

Communication Tools and Tips: How to Get the Most from a Mentor

- ◇ **Know your mentor's roles and responsibilities**
 - ✓ Formally: if s/he has agreed to be a mentor as part of a program, what are their official responsibilities?
 - ✓ Informally: what do they do and how can they help you?
- ◇ **Know when and how to approach a mentor ... know when and how *not* to approach a mentor**
 - ✓ E-mailing vs. visiting in person
 - In person is almost always better for faculty. *Go to their office hours*; that's what they're there for!
 - Friends and acquaintances may prefer email or telephone (find out what is best)
 - BIG differences between e-mailing your friends and e-mailing faculty and other mentors
 - Use correct grammar and spelling; capital letters and punctuation matter!
 - Choose a professional email address with your name for communicating with professors and internships or jobs
- ◇ **Introduce yourself to your mentor ... let him/her get to know you**
 - ✓ Consider sharing educational accomplishments, personal interests, significant milestones that have led to growth
 - ✓ Think of some things you'd like to know more about
 - For faculty, ask about their research
 - Share ideas about different approaches to something mentioned in class
 - Ask about your mentor's expertise
 - ✓ Have a clear statement of what you believe your mentor could do to help you
- ◇ **Be prepared for meetings**
 - ✓ Go out of your way to meet them on their terms - when it is most convenient for them
 - ✓ Know what you want out of the meeting and communicate that to your mentor
 - ✓ Be honest
 - ✓ Be yourself (you don't have to be a genius)
 - ✓ Be observant
 - ✓ Listen actively and take notes
 - ✓ Share problems you believe might cause you to fail to meet your objectives (past, present, or future), and ask for suggestions.
- ◇ **Be willing to depart from your comfort zone and open to learning new things**
 - ✓ Recognize that bringing out different behaviors leads to greater self discovery and understanding of what works for various people
- ◇ **Be open to getting feedback**
 - ✓ Feedback helps us learn/grow
 - ✓ Initiate conversations that will give you this much needed information. Use open-ended questions starting with, e.g., "Tell me more about," "Why has this," "How do you think," and "To what extent do you see."
 - ✓ When offered, assume your mentor is attempting to provide useful information
 - ✓ Listen carefully, and check to be sure you understand
 - ✓ Be tactful, not defensive
- ◇ **Follow up with your mentor**
 - ✓ Try some of their suggestions and share the results
 - ✓ Let them know you appreciate their time and ways in which their advice is helpful to you
 - ✓ Send an email or hand-written thank you; small (non-monetary) gestures of appreciation can help you better sustain the relationship