

Getting to Know You: Conversation Starters for Mentors and Mentees

Getting a mentoring relationship started on solid footing requires engaging in collaborative conversation. So, how do you start the conversation? Often, the best way to get started is just to begin.

You begin by inviting your mentoring partner into conversation by asking questions that motivate them to talk about themselves. As you and your mentoring partner learn more about each other, you develop points of connection that lay the foundation for a trusting and authentic learning relationship.

Begin By Asking Your Mentor . . .

- Who inspired you to be a leader?
- What was the career path that led you to your current position?
- What challenges have you faced in your career?
- What lessons have you learned from your successes and failures?
- What do you do for your own growth and development?

Begin by Asking Your Mentee . . .

- What makes you you?
- What values drive your actions?
- What life experiences have influenced you the most?
- What is your strongest attribute?
- What unique skills and competencies do you possess?

What Else Are You Interested in Learning About Your Mentoring Partner?

Before you meet your mentoring partner for the first time, think about whether these conversation starter questions are your questions. If not, perhaps they will suggest other questions you might consider.

Active Listening is a Must!

Asking the right questions at the beginning of a mentoring relationship is a good start but it won't suffice unless you are prepared to actively listen to your mentoring partner's response.

- Make sure that your body language and facial expressions convey that you are listening.
- Use eye contact.
- Listen for feelings like confusion, disappointment, and frustration.
- Listen for attitudes and values.
- Be aware of your own emotional response to what is said.
- Listen for the basic idea or main point.
- Listen for the underlying meaning.
- Pay attention and concentrate.
- Do not interrupt unless necessary; don't let others interrupt.
- Check for understanding.
- Be genuinely curious about the answers to the questions you are asking.
- Show sincere interest in learning about the other person.

Remember: Getting to know your mentoring partner is more than learning a name, rank, serial number and the facts of a resume. We each bring who we are to what we do. Unless we develop an honest and open relationship with a mentoring partner, we never get to know who they truly are. It begins and continues with conversation.