

# MENTORING EXCELLENCE

## Pocket Toolkit #4



### ➔ Accountability Strategies and Checklists

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## **Learning Is the Purpose, Process, and Product of Mentoring**

Mentors and Mentees are mutually accountable for the learning that takes place in a mentoring partnership. The success of the learning depends on the ability to build and maintain a strong collaborative relationship and set goals. Goals frame the work of the relationship by focusing the learning. Goal setting requires planning, structure, and discipline. Accountability agreements assure that goals are met, the relationship stays on track, and that problems are addressed before they become stumbling blocks.

This pocket toolkit provides multiple strategies and checklists to guide your goal setting process and assist you in shaping broad starter goals into robust SMART goals. The strategies and checklists for communication, relationships and meetings in this toolkit will start you off on the right foot towards mutual accountability.

## The Power of Goals

Well-defined goals drive the learning in a mentoring relationship. If goals are too broad, it is hard to know where to focus time and attention. If goals are too tactical—merely tasks and “to dos”—chances are that the outcome will be less than satisfactory.

Formulating goals is an iterative process that requires time and good conversation between Mentor and Mentee. The Mentee might begin with “starter goals”—broadly stated and unfocused goals that highlight a general area. Good conversation helps move the goals from the general to the more specific and, once articulated, should accelerate and enhance the professional or personal development of the Mentee.

Successful mentoring partners engage in a collaborative, robust goal-setting process and then create a game plan for how to achieve those goals.

## Strategies for a Goal-Setting Conversation

- Talk about the Mentee's learning needs, career aspirations, and gaps in current skill sets.
- Good conversation between mentoring partners surfaces the Mentee's "starter" goals.
  - Ask your Mentee to describe his or her career vision, hopes, and dreams, and to articulate broad learning goals and why they are important.
  - What learning goals would align with his or her vision of the future?
  - What goals would help develop the skill sets of the Mentee ("Do" goals) and what goals would help the Mentee's personal development ("Be" goals)?

## Do-Be Goals Checklists

### “Do” Goals

Short-term, measurable, observable. They involve:

- ☐ Knowledge
- ☐ Skills
- ☐ Job functions
- ☐ Performance
- ☐ Examples:
  - ☐ Professional competencies
  - ☐ Computer skills
  - ☐ Processes
  - ☐ Conflict management
  - ☐ Communication skills

### “Be” Goals

Often invisible, intangible, and harder to measure. They involve:

- ☐ Character
- ☐ Internal capacity
- ☐ Development
- ☐ Examples:
  - ☐ Managing emotions
  - ☐ Using reflection
  - ☐ Being assertive
  - ☐ Becoming more empathetic
  - ☐ Reading people more effectively

## Strategies for SMART Goals

Goal formulation is one of the hardest tasks for mentoring partners.

- Carve out adequate time to talk about:
  - The Mentee's perceived learning needs, strengths, and challenges
  - The current and future needs of the organization and where there is alignment between the Mentee's needs and the organization's
  - "Do" goals and "be" goals
- Learning goals need to be focused, relevant, and challenging enough to warrant the time and attention of both Mentor and Mentee.
- Convert starter goals into SMART goals.
- A SMART goal is specific, measurable, action-oriented, realistic, and timely.
  - It can be stated in one sentence or formatted as multiple statements.
  - Substance is more important than form.
  - The goal should be clear, concise, specific, and comprehensive enough to capture the five requirements of a SMART goal.
- Once mentoring partners convert their starter goals into SMART goals, it is time to invest time and energy in achieving them.

## SMART Goals Deconstructed

- **Specific:** If it isn't specific enough, it is hard to focus the learning.
  - *Not specific:* To learn what it takes to be a better manager.
  - *Specific:* To increase my competency in developing and managing my department's budget.
- **Measurable:** If it isn't measurable, it's hard to know if you have accomplished it.
  - *Not measurable:* To better balance work and family life.
  - *Measurable:* To be able to spend at least three weekday meals with my family.
- **Action-oriented:** If it isn't action-oriented, it may not lead to visible, tangible results.
  - *Not action-oriented:* To get the staff to be more responsible.
  - *Action-oriented:* To implement a new staff development program this year.
- **Realistic:** If it isn't realistic, it is difficult to accomplish, and both partners may lose enthusiasm for the effort.
  - *Not realistic:* To double our customer orders.
  - *Realistic:* To increase productivity by 20%.
- **Timely:** If it isn't timely, it may be difficult to maintain momentum.
  - *Not timely:* To be promoted to senior manager in five years.
  - *Timely:* To create a two-year leadership development plan that prepares me for my next promotion.

## SMART Goal Checklist

SMART goals are specific, measurable, action-oriented, realistic, and timely. When you have successfully articulated a SMART goal, you should be able to answer each of the questions below affirmatively.

Question	Yes/No
Is the goal clearly anchored in the future?	
Is the goal realistic?	
Will the goal be challenging?	
Will this goal require the Mentee to make a personal investment of time, energy, and effort?	
Will this goal contribute to the Mentee's growth and development?	
Does this goal require constructive feedback and candid conversation?	
Is this goal achievable within the time frame of this relationship?	
Will the Mentee feel a sense of pride and satisfaction when this goal is achieved?	
Is this goal in the Mentee's best professional or personal interest and/or in the best interests of the Mentee's organization?	

