



Negotiating Mentoring Expectations

Many mentoring relationships follow a common pattern. In the beginning, both the mentor and mentee approach the relationship with excitement and resolve. Often things go well for several months, but eventually other priorities begin to crowd out the mentoring meetings. Sometimes the disappointments of unmet expectations build into resentment. The mentoring relationship that began with the greatest of intentions and much energy loses momentum.

Mentoring relationships do not need to experience this type of slow decline. Mentors who take the time at the beginning of a mentoring relationship to discuss their expectations of the relationship, as well as establish parameters and boundaries, decrease the possibility that the mentoring relationship will run out of steam several months down the road. By investing time at the beginning of the relationship to clarify assumptions, boundaries, and responsibilities, you will lay a strong foundation for your mentoring relationship.

Start by thinking about your assumptions as a mentor and what you would like the mentoring relationship to look like. You may want to jot down some notes summarizing your thoughts about:

- Your role as a mentor
- Your responsibilities as a mentor
- Your mentee's role
- The qualities you would like to see in the mentoring relationship

Next spend some time with your mentee to better understand where he or she is coming from. You may want to:

- Talk about your mentee's past mentoring experiences
- Ask about your mentee's learning goals (The learning contract from Cross Cultural Ministry Internship [Pre-Field Training] is a great place to start.)
- Ask your mentee what he or she expects from the mentoring relationship
- Identify three to five things that your mentee wants to work on over the next few months

- Share your assumptions about how you would like the mentoring relationship to go

Finally you should write up a short and simple mentor partnership agreement which covers the following main areas:

- **Goals** which focus on the mentee's growth in the next three to six months
- **Learning outcomes** which describe what success looks like once the goals are reached
- **Ground rules** to the mentoring relationship. For example,
 - We will meet every two weeks for one hour.
 - The mentee is responsible to confirm our appointment two days before the meeting.
 - The mentee will keep a journal of what he or she is learning.
 - At the end of each meeting we will establish an assignment to complete before the next session.
- **Time frame and checkpoints** for the mentoring relationship.
 - How long do you envision the mentoring relationship lasting?
 - We recommend scheduling meetings at the three, six, nine, and twelve month points to evaluate how the mentoring relationship is going. During these "checkpoint meetings" it is helpful to discuss:
 - What is going well
 - What is not going well
 - What changes or adjustments need to be made

Taking the time to work through these steps and discuss mentoring expectations with your mentee may seem like overkill. However, by negotiating the parameters of your mentoring relationship, you will increase the capacity to continue strong once the initial excitement of the new mentoring relationship wears off.