



IRISH EXECUTIVE MENTORING PROGRAM

## GETTING STARTED GUIDE

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## GETTING STARTED

This Getting Started Guide is designed to help you identify the key skills you'll need to cultivate to be a great mentor to your partner.

The Guide itself is divided into three sections:



You can also connect with other IEMP mentors to ask and answer questions – and make suggestions for improvements to this guide on our community site.

## PREPARING TO MENTOR

As with anything, solid preparation for a mentoring relationship will significantly increase the likelihood of success. Understanding your role in the relationship, the skills you will need to hone and thinking through your expectations for the experience are key to getting off to a great start.



### KNOW YOUR ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

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What is the role of a mentor?

It can mean a lot of things, but in a professional setting your job is to help your protégé achieve the goals they have identified that will help them move their career forward. Your role is to:

- Support and guide without offering easy answers
  - Challenge and offer hard truths without judging
  - Help your protégé draw out the knowledge you have that's most likely to help them succeed
- Guide your protégé to develop their own conclusions
  - Be a powerful listener who can mirror back what you have heard from your protégé

You will need to define these things for yourself to approach your new partnership with a strong foundation. A simple way to do this is to think about how a mentor affected your own career. Reflect on the things that were most memorable about that relationship. Chances are that will echo some of the qualities described above and provide a good model for the role you are going to play in this partnership.

#### Reflect on your overall skills, experience, and knowledge

Figure out how your skill set fits into the partnership and how it could help your protégé:

- Think through your career path – why have you succeeded?
- Identify specific challenges you have faced in your career – how did you overcome them?
- Think about why you became a mentor – did you have a great mentor yourself, or do you wish you had?
- What is the one thing you wish you had gotten great guidance on?
- Looking back, what is the advice you would have wanted to receive?

- Examine critical junctures in your career. How did you make decisions that helped you navigate your next steps?

### Define your expectations

Take a bit of time to think through what you expect from your protégé:

- What is important to you? (e.g., timeliness, follow up, etc)
- What do you expect to gain from your time spent with your protégé? (e.g., a new contact, a sense of giving back, knowledge of a new field, a friend, etc.)

Jot this down and share it with your protégé. Ask your protégé what their expectations are of you. A discussion to align expectations at the beginning of the relationship can prevent misunderstandings that can damage the partnership. Clarity on this topic can serve as a guide for your relationship, and you might be surprised by the new things you have learned when you reflect back on this a few months down the line.

## DEVELOP EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Think about the communication skills you will need to hone to effectively connect with your protégé. Remember that the partnership should be reciprocal and you should meet your protégé halfway, rather than expecting them to operate on your terms alone.

### Active listening

In our day-to-day jobs we are often encouraged to have an opinion on everything, and to express that opinion openly. But as a mentor, your job is to listen. Ideally, you should let your protégé do 80% of the talking, while you stay present and engaged and keep an ear out for opportunities to dig deeper or support your protégé as they develop their plan to succeed.

- Remember the things they say, making sure not to interrupt or think ahead to a solution.
- If you are face-to-face or using video conferencing technology (like Skype), pay attention to your nonverbal cues and body language so that your protégé knows they have your full attention.
- Then, try to paraphrase what is been said before moving on with the discussion.

Practicing effective listening can also help you “find the real question” when talking to your protégé. They may bring up a question that is really driven by a deeper issue.

- One of your key roles is to listen carefully, ask questions and leave room for an answer, and try to dig deeper to see what is really at work.

- Once you have uncovered the right question, you can have the biggest impact by addressing the right issue. For example, your protégé might bring up a time management problem and ask you how they can become more organized and efficient.
- But if you ask a few questions, you might figure out together that the crux of the issue is with your protégé's "managing up" skills, and you can help them improve the way they relate to their boss or supervisor.

## Giving feedback

The mentor/protégé partnership exists to help the protégé improve their performance and effectiveness, so a truly effective mentor cannot just be a friend or sounding board. Many times your protégé will approach you with an issue or situation that requires respectful, honest feedback and a certain level of candor.

These are the times you can help the most. Your relationship with your protégé is very different from that with a direct report within your organization. You should practice constructively raising hard truths and holding your protégé accountable when they fall short for lack of effort or engagement, while still recognizing their achievements and strengths.