## The Power of Accountability

While setting goals is the first and most important step to achieving accountability, there are other actions you can take to make your relationship successful. Mentoring partners need to clarify mutual expectations, define roles and responsibilities, establish working agreements, monitor progress, and measure results. Ongoing feedback must be built into meetings to keep the relationship on track. Throughout your discussions, avoid accountability missteps by continuously clarifying your understandings and getting buy-in from your mentoring partner on any agreements you make.

Without accountability, even the best partnership can be upended. Small stumbling blocks can undermine trust and erode confidence.

## The Case for Accountability

- Lack of commitment to the relationship
  - Leads to increased sense of vulnerability and withholding
  - Leads to posturing and lack of safety
- Lack of clear agreements
  - Leads to misunderstandings and confusion
  - Raises the likelihood of false starts and mistakes
- Lack of buy-in to mentoring agreements
  - Leads to lack of energy and enthusiasm for the relationship and goal attainment
  - Increases the likelihood of cancelled meetings
- Lack of candid discussion and feedback
  - Leads to artificial harmony
  - Lowers quality, standards, and learning
  - Creates disappointment and increases disengagement

## Strategies for Accountability

- ☐ From time to time, revisit the job descriptions, responsibilities, and relationship agreements to see if everyone is still on track.
- ☐ Establish a regular pattern of formal and informal contact.
- ☐ Expect the relationship to take time to develop, but make sure it is moving in the right direction.
- ☐ Periodically, ask yourself “What am I learning from this experience?”
- ☐ Monitor the learning level to see that it is satisfying for both parties and meets mutual expectations.
- ☐ Be on the lookout for new learning opportunities.
- ☐ Provide regular feedback to your mentoring partner.
- ☐ Give the relationship space when needed.
- ☐ Expect to make mid-course corrections.

## Communication Checklist

The frequency, content, and manner in which you and your mentoring partner communicate will determine your success. Be SMART.

<b>Shared Meaning</b>	Partners truly understand the other's meaning and don't rely on surface conversation. They explore what is said and what is NOT said and routinely check for understanding to avoid making assumptions.
<b>Authenticity</b>	Partners are candid and speak their mind. They raise concerns and red flags when they appear, even if the conversation is difficult.
<b>Respect</b>	Partners establish an open, honest, trusting relationship, honoring each other's point of view regardless of position.
<b>Trust</b>	Partners work at building and maintaining a trusting relationship and protect the confidentiality agreements they establish between them. They assume good intention in the other in whatever is communicated.

SMART communication promotes vibrant and thriving interactions that positively influence the mentoring relationship.

## Relationship Checklist

Mutual accountability begins with a candid and open conversation about the “softer” issues in a mentoring relationship: ground rules, confidentiality, boundary setting, and hot buttons. Discussion of these four topics builds trust and avoids stumbling blocks.

<b>Ground Rules</b>	Establish norms or guidelines to manage mutual expectations and minimize the likelihood of problems developing. Examples include: how often, when, and where you will meet; dealing with interruptions; how meeting cancellations will be handled; meeting notes and documentation; how to raise concerns and give feedback to each other.
<b>Confidentiality</b>	Although often uncomfortable, mentoring partners should hold a frank conversation about confidentiality. Once it is breached, trust is hard to restore. Discuss what confidentiality means to you. Examples include: what we talk about stays between us; we can share good things with others; Mentor won't speak to Mentee's supervisor without advance notice or permission.
<b>Boundary Setting</b>	Mentoring partners talk about the limits of the relationship and what they are willing to commit to in terms of time and topics. Examples include: availability of the Mentor, the degree of advocacy; discussion of personal issues and problems; evening and weekend contact; not to engage in gossip about colleagues.
<b>Hot Buttons</b>	Mentoring partners talk about those things that personally irk them. By sharing hot buttons early in the relationship, they avoid pushing them. Examples include: being late; canceling at the last minute; coming unprepared; not following through with a commitment; multitasking during a mentoring meeting.

## Meetings Checklist

Mentoring meetings are more effective when mentoring partners manage their time and monitor it.

- ☐ Use an agenda to plan and frame your meetings.
- ☐ Take time to invest in the relationship *and* work on goals.
- ☐ Maintain a balance between long-term development issues and short-term, day-to-day issues.
- ☐ Build routine check-ins into your meeting calendar to keep from getting off track.

Ask open-ended questions
"How's it going?"
"How are we doing?"
"What do you need more of from me?"
"How can I help?"

- ☐ Always have a mentoring meeting scheduled on the calendar. Reschedule meetings instead of canceling them. When large gaps of time occur between mentoring meetings it threatens the continuity of conversation and slows down the momentum of achieving goals.

## Mentoring Partnership Checklist

Complete this checklist periodically throughout your relationship to make sure your relationship stays on track and trust remains high. Discuss your results and decide what you can do to improve your relationship.

	Never	Some- times	Most of the time	Always
We meet regularly.				
We do a good job of communicating schedule changes that may affect mentoring meetings.				
We notify one another if we cannot follow up or honor our commitments to each other.				
We eliminate outside influences and distractions when we meet.				
We check out our assumptions.				
Our communication is clear and misunderstandings are infrequent.				
We check in with each other to make sure that we stay on track with the learning goals.				
We provide feedback regularly and make sure that it is two-way.				
Our meetings are relevant, focused, and meaningful.				
We acknowledge and address conflict when it occurs.				
We are conscientious about safeguarding confidentiality.				

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#### Other Toolkits

**Toolkit #1** Strategies and Checklists for Mentors

**Toolkit #2** Feedback and Facilitation for Mentors

**Toolkit #3** Strategies for Mentees

**Toolkit #5** Mentoring Across Generations

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