

INITIAL MENTORING MEETING

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During the first formal meeting with your mentor, it is paramount to accomplish several things. At some schools, this formal meeting will take place with a representative of the school present. At other schools, you will be responsible for making sure that this initial meeting takes place. However, in either case, make sure that the following material is covered.

Getting to Know Each Other

It is impossible to have a relationship with someone if you do not know him or her. As simple and maybe as silly as this sounds, start by getting to know each other. In some cases, you have already established a wonderful relationship with your mentor and the internship is just bringing some intentionality to an already fantastic association. In other cases, you and your mentor might have only spoken on the phone or had an exchange of e-mail conversations before actually meeting face to face for the first time.

If you do not know your mentor well, you will want to get to know your mentor. Find out about his or her family. Ask about his or her hometown. Learn about his or her life experiences. Find out about their current job. What do they love about his or her current place of service?

Just as you need to get to know your mentor, you need to allow your mentor to get to know you. The more information that you share about yourself, the more your mentor will be able to work alongside you in your development. More about this level of conversation will be discussed in just a little bit.

Describing the Mentoring Relationship

Once the basic introductions are taken care of, it is critical to discuss the actual mentoring relationship. In some cases, your mentor has asked you to serve with him or her. In other cases, you have asked your mentor. Either way, you need to now establish what the mentoring relationship will look like.

Share with your mentor how you would like to be mentored? What do you want out of this relationship? In addition, make sure that your mentor shares with you what they are envisioning the mentoring relationship to be as well. As you will see in the list that follows, if the two of you are not seeing the relationship in the same way, then frustration is sure to follow.¹

¹ Donald F. Beisswenger, "Differentiating Modes of Supervision in Theological Field Education," in *Theological Education*, ed. Jesse H. Ziegler (Vandalia, OH: The Association of Theological Schools, 1974), 50-58.

Evaluation Model

Is your mentor looking for a worker? Some mentors see their role as a supervisor who assigns tasks to the intern. In return, the intern performs the tasks and is evaluated on their performance. In this model, the mentor is the one with the control of the situation.

Instructor Model

Are you looking for a teacher? Some mentors approach an internship as more of a classroom environment. In this circumstance, the mentor determines what the intern needs to know in advance. The role of the intern is to learn what the mentor wants to intern to learn. In this model, the mentor is the one with the control of the situation.

Apprentice Model

Are you looking to be an apprentice? In this model, your mentor will go about his or her normal work and model skills for you. The role of the intern is to “tag along” and watch, but not do. In this model, the mentor is the one with the control of the situation.

Training Model

Are you looking for training? In this model, the mentor wants to create an environment in which you can grow and develop personally and professionally. Sounds a little more like the model that I have been describing throughout this book, doesn't it? With this model, the intern will begin to interact with the ministry environment in meaningful ways and to be stretched. Unlike the models listed about, both the mentor and the intern share the control of this situation.

Resource Model

Are you looking for a resource guide? In this model, the mentor takes a more “hands off” approach and serves as a resource person when called upon by the intern. This can sometimes come into play in situations where the intern already has some significant prior experience in a particular ministry area. In this model, the intern is in control, with the mentor providing little direction.

Consultative Model

Are you looking for a consultant? In this model, your mentor works with you to determine what you want and need to learn and then assists you in this learning by consulting with you about the ministry experience. In this model the intern takes the initiative while the supervisor facilitates and encourages. As with the previous model, the intern is in control of the situation.

Spiritual Guide Model

Or finally, are you looking for a spiritual guide? In this model, your mentor focuses on reflecting with you on the day-to-day ministry events and seeking the theological implications of

these experiences. Typically, the intern will bring situations and events to the mentor for discussion. And again, the intern is in control of the situation.

So Which is Right?

Mentors in supervision will probably use several styles, but one style will dominate. Styles are like shoes: there is a right style for every situation and the situation dictates the style. The most beneficial styles of supervision for you as the intern are those in which you are given some control in the supervisory relationship.

The important thing is for you and your mentor to discuss these things at the first of the internship. So if your mentor is looking for cheap labor for the summer and you are looking for a spiritual guide for the summer, you might not ever see eye to eye. In that case, it would be much better to identify these differences up front and seek other options.

