



Eight Mentoring Myths Busted

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Think about a mentoring relationship and you probably imagine the stereotype of an older mentor advising a younger professional, with just the mentee benefiting from the interaction. But that's just not so.

As more companies and organizations, including the IEEE, offer mentoring programs, misconceptions continue to exist about the mentoring relationship. Here are eight of them.

MYTH 1: Mentoring is a one-way street.

Both people can learn from each other's strengths and experiences. As a mentor, you can learn something new, too. Your protégé's perspective may make you think about things differently. A good mentoring partnership is always a two-way relationship.

MYTH 2: A mentoring relationship can only be face-to-face.

Many mentees want to meet with their mentors in person. That's possible if the two work in the same area, or when one travels for business and is in a mutually convenient place to meet. But face-to-face meetings may be impossible when, for example, mentoring partners live in different countries. Some mentees even prefer a mentor

from another country in order to gain new perspectives, knowing the opportunity to meet face-to-face will be rare.

It's important for the two parties to establish ground rules for communicating. That includes discussing whether they will connect via e-mail or phone and, if possible, meet in person. Meeting times should be confirmed in advance, as well as the topics to be discussed.

MYTH 3: Mentoring is a time-consuming process.

Each mentoring relationship is unique, and so is the time and energy that goes into it. The amount of time depends on the mentor and protégé agreeing on the purpose and focus of their relationship. The IEEE's Mentoring Connection—a program that connects young professionals

and recent grads with IEEE members willing to guide them in their professional development—recommends spending at least two hours each month. As one participant says, "The more you put into the partnership, the more you get back."

MYTH 4: Expectations are the same for everyone.

Although many mentoring partners share similar reasons for having such a relationship—for personal or professional growth—their individual expectations vary. Some mentors want to give back to their profession by sharing their knowledge and experiences with their partner. Others want to learn about industry trends and cutting edge applications from their mentees.

MYTH 5: Mentors must be older.

Age should not qualify or disqualify someone from being a mentor. Mentors should be chosen for their understanding, skill, and capacity to share what they know. Often, recent graduates are looking for mentors who are also recent graduates. The key to finding the best mentors is for mentees to select them based on their own professional development needs.

MYTH 6: Developing a mentoring relationship is complicated.

The relationship is only as complicated as one makes it. The Web-based IEEE Mentoring Connection makes it easier to have meaningful relationships because it uses a step-by-step process to help match mentees with mentors. The program also provides a variety of resources to guide the mentoring partners. For example, partners can communicate through the program's discussion board or review mentoring guidelines and resources at its Web site.

MYTH 7: You need only one mentor at a time.

Each mentor brings unique knowledge to the mentee, so having more than one can offer greater learning experiences. However, it can be difficult to set expectations for each relationship unless each mentor has

been chosen for a specific area of development. That's why it's important for mentees to openly share their objectives with their mentors. The IEEE asks that each mentor have no more than two mentoring partnerships at any one time.

MYTH 8: Mentoring relationships happen on their own.

The IEEE Mentoring Connection helps mentees select their mentors from a database of professionals, such as engineering professors, project managers, and research directors who have volunteered to participate in the program. It's up to the mentees to find someone they will respect and trust to help them reach their objectives.

IEEE members in the program have a wide range of knowledge and technical and professional expertise. Once the partnership is under way and working, it's up to the partners to make the relationship blossom.

MORE ON MENTORING The IEEE Mentoring Connection was launched in 2006 and is open to all members above student grade. The Web-based program connects young professionals and recent graduates with IEEE members willing to devote the time needed to advise mentees in their professional growth.

As of mid 2007, more than 200 mentoring partnerships have been established.

Mentors need to commit at least two hours a month to the one-on-one partnership, which lasts for a year. Communication with the mentee can be by phone, by e-mail, or in person.

Prospective mentors complete an application that asks for a short biography, including technical background, which is used to create an online mentor profile. Each mentee is asked to choose a mentor based on the contents of the profiles.

The Mentoring Connection program's online resources include an agreement document the partners fill out to clarify their expectations, short-term and final evaluation forms, and a mentor's guide.

For more information, visit <http://www.ieee.org/mentoring>.