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How to Be a Good Mentor

So you've hired a student. An important aspect of hosting a student work placement includes providing mentorship to your new employee. Mentorship can be a powerful organizational and personal development tool which can add value to the experience for both you and your new hire. But what is mentorship? How does it differ from supervision? And how can you be a good mentor? A little planning can lead to positive outcomes for everyone.

Supervision vs Mentorship

One of the major differences between supervision and mentoring is that the former is often task-oriented whereas the latter is more about caring for an individual's long-term development.

Supervision

Your plan for *supervising* your student-employee likely includes:

- Regular check-ins to monitor their progress in assigned projects and tasks
- Making sure they are trained in the processes and procedures of your organization
- Being available to help them troubleshoot any issues that may arise



Mentorship

Mentorship is concerned with the broader overall growth of your student employee. It can take many forms but may include:

- Helping them adapt to your organization's work culture
- Providing wisdom and insight about your industry or sector
- Sharing knowledge about your own career progression
- Helping a mentee to set career goals



1

Listen to your mentee

“The two most important skills for a mentor are the ability to ask good questions and the ability to listen effectively” (mindtools.com). Ask your student open-ended questions to learn more about their background, interests, and goals. Not only will this provide information to help guide them towards new projects and skills, it helps validate their own unique impact in the workplace.

2

Examine possible options

Understanding your student’s interests will help you connect them to the opportunities and resources available in your organization. Not every assignment or task during their work placement will completely overlap with their interests, but finding projects for your student-employee that are related to their passions and providing them the opportunity to develop new skills is important to a meaningful learning experience.

Tip: Look to your professional network. Introducing students to other individuals in your organization can link them to resources and skills that are outside your own area of expertise.

3

Continually assess

As you oversee their progress in work-related tasks, keep checking in with your student-employee about their larger learning and career development goals. A good mentor recognizes that this is an ongoing conversation that will last the duration of the work placement. Some questions you might consider:

- Have the student’s learning goals changed since we last discussed them?
- What new skills has the student learned recently?
- What skills does the student still need to develop?
- Am I modeling the professional values and behaviours that align with the student’s learning goals?
- Is the student learning and challenged by the tasks they are working on?

4

Have your mentee's back

Offer encouragement! Remind them of what they’ve overcome and how you believe they can succeed; be empathetic and share your own successes and challenges. Seek their consent before offering constructive feedback and acknowledge and celebrate their accomplishments.

Sources:



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