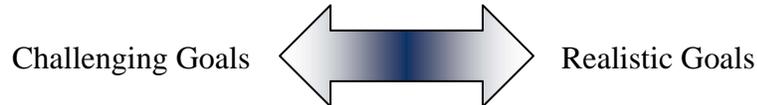
Beisswenger's Supervisory Styles

Supervisory Style	Roles	Control
Evaluation Mode	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Supervisor assigns tasks ▪ Student performs tasks and is evaluated 	Supervisor
Instructor Mode	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Supervisor determines what the student needs to know ▪ Student learns what the supervisor wants the student to learn 	Supervisor
Apprentice Mode	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Supervisor goes about your normal work and models skills ▪ Student “tags along” and watches only 	Supervisor
Training Mode	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Supervisor creates an environment in which the student can grow and develop personally and professionally ▪ Student interacts in the environment 	Supervisor and Student
Resource Mode	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Supervisor takes a more “hands off” approach and serves as a resource person when called upon by the student ▪ Student is given responsibility but is given no direction from the supervisor 	Student
Consultative Mode	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Supervisor works with the student to determine what the student wants and needs to learn and then assists the student in this learning by consulting with the student about the ministry experience ▪ Student takes the initiative while the supervisor facilitates and encourages 	Student
Spiritual Guide Mode	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Supervisor focuses on reflecting with the student on the day to day ministry events and seeking the theological implications of these experiences ▪ Student brings situations and events to the supervisor for discussion 	Student

Goal Setting

We have already discussed goal setting in a previous chapter, but let me just quickly reiterate. Remember that while the school and the mentor can assist, ultimately it is your responsibility to clarify the goals of the internships. Goals should come out of your needs. They should be challenging, yet realistic. Where the mentor can be a huge help to you are in the area of bring specificity and developmental focus to the goals.

Tension of Challenging and Realistic Goals



It is at the first meeting that you will need to share your goals for the internship. Tell you mentor what you want to learn from this experience? Discuss what are the specific learning outcomes desired from this experience? In posing these questions, your mentor is probably going to want to know how would you like to go about achieving your learning goals. Moreover, your mentor is probably going to ask what is the most useful kind of assistance I can provide.

In the discussion of the goals for the internship, a useful tool is for the two of you to generate a list of learning opportunities that are available to you.² What learning opportunities are available “in house?” What is learning opportunities are available outside the office or ministry setting? What kinds of learning opportunities exist to get exposure to new learning? What kinds of learning opportunities exist to reinforce new learning? And what kinds of learning opportunities exist that might accelerate learning? A quick brainstorming session between the two of you should create a beneficial list of learning opportunities to complement you goals. I have included a sample worksheet for generating these learning opportunities in the Appendix.

Administrative Process

Of course, with any formal internship there are some basic “housekeeping” things that need to be discussed. You and your mentor will need to discuss what the school’s requirements are for the internship and how the two of you can fulfill these. What paperwork needs to be turned in? What paperwork needs to be signed? What are the due dates for the paperwork? Are there formal check in reports with the school during the internship? How is evaluation handled?

But besides the school’s requirements, there are probably some “housekeeping” issues that need to be discussed concerning the church or organization where you are serving. This is especially important if you are brand new. There needs to be some type of formal orientation for you to the church or organization, addressing the following questions.³

² Lois J. Zachary, *The Mentor's Guide: Facilitating Effective Learning Relationships* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 121.

³ Craig P. Donovan and Jim Garnett, *Internships for Dummies* (New York: Hungry Minds, 2001), 259-262.

First, there are the “who” questions. Who is your supervisor? Who are your co-workers? Who are your fellow interns? Whom else do you report to? Who will be evaluating you?

Second, there are the “what” questions. What are your duties? What are your hours? What are the rules about conduct, safety, and so on? What should I call your supervisor and other employees?

Third, there are the “where” questions. Where will you be working? Where is your desk or workspace? Where can you keep your coat and personal things? Where are the bathrooms? Where can you get something to eat? Where do you park?

