

TIP SHEET: Avoiding Common Mentoring Problems

From *Get Mentored: A Practical Guide for Workers in Culture*
by **Doug Simpson and Drew Knappe** (Cultural Careers Council, 1999).

Neglect of current job

A perception that you are short-changing your current job can result in pressure to curtail your mentoring activities. The best way to avoid this is better organization of your time and more careful reporting on tasks to your immediate superiors so parties can see that you are honouring your commitments.

Conflict with current employer

Conflicts can arise when an employee wants to apply what has been learned through mentoring or an employer thinks the employee is departing from the company's agenda. It is best to harmonize what you are learning with your employer's policies and procedures for as long as you wish to maintain your current position.

Unrealistic expectations of advancement

It is easy to become convinced that the mentorship will lead directly to career advancement. This is unrealistic and should not inform any decisions about your current employment. Mentoring can equip you to pursue your career objectives, but cannot be relied upon to carry you to the desired ends.

Transfer of responsibility for career development

You may feel your progress is dependant on your mentor, or that your mentor has assumed responsibility for your career goals. Go back to your mentoring agreement and the development plan and review the limitations on what your mentor has committed to. Even if the mentor goes beyond the terms of your agreement, you are still responsible for your own career.

Becoming the object of jealousy and gossip

The attentions of a prominent person can quickly damage workplace relationships unless confidentiality is strictly maintained or disclosures are carefully made. Resulting alienation from your colleagues might do short term and long term damage to your career. You need to anticipate how your news will be accepted and if, how, and when to inform colleagues of what you are doing. People will speculate, so it is better to err on the side of disclosure than secrecy.

Mentor becomes possessive

Sometimes a mentor's sense of urgency exceeds what is required in your development plan. There may be excessive demands on your time or attention, or pressure to focus on mentoring assignments to the detriment of your other obligations. You need to revisit your development plan, and perhaps your mentoring agreement, the next time you meet with your mentor. You may be the mentor's protégé in terms of professional status, but you are the mentor's equal within the relationship. You have a responsibility to keep the relationship within the bounds of the agreement, and are entirely within your rights to amend or conclude that agreement if you feel it necessary.

Mentor fails to keep commitments

Your mentor may fail to fulfil some commitments. You may have tried to address this problem in your mentoring agreement and development plan. Table

the issue at the first opportunity and allow your mentor to make a more realistic assessment of time commitments. If no further accommodation is possible, you could consider slowing your progress through the development plan or terminating the relationship altogether. This is regrettable, but understandable as long as your level of commitment is significantly out of alignment with your mentor's.

Mentor fails to give you credit for your work

This can be extremely hurtful both personally and professionally. Mentoring works best in an atmosphere of trust, so there is little to be gained by obsessively watching for signs of betrayal. However be up front about the importance of recognition when drafting the mentoring agreement and development plan. Where possible, document your contribution to any joint projects in ways that will make your skills and abilities obvious to others. This is the best way to get good value out of your mentoring experience regardless of how your mentor ultimately behaves