Here are some helpful techniques for giving feedback without giving the answers, and most of all, staying constructive and positive as you do so:

- Establish a basic level of trust. This informs your protégé you are invested in their success, and that your feedback is meant to support them and push them forward – not to criticize or discourage.
- Ask your protégé if they want feedback. Explain that you have an observation that you would like to share, and check in to see if your protégé will be receptive to hear your perspective.
- Offer feedback early and often. If your protégé is used to getting feedback they will be better prepared to process hard truths as you dig deeper into the relationship.
- Stay supportive. Before you address one of your protégé's weaknesses, begin by acknowledging one of their strengths or the things they did well in the situation.
- Be specific. Tell your protégé the concrete areas that need to be improved, rather than speaking in generalities.
- Keep it simple. Offering too much feedback at once can be discouraging and overwhelming; you want your protégé to leave the conversation feeling like improvement is possible, and that there are manageable ways of getting there.

## Stay flexible

While accountability is important, always remember that the work world is a dynamic environment. Things change rapidly; for example, your protégé might be relocated in the middle of the partnership cycle, and their business goals could change accordingly.

In fact, any dramatic change in their world is likely to influence the partnership, and your guidance will become that much more valuable. Remaining flexible and open with your protégé, and leaving the door open for new topics, will allow them to feel more comfortable coming to you if an abrupt change happens.

## VALUE DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

You and your protégé have been matched for many specific, relevant reasons. However, no matter how well reasoned the match, the two of you will undoubtedly be different in many ways and will hold different points of view. A key success factor in your relationship will be your ability to integrate these differences into the fabric of your relationship.

Similarities in race, gender, culture, values, backgrounds, beliefs, and work styles do not guarantee a successful partnership. Likewise, differences in these areas do not preclude a successful, meaningful relationship. When both partners are willing to try to understand the other person's experiences and perspectives, to look at the world through the other's eyes, the relationship can be enriched by these differences. In fact, research indicates that partnerships between diverse people often lead to significant growth for both mentee and mentor. The key is to be aware of and appreciate the perspective of others.

Remember, an effective partner:

- Avoids stereotyping
- Acknowledges biases that may have gone unrecognized
- Refrains from judging others on the basis of life experiences
- Is candid regarding issues of difference

## DEVELOPING A PLAN

As you get started, you will need to work with your protégé to set a tone for meetings and interactions, drawing on your own reflections around communication and your own expectations for the relationship.

### GUIDELINES FOR GETTING STARTED WITH THE PARTNERSHIP

While it is the protégés responsibility to drive the mentoring relationship, we encourage you to consider how your mentoring style fits with your partner’s personality, learning style and communication preferences.

#### Setting a first meeting agenda

Your protégé should come prepared to the first meeting with an initial agenda; let them take the reins on this.

Your first meeting agenda that should answer the following questions:

- What are our goals for the partnership?
- How often will we meet, and how will we communicate?
- How will we measure progress?
- When are we meeting next, and what are we each doing in the interim?

#### Establishing trust

One of the most powerful things about a confidential mentoring relationship is the ability for your protégé to openly share with you what they might hold back with an internal supervisor or peer. While a steady rapport can build quickly, trust often takes time, so it’s crucial to start building mutual trust and respect from the very first conversation.

During the meeting, before you transition to setting clear objectives about goals and the partnership process, take some time to get to know your protégé and allow them a chance to get to know you. You can talk about your own experiences and share something personal like a favorite hobby or hidden talent. You can also talk through questions that are more relevant to the partnership, but also compliment the “getting to know you process.” Some simple examples include:

- Have you worked with a mentor in the past?
- What do you want to get out of this partnership?
- What are some specific goals you want to work on?
- How do you think we can measure success?



Here are a few techniques to keep in mind during this discussion that can help you establish trust right off the bat with your protégé:

- Show credibility. Introduce yourself by talking about your background and presenting your credentials to show your protégé that you are knowledgeable and have achieved the things they're striving for — but be sure to keep it balanced by addressing some challenges and failures from your own career path.
- Remember to guide and motivate, not direct them or tell your protégé what to do.
- Practice empathy, honesty, and active listening.
- Over time, keep your commitments to your protégé, and be consistent and reliable.
- Stay open to your protégé's ideas and allow them to steer the partnership more often than not.
- Provide positive, constructive feedback.
- Maintain confidentiality within the partnership.

### Agree to a pattern

During your first meeting, work with your protégé to establish and agree on a set pattern for subsequent meetings.

Following this basic framework should help get your mentoring partnership off to a solid start — here are some things to consider:

- **Logistics.** Establish a form of contact, i.e. phone, Skype, etc. Let your partner take the lead to figure out what's most comfortable.
- **Frequency/Duration.** How often should meetings take place, and for how long? Each relationship will find its own rhythm based on the nature of the protégé's goals, and both partners' availability. A good starting point is to meet for about an hour once a month, but many mentoring pairs meet more often, and others meet less frequently. You and your protégé will ultimately settle on the frequency and duration that fits your needs and allows for valuable progress.
- **Cancellations/Rescheduling.** You should agree on how much advance notice is expected when canceling or rescheduling a meeting. In the event of cancellation, we recommend that the canceling party takes ownership for booking the next meeting. This means that while we generally look to the protégé to drive the schedule, if you cancel a meeting, you should also take the initiative to reschedule.
- **Accountability.** At the close of each meeting, there should be some mutual agreement about the work you plan to check in on at the next meeting. Do you want to end each meeting with a clear, structured homework assignment (for one or both parties)? If so, structure your meetings to work that in. If you'd rather take a looser approach, that's ok too, but make sure to check in with your protégé.

