

Qualities of Effective Mentors

Mentors come in all shapes and sizes. Each person's personality, background, and experience profoundly affect the way they mentor. In addition, the interpersonal dynamics of how the mentor and mentee relate mean that mentoring relationships and styles can vary greatly.

In spite of the diversity in how mentors approach mentoring relationships, there are some things that the most effective mentors do to help their mentees grow. Research has shown that the most effective mentors demonstrate the following five qualities:

1. Listening
2. Patience
3. Knowledge of the industry or organization
4. Ability to read and understand others
5. Honesty or trustworthiness¹

In addition to these five qualities of effective mentors, there are at several other qualities which help foster effective mentoring relationships. They include:

- Structuring the mentoring relationship
- Being interested in all aspects of the mentee's life
- Allowing the mentee to grow on his or her own
- Being fair and objective
- Building and establishing a relationship with the mentee
- Giving good feedback
- Being open to suggestions
- Providing advice that is in the mentee's best interest
- Enjoying the mentoring relationship

In 2007, as a part of his master's degree, Peter Beck surveyed MTW mentors and mentees and asked them to rate their mentoring experience. Several things stood out about the results of the survey.

On the positive side, mentees said that their mentors were honest, genuine, interested in all aspects of their lives, and trustworthy.

¹ Allen, T. D. & Poteet, M. L. (1999). Developing effective mentoring relationships: Strategies from the mentor's viewpoint. *The Career Development Quarterly*. 48(1), 59-73.

On the negative side, mentees said that their mentoring relationships were unstructured, lacked communication and feedback, and did not focus on building the mentoring relationship. In addition, many mentees felt that their mentor did not enjoy the mentoring relationship.

Our advice to mentors?

- **Build on the strong foundation of trust** that you have already established. Your mentees respect you and are open to your feedback.
- **Spend some time thinking about how to be intentional** in your mentoring relationship.
- Work with your mentee to **set learning goals**.
- **Tell your mentees what they are doing well**, and encourage them as they seek to improve areas where they are growing.