

Long Distance Mentoring Guidelines for Success

By Adele B. Lynn

Mentoring across miles or even oceans, can create some unique challenges that can kill a mentoring relationship if special care isn't taken. Adele B. Lynn, of Lynn Learning Labs, suggests the following ideas for generating more success in these long distance mentoring relationships.

1. The phone is your friend. Most of the mentoring in long distance relationships takes place via telephone. Take the time to develop a phone language that will produce fruitful exchange with your mentor / mentee. Allow some time to establish the relationship during the phone conversation. It's easier to sound rushed when using the telephone. Also, be aware of phone manners that could suggest that you are not paying attention - such as keys clicking in the background.
2. In a face to face mentoring encounter, the mentor and mentee have the benefit of extracting meaning from the rich information exchanged through non- verbal communication. In long distance mentoring relationships, more active listening is needed on the part of both mentor and mentee because the visuals of body language are missing. Ask questions, clarify information, but more importantly clarify feelings. How does the mentee feel about a particular strategy or alternative?
3. Email is great. It is a fabulous way to communicate with a mentor / mentee. However, our normal use of e mail is for the exchange of information. Information exchange is an important portion of mentoring, and I encourage you to make it a habit to send your mentor / mentee information that he /she will find helpful. However, true mentoring is deeper than information exchange. Mutual respect, honor, and a sense of caring must also be conveyed in order for your mentoring relationships to prove most fruitful.

4. The tone of your e mail messages is critical to conveying the intangible feelings that mentoring must produce in order for the relationship to flourish. Take extra time to assess your e mail messages to determine if they allow for this more subtle exchange of feelings along with your information.
5. Set up regular telephone meetings. Just as in face to face mentoring, it is important to establish a schedule for your mentoring activities. In a long distance relationship, establishing a routine schedule is even more important because the mentor and mentee don't have the luxury of running into one another in the elevator and reminding each other that it's time to get together.
6. Occasional face to face meetings when possible is highly suggested. If possible, it would be very worthwhile to launch the mentoring relationship in a face to face meeting. Use this face to face time to get to know one another and to discuss the mentoring objectives.
7. Respect time differences if your long distance relationship takes you to different time zones. Encourage convenience so that the relationship isn't a burden.
8. Experiment with technology. Inexpensive video cameras allow for face to face conversations via the Internet. One company, purchase video cameras for each participant and video conversation became the norm. As this technology becomes more available, long distance mentoring will no longer be a hurdle.
9. Send messages via travelers. Maybe you aren't going to be at the home office this week where your mentee/mentor works, but a colleague is going to be there. Ask your colleague to stop by and say hello to your mentee/mentor. Perhaps you could send along a book, video tape or other item of significance to your mentoring relationship. This demonstrates that you are thinking about and valuing the relationship.
10. Have fun. Approach your mentoring as something that you will enjoy and gain from and all of a sudden the miles will disappear.

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