

# The Initial Mentoring Conversation

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Not every mentor is comfortable with or adept at relationship building. It is easy to get frustrated, because it takes time and may not produce immediate results. However, if you invest the time in the beginning to build a trusting relationship with your mentee, it will create a solid foundation that will enhance the learning that follows.

Here are some steps to guide you through your initial mentoring conversation:

1. **Take time to get to know each other.** What kind of information might you exchange to get to know each other better? What points of connection have you discovered in your conversation? What else do you want to learn about each other? Your mentoring partner doesn't need to know everything that ever happened to you, but needs to understand who you are as a person, your context and your past experiences. You might want to talk about your experiences as a translator in your language program or as a translation consultant.
2. **Talk about mentoring.** Share your previous mentoring experiences with your mentoring partner, i.e. your personal stories about individuals who had a profound impact on your development and learning (from your mentoring constellation). What did you like about your experiences that you each want to carry forward into this relationship? You may have been in a mentoring relationship that was disappointing. You might want to share your story about that relationship in a way that keeps anonymity and confidentiality intact but allows you to consider what went wrong and why. Apply those lessons learned to your new relationship. Ask your mentee why he or she chose you as a mentor.
3. **Discuss your personal** (e.g. MBTI, StrengthsFinder, etc.), **communication, and learning styles** so you gain additional insights about each other. How might each other's styles affect the learning that goes on in the mentoring relationship? *(For example, Kim is a pretty easygoing person and takes things as they come. She is not a worrier and is very accepting. Mark might tell his mentor that he has taken the MBTI (Myers-Briggs) and that he is an ISTJ (one of sixteen Myers-Briggs personality*

*types) and that pretty much is how he operates. He likes structure, is not into “touchy-feely,” and likes to tie up loose ends and therefore prefers to work on one goal at a time).*

4. **Articulate your learning and development goals.** Why do you want to engage in this relationship? What learning goals would you like to reach? Your translation consultant growth plan may be useful for identifying areas you would like to focus on.
  
5. **Determine relationship needs and expectations.** An honest discussion about expectations for the relationship is critical. This means explicitly asking your mentoring partner what he or she wants, needs, and expects out of the relationship and stating exactly what you want, need, and expect as well. Putting these on the table and discussing them is essential to arrive at consensus about what is realistic and what isn't. This ensures that both parties are satisfied with the relationship. *(For example, if you have the expectation that a mentor should be a friend and confidant, you need to say so. It's better early on to know whether or not your mentor is comfortable with this. If you find out that he or she isn't comfortable, that doesn't mean you have to end the relationship. It does mean that you two can discuss this and determine how you can work together given that expectation.)*
  
6. **Candidly share your personal assumptions and limitations.** What assumptions do you hold about each other and your relationship? What are you each willing and capable of contributing to the relationship? What limitations do you each bring to the relationship? Instead of focusing on the relationship as you did above, now you focus on *personal mentoring* assumptions, specifically the assumptions you hold about your role and the role of your mentor.

*(Example: Marisa assumes that Howard, her mentor, will be a sounding board and help her get through her day-to-day challenges, provide just-in-time answers to her questions, and introduce her to his network. Howard assumes that his role as a mentor is to be a guide. In that role he is to ask questions to help Marisa find her own answers, focus on the big picture, and support her in reaching her development goals and learning how to access the right people. Unless Marisa and Howard talk openly and frankly about these assumptions, Marisa will be looking for quick fixes, expecting answers, and 24/7 access to her mentor.)*

Also, talk about your personal limitations in the relationship and find out about those of your mentoring partner. Each of us has limitations, whether personal, time-related, work-related, or physical. It is important to be up-front about any limitation that may affect the mentoring relationship.

At this point, you have laid the groundwork for your mentoring relationship by meeting with your mentor or mentee, learning more about each other, and talking about what you desire to accomplish. You have discussed mutual expectations and explored some initial opportunities for learning. With the relationship preparation work completed, you are ready to take the next step: building a foundation for your mentoring relationship to grow and flourish. The next phase of the relationship requires some negotiating with your mentoring partner to establish agreements (phase 2).