone or Skype session(s), or if you’re in the same city, could you meet at an office or café? Your mentor will have his/her own expectations and commitment availability. Our recommendation is that you begin with an agreed upon minimum number of conversations, for example, three conversations over three months. Then renew if it seems useful to you both. This would provide a natural way to end an unproductive interaction. (See the section below on **When it's not working out**).
Introduce yourself
Make sure that your alumni profile is up-to-date with your education, career, areas of expertise and resume. Remember, your LinkedIn profile will synch with ConnectSYA. This will give your mentor an opportunity to get to know you in advance of your first session.

Articulate your goals
Now that conversation is flowing, be direct in your request and bring a specific situation to your mentor, a topic that you’d like help navigating, what you’re hoping to gain from this relationship:

- Are you considering a career that your mentor is experienced at?
- Are you looking for ways to improve your value/skill set for your current position?
- Is there a specific situation that you would like recommendations for navigating?
- Do you need help in revising your resume?

We provide a series of questions later in this document to help you frame your mentorship request.

Seek and expect feedback
For a mutually beneficial mentorship, feedback from both mentor and mentee is valuable. Be open to feedback and accept it graciously, even if you don’t agree with your mentor’s recommendation or advice.

Follow up
After your meeting/session, follow up with a summary email. Include meeting notes and actionables. If a next session is planned, share your availability. Prepare a clear agenda in advance and provide updates on action items. When preparing for your last session, take time to reflect on your progress and accomplishments. Provide your mentor with your planned next steps. Always thank your mentor. Even if you don’t agree with his/her recommendations.

If you’d like to, discuss how you’d like to maintain contact going forward. Ask your mentor if there were ways that you could be a better mentee. This will help you grow for future mentorship relationships, both as a mentee and a mentor.

Gratitude
We can’t say it enough. Find a way to show your appreciation. Send quick thank-you emails after sessions. If you’re meeting in person, offer to pick up the tab. And ask them if there is anything you can help them with, remembering that the best mentoring relationships are reciprocal.

When it’s not working out
Of course, there are times when a mentoring partnership may not be the best fit for either mentor or mentee. How do you manage potential awkward situations? While we offer suggested expectations for both roles (beginning with a specified number of conversations over a period of time), it’s always best to be honest and acknowledge. If you’ve reached the agreed upon number of conversations, the interaction can expire naturally. BUT be sure to provide your
mentor with thanks for the time spent. If your mentor asks for feedback, be honest in a kind way. Let him/her know what you hoped to gain but didn’t. You might learn to approach a mentorship differently in the future.

**SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO GET YOU STARTED**

**Situational Suggestions**

Are you seeking advice to help you through specific situations? Some questions to consider asking your mentor:

- I tried to delegate a task last week and it did not go well. Can we work through what to do differently next time?
- My supervisor told me I need to be more strategic. What does that mean?
- How can I let my boss know that I don’t need to be micromanaged?
- How can I stay connected to key influencers who do not work in same office or geographical area?
- When trying to gain buy-in to implement a new program, what tactics have worked for you?
- My performance review is coming up. What type of preparation do you most appreciate seeing from your employees?
- I’m considering a career transition. What are some other areas of the business that might be a good fit for me?
- I’ve heard that taking a stretch assignment could help my career trajectory. What are the pros and cons?

**Skills Enhancement**

- How can I become a more assertive negotiator?
- Can we role-play asking for a raise and a promotion?
- How can I become better at managing people who do not report to me?
- Do you have any quick tips for re-energizing an overworked team?
- Can you recommend a book or resource for dealing with difficult conversations?
- What practices can you recommend for dealing with nervousness when speaking to groups?
- I have been asked to facilitate a team-building activity at a staff retreat. What are some keys to success?
- What’s a good methodology or tool for project management and tracking team commitments?
- Do you have a template that you use for long-range visioning and strategic planning?
- What new skills do I need to move?
Good mentors encourage mentees to try new things, to improve and develop. A great mentor asks questions rather than simply impart one-way wisdom and experience. Listen to your mentee’s story and approach. Can you provide another perspective and challenge them to consider it?

Your mentee is at a crossroad – whether graduating from college and preparing to enter the workforce, transitioning from one role to another, or perhaps considering a career change. All experiences can be valuable in mentoring relationships and you will have particular experience to share in navigating change.

Be prepared
Look at your mentee’s alumni profile on ConnectSYA and LinkedIn to better understand his/her background and experience. If your mentee doesn’t have a resume attached to ConnectSYA, and hasn’t shared one with you, ask him/her for it.

Know your boundaries
Mentors are generous in volunteering their time. It is YOUR time. Work with your mentee in establishing boundaries on how often, or how long, you can offer your time. How are you willing to connect: in person, Skype, phone, email? If your mentee steps into conversations that you are not comfortable addressing, let him/her know. Mentoring is not a job recruitment function. We’ve recommended that an initial interaction of three conversations over three months may be a good starting place. This way, the partnership can be assessed and unproductive interactions can expire naturally.

Before the first “meeting”
Take this opportunity to introduce yourself and set the parameters of your availability. Send a quick message introducing yourself. Give a brief overview of your career highlights and relevant experience. Let your mentee know why you’re offering your time and what you hope to gain from this experience. Share how mentors may have helped you along the way. If your mentee has shared an intro and bio, thank them. If your mentee hasn’t, ask him/her what they are seeking in this relationship, so you can best assist and guide them in achieving their objective.

Consider your own experience and strengths, and what you’ll be able to bring to this mentoring relationship. Consider what YOU want to get out of this, too: it’s a two-way street and reciprocal mentoring can provide you both with long-lasting benefits.

Getting the housekeeping out of the way can be a great ice breaker, and an important starting point!
After the first “meeting”
Encourage your mentee to follow up with an email summarizing what you discussed along with any action items, including the next check-in date. Consider what you discussed to ensure that the meeting wrap up provided by your mentee is covered.

Share any relevant articles or suggest networking groups that might be beneficial to your mentee.

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Visit ConnectSYA, activate your alumni profile, and get involved with mentoring!