- **Checkpoints.** When will you review progress? Make sure you and your protégé agree on how often to check in on specific goals and objectives. Remember that the frequency of checkpoints may vary based on the goal, and that you'll want to leave sufficient time to begin working together before assessing progress on initial objectives.
- **Evaluation.** How will you and your protégé measure success? Again, this may vary based on the goal, but you should agree to some basic criteria for the first set of goals. It helps to start with an initial benchmark to make sure you're still on the right track to completing the objective. Let your protégé identify this and make sure to write it down, as well as any action plans for either side. Once you've reached the first benchmark it'll help you determine how close you are to your protégé's goal and what the next steps might be.

(**Note:** As you achieve goals, remember to be open to changes in the partnership or in your protégé's situation. Your protégé might achieve a goal and springboard off to a related goal that neither of you thought of at the beginning of the partnership. They might also want to modify an existing goal or objective. Stay adaptable.)

## TARGET MEETING OUTCOMES

You want to walk out of your first meeting with a solid plan — even if it is just a plan to flesh out a first goal, identify the resources you'll use together to make it happen, and set a firm deadline.

For subsequent meetings, we recommend starting with a recap of your last meeting, then getting an update from your protégé on any progress they've made. Discuss any challenges that have come up or that they are still working on, and identify some new steps to take before the next meeting.

Finally, make sure you and your protégé both have a clear idea of what progress you hope to make next and how you're working together to achieve it.

## CONFIDENTIALITY – A FINAL NOTE

While a written agreement is not always necessary, you and your protégé should mutually agree upon a level of confidentiality during your time together. Any information that your protégé shares within the partnership stays within the partnership, and should not be shared with anyone outside of IEMP. Don't be afraid to take the lead here, and if any additional agreements need to be established down the line, you as the mentor should raise that point and make sure everyone is comfortable.

Rather than strike a formal agreement, you can lead off by saying, "I'm going to treat these meetings as confidential. Is there any additional agreement you think we need?"

Keeping to a strict confidentiality with your protégé will allow them to feel more secure and open within the partnership, and more likely to share their needs, thoughts, and feelings.

## ASSESSING YOURSELF

Most mentors are looking to develop their own skills and learn something new from each new partnership they engage in. In order to achieve growth through each partnership it is important that mentors lay out their own goals, just as a protégé would, to measure progress as time progresses.

### ASSESS YOUR OWN PROGRESS

At the start of the partnership — especially if this is your first time in a mentoring role — you should define how to measure your own success, independent of your protégé's specific goals and objectives.

- What improvements do you want to see in yourself as a mentor?

Just as your protégé has done, set your own goals, objectives, and areas of growth; identify benchmarks; and decide on the frequency of checkpoints.

- Then, check in with yourself over the course of the partnership cycle.
- Think back on the expectations you laid out for yourself before beginning the partnership, and assess how close you are to meeting those expectations.

You might even think of new objectives as the partnership progresses and you find concrete areas of improvement.

### SOLICIT FEEDBACK

Beyond self-assessment, another way to measure your self-development is to simply solicit feedback from your protégé on your performance as a mentor. You will be providing feedback to your protégé on their growth and development. It can be very insightful for you to understand your effectiveness as a mentor by asking for feedback on the mentoring relationship itself.

We recommend that you and your protégé devote 5 to 10 minutes at the end of each meeting or activity to consider and discuss the following questions. (Both you and your protégé should offer their responses to these questions.)

- What did I observe or learn about myself during this meeting or activity?
- What did I observe or learn about you?

- What did we do well? What could we do differently in the future to improve our effectiveness and strengthen our partnership?
- What positive and developmental feedback do you have for me?
- If not already discussed, how will I apply the key learnings about the subject matter, your feedback, and myself into my work environment?

At the close of each partnership cycle, you should discuss your objectives with your protégé and ask them for an honest evaluation of your progress.

All of this new self-knowledge carries over to your next mentoring partnership, but it is even applicable in the workplace.

Remember that the mentoring partnership is mutually beneficial, and that the skills you develop from being a mentor — effective communication, reliability, trust and respect, giving positive feedback, constructive ways of approaching issues, etc. — can also help you grow as a business leader, manager, and employee.