

How to Set Expectations and Manage Boundaries

Introduction

Mentoring relationships thrive when both parties have a clear understanding of their roles and expectations. Without a mutual agreement on how to work together, misunderstandings may arise, potentially leading to frustration and dissatisfaction. To prevent this, it's essential to discuss and set realistic expectations and boundaries early on, particularly during Phase 1 of the Mentoring programme. This process ensures that both the mentor and mentee are on the same page regarding what they can expect from each other and what boundaries will be in place.

Key considerations for setting expectations

Before your first meeting, reflect on the following questions to help clarify your expectations:

- What does mentoring mean to me?
 - Consider your personal definition of mentoring and what you hope to achieve through this relationship.
- What are my goals for this mentoring relationship?
 - Identify specific outcomes you would like to achieve as a result of the mentorship.
- What boundaries need to be established?
 - Think about any personal or professional limits that should be respected, such as time constraints or topics that are off-limits.
- When and how often should we meet?
 - Decide on a schedule that works for both of you, including the frequency and duration of your meetings.
- How will we hold ourselves accountable?
 - Discuss how you will ensure that both parties remain committed and engaged throughout the relationship.

Examples of realistic expectations

During your initial meetings in Phase 1, you and your mentoring partner should discuss your thoughts on the above questions and agree on a set of realistic expectations. Here are some examples:

- Confidentiality: Both parties agree to keep all discussions confidential.
- Commitment: Meet for at least two hours per month and honour all scheduled meetings.
- Respect for differences: Acknowledge and celebrate each other's differences, without any judgments.
- Full attention: Give your mentoring partner your undivided attention during meetings.
- Openness and honesty: Be transparent and truthful in all communications.
- Communication: be proactive in messaging and responding to each other in agreed-upon time periods.

Specific expectations for mentees and mentors

In addition to the shared expectations, there are certain roles and responsibilities specific to mentees and mentors:

Mentees will:

- Lead the relationship, taking responsibility for setting agendas and driving the direction.
- Be open to guidance from their mentor, reflect on their feedback, and decide what to implement.

Mentees will not:

- Ask their mentor for money.
- Be defensive when receiving constructive feedback.

Mentors will:

- Practice active listening and provide a supportive environment.
- Serve as a sounding board, offering guidance without dictating decisions or giving answers.

Mentors will not:

- Tell their mentee what to do or make decisions for them.
- Charge money for their mentoring support.

Establishing and managing boundaries

Discussing boundaries is another essential step during Phase 1. Boundaries help define the limits of your mentoring relationship, ensuring that both parties feel comfortable and respected. Here are some considerations:

- **Personal preferences:** Discuss any topics you prefer not to cover, or times when you are unavailable, such as weekends or after-hours.
- **Response times:** For example, you might agree that you will not respond to messages from Friday 5 PM until Monday 9 AM, or replies will be no later than two working days.
- **Professional vs. personal boundaries:** While some mentoring relationships may evolve into friendships, it's essential to remember that this is primarily a professional relationship. Maintain appropriate professional boundaries.
- **Cultural sensitivity:** Recognise that boundaries can be influenced by cultural differences. Have an open dialogue about these differences and agree to respect each other's boundaries.

Ongoing boundary management

Boundaries are not static; they may evolve as you get to know each other better. It's important to revisit and discuss boundaries throughout the mentoring relationship to ensure they continue to meet both of your needs.

Conclusion

Setting clear expectations and boundaries is the foundation of a successful mentoring relationship. By engaging in open and honest discussions early on, both mentors and mentees can create a strong, mutually beneficial relationship that respects individual needs and goals.

As the relationship evolves, it's essential to revisit these expectations and boundaries to ensure they continue to serve both parties well. Through ongoing communication, mutual respect, and a commitment to the process, the mentoring relationship can flourish, leading to meaningful personal and professional growth for both mentor and mentee.