Fourth, there are the “when” questions. When do you start? When will you be evaluated? When do you get paid (if it is a paid internship)? When does the internship officially end?

Finally, there are the “how” questions. How will you be evaluated? How often will we be meeting? How does your mentor prefer you to interact with him or her? How does your mentor prefer you to interact with other staff members?

Expectations and Boundaries

Finally, in this initial meeting both you and your mentor need to discuss expectations and boundaries. I should give you a word of caution in the areas of expectations and boundaries. The basis of much of the disappointment in internships is unmet expectations. Moreover, these expectations can go both ways. Everybody involved in the internship must be intentional to discuss expectations at the start of the internship.

Expectations

Expectations should be mutually expressed, negotiated, and agreed upon at the beginning of an internship. Starting your internship, you need to understand what you are hoping that this internship and this mentoring relationship will do for you. Is that hope realistic? Can any relationship satisfy your hope, or are you just wishing on a star?

Do not expect that everything in the internship will come overnight. Mentoring takes time. Growth, like anything significant, takes time. While the “blinding flash of insight or epiphany on the mountaintop are always possible,” for most of us change is “more like agriculture than rocket science.”⁴

With the goals discussed, both you and your mentor need to have an honest discussion as to whether meeting these goals is realistic in this type of internship? The two of you will also want to discuss if there are any issues that may have caused previous mentoring relationship to be disappointing. Finally, discuss what are the anxieties, uncertainties, uneasiness, and inadequacies do the two of you feel about this relationship?⁵

Both you and your mentor need to be honest about what is possible and what is not possible in this internship. Do not just assume that things can be worked out later. I would much

⁴ Laura Whitworth, Henry Kimsey-House, and Phil Sandahl, *Co-Active Coaching: New Skills for Coaching People toward Success in Work and Life* (Palo Alto, CA: Davies-Black Publishing, 1998), 157.

⁵ Donovan and Garnett, 259-262.

rather have to discuss this up front than to invest six months in an internship and a mentoring relationship that was doomed from the start.

Boundaries

Along with realistic expectations, there is also a need to establish clear boundaries. The mentor is not the intern's parent, peer, or therapist. Lois Zachary warns, "A frank discussion about the limits and boundaries of the mentoring relationship enables mentoring partners to sustain the focus on learning, manage expectations, and ensure mutual accountability throughout the duration of the relationship. Boundaries that go undefined frequently undermine the relationship by deflecting energy away from the learning focus of the relationship. When boundaries are too loose, they may be misinterpreted, and when they are too rigid, they incapacitate the relationship."⁶

Based on the current internship situation or on p[revious experiences, some of the following questions dealing with relational boundaries need to be discussed. First are questions of access. What kind of access do you have to the mentor? What is the limit? Does being a mentor mean you have unlimited access to him/her for the duration of the relationship? Do you need an appointment to meet with the mentor? What kind of telephone access do you have to the mentor? Will you need to go through a gatekeeper to get to the mentor?

Second are questions of sensitivity. Are there any issues that may have caused previous mentoring relationship to be disappointing that the mentor or you think would be wise to discuss before you start? What anxieties, uncertainties, uneasiness, and inadequacies does the mentor or you feel about this relationship?

It is important from the very first to establish some clear ground rules for the mentoring meetings and the mentoring relationship in general. These can include the following:

- Our meetings begin and end on time
- Responsibilities will be clearly explained
- Each of us will actively participate in the relationship
- Our communication is open, candid, and direct
- We will respect our differences and learn from them
- We will honor each other's expertise and experience
- We will safeguard confidentiality
- We will manage our time well
- We will put interruptions aside⁷

If clear boundaries are established at the first of the internship, then the mentor and the intern should respect these boundaries. In most cases, that is the truth. The mentor, not you, has the power and responsibility for establishing clear boundaries and communicating those boundaries. Nevertheless, even sometimes when all of the best preparation is taken, sooner or later, there is disappointment. Unfortunately, studies have estimated that as many as one out of four ministry internships have poor intern-supervisor relationships.

⁶ Zachary, 106.

⁷ Ibid., 103.